A NATURALISTIC STUDY OF HOW SELECTED

SCHOOL CONTEXTS ADAPTED ROLES AND

RESPONSIBILITIES DURING THE COVID-19

PANDEMIC PHASES: A CULTURAL THEORY

PERSPECTIVE

By

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Title of Study: A NATURALISTIC STUDY OF HOW SELECTED SCHOOL CONTEXTS ADAPTED ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES DURING THE COVID-20 PANDEMIC PHASES: A CULTURAL THEORY PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: The purpose of this naturalistic study is to explore, through the lens of cultural theory, how selected school contexts adapted roles and responsibilities in educational processes during three of the COVID-19 pandemic phases: (a) infection, (b) social distancing, and (c) management. The COVID-19 pandemic forced educators and the districts in which they serve to make significant changes to how they educate students. Schools had to adapt to different roles as well as meet state practices and mandated standards (OSDE, 2020; Rauf, 2020; Schwartz, 2020b). While all districts were forced to make significant changes in their roles and responsibilities because of the COVID-19 pandemic, research indicates that some school contexts adjusted to these changes more readily than others (Gewertz, 2020; Kunichoff, 2020; Peroff, 2020; Reuters, 2020; Schleicher, 2020; Turner et al., 2020). One explanation for these differing adjustments can be found in the tenets of cultural theory, which explain how members' roles, values, beliefs, and behaviors in an organization, along with the rules that govern the organization, are important in understanding how contextual meaning is constructed and transposed when implementing change (Harris, 1995; Harris, 2015). This study used naturalistic inquiry methods (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993), which allows the researcher to understand the everyday life of the people involved in the educational environment. The naturalistic inquiry method was chosen to provide a holistic picture of what the impact is on the lives of the teachers, school culture, and the principal, within the school context.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Educational environments are continuously changing. One room schoolhouses have been turned into historical venues and replaced with million-dollar school buildings. SMART boards and computers have replaced slates and chalk. And most recently, the educational landscape has been impacted by the unexpected societal upheaval of the Coronavirus (COVID-19), which caused schools around the world to close their doors.

According to Forrester (2020) there are four phases of a pandemic: Phase 1 (infection), Phase 2 (social distancing), Phase 3 (management), and Phase 4 (eradication). Phase 1 (infection) started in January 2020 and ended around mid-March 2020 (Forrester, 2020). The virus was quickly spreading while schools were conducting business as usual with minimal knowledge about the changes that would soon occur.

In March 2020, the nation entered Phase 2 (social distancing) which would last until mid-May. During this phase infections increased, and mitigations strategies were implemented (Forrester, 2020). The CDC published strategies for mitigation of COVID-19. The document outlined strategies ranging from minimal mitigation, such as hand washing and disinfecting surfaces, to substantial mitigation such as closing schools (CDC, 2020).

Due to the number of cases and deaths that were being reported daily, states across the nation were forced to close its school buildings and implement distance learning strategies.

During May 2020, the nation entered Stage 3 (management) which would last until the end of 2021 (Forrester, 2020). Pandemic Management Protocols (PMPs) were developed concerning travel, business operations, working, eating, and by all organizations in society, including schools (Forrester, 2020). Schools developed plans using suggestions from the CDC, while grappling with uncertainty as to what instruction would look like in the fall. Many of these plans included protocols for facilities, instruction, teacher training, and communication (Forrester, 2020, Harris, 2020; Reingold et al., 2020; Schleicher, 2020). The work done by schools in response to the COVID-19 pandemic transformed education and instruction around the world.

Forrester (2020) described phase four as the eradication phase. This phase will occur when a vaccine becomes available (Forrester, 2020). This research in this study focuses on instruction prior to COVID-19 and during the first three phases of the pandemic.

Statement of the Problem

The COVID-19 pandemic forced educators and the districts in which they serve to make significant changes to how they educate students. Schools had to adapt to different roles as well as meet state practices and mandated standards (OSDE, 2020; Rauf, 2020; Schwartz, 2020b). While all districts were forced to make significant changes in their roles and responsibilities because of the COVID-19 pandemic, research indicates that some school contexts adjusted to these changes more readily than others (Gewertz, 2020; Kunichoff, 2020; Peroff, 2020; Reuters, 2020; Schleicher, 2020; Turner et al., 2020). One explanation

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Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this naturalistic study is to explore, through the lens of cultural theory, how selected school contexts adapted roles and responsibilities in educational processes during three of the COVID-19 pandemic phases: (a) infection, (b) social distancing, and (c) management.

Research Questions

1. What were administrator and teachers' roles and responsibilities prior to COVID-19?

2. How did teachers and administrators' roles and responsibilities change during three of the phases of the pandemic?

    a. Infection?

    b. Social Distancing?

    c. Management?

    3. What have leaders done and what are teachers doing to adapt to the changes?

    4. How does cultural theory explain the above?

Epistemological Perspective

Constructivism is the epistemological perspective proposed for this study. Crotty (1998) described constructivism as:

the view that all knowledge, and therefore meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human

beings and their world, developed and transmitted within an essentially social

context. (p. 42)

In relation to this naturalistic study, knowledge was constructed as administrators and

teachers from each selected school adjusted their roles and responsibilities during the

infection, social distancing, and management phases of the COVID-19 pandemic. One way

to develop a deep understanding of these changes is to observe teachers in their natural

setting. Erlandson et al. (1993) posited, "Naturalistic research involves utilizing what comes

into the world with (i.e., the five senses plus intuition) to gather, analyze, and construct

reality from the data" (p.82). It allows for a variety of sources to be used during data

collection. Observing teachers in their classrooms and during their interactions with

colleagues allowed for an understanding of the teachers' reality of their new roles and

responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. For these reasons, the naturalistic inquiry

method was selected for this study.

Theoretical Perspective

Anfara and Mertz (2015) emphasized that "theory plays a key role in framing and

conducting almost every aspect of the study" (p. 11). Mary Douglas' (1982) grid and group

typology, also referred to as cultural theory (CT), will be the framework used to explain

contextual roles and practices of educators in a selected school districts prior to COVID-19

and during the three phases, infection, social distancing, and management of the COVID-19

pandemic.

Cultural theory provides a matrix in which to classify school contexts and conduct

specific observations about individuals' values, beliefs, and behaviors (Harris, 2015). It

consists of two dimensions called grid and group. According to Harris (2015), "Group

represents the degree to which people value collective relationships and the extent to which they are committed to the larger social unit" (p.36). In strong-group school settings, teachers demonstrate loyalty to the school district. Loyalty could also extend into the community, depending on the size of the district. In weak-group schools, the focus is on the individual teacher rather than the organization as a whole.

In cultural theory, grid refers to the degree to which an individual's choices are constrained within a social system by set expectations, rules, and procedures (Harris, 2015). Examples of constraints within a school system are regulations concerning curriculum, grading scales, and district-wide programming. Authority and power are also concepts to be considered when using grid to analyze behaviors in an organization. A school district demonstrating strong grid will have centralized power, resulting in minimal autonomy for teachers. In a weak-grid school district, teachers have maximum autonomy due to a decentralized power structure.

The strength of both grid and group can be placed on a continuum from strong to week. Scholars have conceptualized a matrix to visually depict this continuum (Douglas, 1982; Harris, 2015). Group is placed on the horizontal axis, with grid placed on the vertical axis, resulting in a four-quadrant matrix. Harris (2015) described these quadrants as bureaucratic (strong-grid, weak-group), corporate (strong-grid, strong-group) individualist (weak-grid, weak-group), and collectivist (weak-grid, strong-group). Figure 1 provides a model of a grid and group matrix, and descriptors for each quadrant. Each quadrant will be discussed in greater detail in chapter two.

Figure 1

Types of Social Environments

Bureaucratic
- Explicit roles
- Minimal allegiance to the organization

Strong Grid

Corporate
- Explicit roles
- Strong allegiance to the organization

Weak Group

Strong Group

Individualist
- Implicit roles
- Minimal allegiance to the organization

Collectivist
- Implicit roles
- Strong allegiance to the organization

Weak Grid
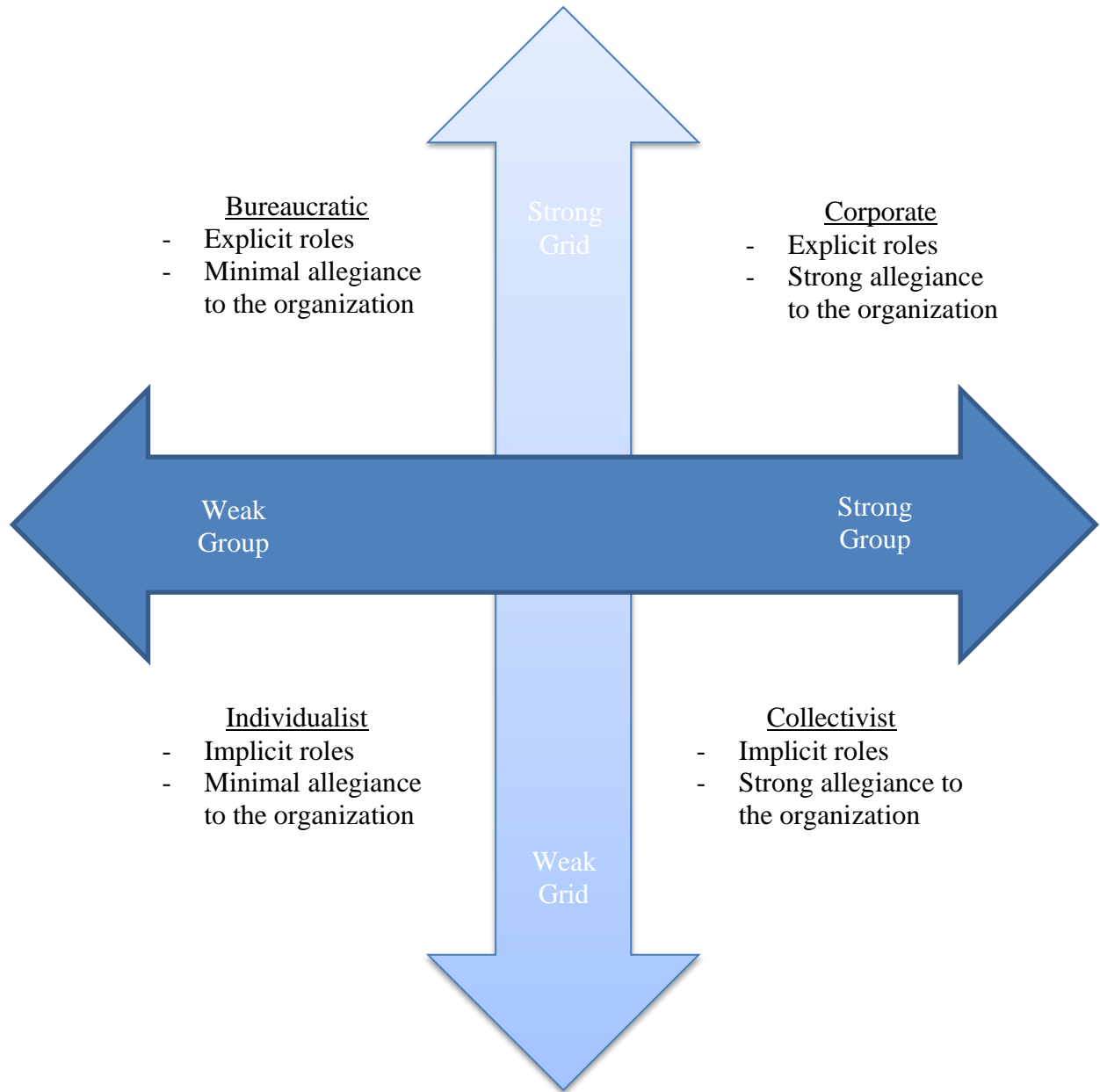
Note. Each quadrant identifies the social environment along with descriptions of cultural expectations. Adapted from "How schools succeed: Context, culture, and strategic leadership," by E. L. Harris, 2015, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Procedures

Naturalistic inquiry is the approach selected for this study that best compliments the constructivist epistemology. According to Erlandson et al. (1993), the essence of naturalistic research is the ability to get inside the social context to share constructed realities with the stakeholders in that context, and to construct new realities that enhance both the knowledge of the researcher and the knowledge and efficacy of the stakeholders. "The primary instrument in this type of research is the researcher him or herself. Relying on all its senses, intuition, thoughts, and feelings the human instrument can be a very potent and perceptive data-gathering tool" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 82). The opportunity to observe teachers in their natural setting, hearing their experiences in rich detail about teaching during the stages first three phases of the pandemic, and how their roles and responsibilities evolved provided a plethora of data for analysis to support this study.

Purposeful sampling was used to maximize the range of specific information (Erlandson et al., 1993) about each teacher's experience teaching during COVID-19. A rural school district in northeast Oklahoma was selected for this study based on its innovativeness in curriculum and instruction, and its partnerships within the community. State test scores are above the state average, and this district has been named by Franklin Covey Education as the first K-12 district in the world with all schools achieving Leader in Me Lighthouse Certification. Additionally, the superintendent from this district was a leader in his professional organization and provided professional development for other districts and school leaders in cutting edge instructional practices. One elementary school, which was selected by the superintendent, the middle school, and high school were selected for this study. Further purposive sampling procedures is discussed in Chapter three.

Data was collected through interviewing four teachers and the principal from each site as well as the superintendent of the district. Two teachers with ten or more years of experience and two with less than ten years of experience were selected to participate. Including teachers with varying years of experience provided rich data with which to gain an understanding of how the roles and practices of teachers have changed during the pandemic. Interviewing the building principals at each site and the superintendents provided data from an administrative perspective concerning the new roles and responsibilities of all educators. Additionally, data was collected through administering the Cultural Context Assessment Tool (Harris, 2015) to all the teachers and principals. Observations of teachers in their classrooms as well as in collaboration with their peers, was also conducted. In addition, artifacts and documents regarding school culture and instructional practices of each site were collected.

According to Erlandson et al. (1993), naturalistic research data analysis involves a twofold approach. The first component involves data analysis at the research site and the second involves analysis away from the site (Erlandson et al., 1993). As much data analysis as possible was conducted immediately after the interviews and observations. Lincoln and Guba (1985) claimed data analysis involves taking constructions gathered from the context and reconstructing them into meaningful wholes. The process that was used to analyze the data collected in this study consisted of three elements: (a) unitizing data, (b) emergent category designation, and (c) negative case analysis (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Potential Significance to the Study

To Research

A large body of research existed about school reform, teachers' roles in the classroom, and school culture. However, minimal research existed on teachers' roles and responsibilities during a global pandemic. Schools around the world made changes to how they provided instruction for students during the COVID-19 crisis. Guidance from the CDC as well as state and local safety expectations continue to evolve, which directly impacted how schools opened in the fall of 2020. This naturalistic study provided new insight into the challenges faced within the contexts of schools, changing roles of the teacher as well as new practices used during these phases: infection, social distancing, and management.

To Theory

Cultural theory describes the organization of a social system and how each person plays an integral role in the system (Harris, 2015). This study analyzed the teacher's role in an organization prior to COVID-19 and during the three of the phases of a pandemic (infection, social distancing, and management) to explain how an individual's choices are constrained within a social system by set expectations, rules, and procedures (Harris, 2015). This study also provided new insight to how the selected school contexts impacted teacher perceptions of their roles and responsibilities during each phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To Practice

The roles of teachers changed overnight as schools transitioned to online instruction. The information from this study will be important to educators as they strive to educate all learners with a new instructional platform and still meet the educational standards that are required by law. With the uncertainty of how public education will change due to the COVID-19 pandemic, an understanding of cultural theory will inform district administration,

principals, and teachers how the roles and responsibilities of the teacher have changed during the pandemic and how much it has significantly impacted educational practices and instruction. This information will be paramount for administrators to ensure teachers have appropriate support and training as the roles of teachers change during this unprecedented time in education.

Definition of Terms

- *Bureaucratic (Strong-Grid/Weak-Group)*: An environment that offers little or no autonomy to its members. The cultural preference is authoritarianism (Harris, 2015).

- *Collectivist (Weak-Grid/Strong-Group)*: An environment where members place high value on unity, equal distribution of resources and conformity to norms. The cultural preference is egalitarianism (Harris, 2015).

- *Corporate (Strong-Grid/Strong- Group)*: An environment where relationships and experiences are influenced by the group and boundaries are maintained against outsiders (Harris, 2015).

- *Center for Disease Control (CDC):* An agency charged to protect America from health, safety, and security threats, both foreign and in the U.S. (CDC, 2020).

- *COVID 19:* According to the CDC (2020), the CO stands for 'corona', the VI means 'virus' and the D is for disease.

- *Cultural Theory:* A cultural model developed by anthropologist Mary Douglas (1982) to demonstrate how native rituals and practices were relevant to modern society.

- *Educational Process:* The wide range of individual activities, policies, and programmatic approaches to achieve positive changes in student attitudes or academic behavior (Arendale, 2016).

- *Grid*: A representation of the degree to which an individual's choices are constrained within a social system by imposed prescriptions such as role expectations, rule, and procedures (Harris, 2015).

- *Group*: A representation of the degree in which people value collective relationships and the extent to which they are committed to the larger social unit (Harris, 2015).

- *Individualist (Weak-Grid/Weak-Group)*: Environments that encourages members to seek risks that will result in personal gain and to be competitive and proactive in carving their future in life (Harris, 2015).

- *Naturalistic Study:* Research that uses the five senses and intuition to gather, analyze, and construct reality from data that is collected from various contexts (Erlandson et al., 1993).

- *Pandemic:* A virus that infects people and spreads globally (CDC, 2020).

- *Practices:* A wide range of individual activities and policies to achieve positive changes in student attitudes or academic behaviors (Arendale, 2016).

- *Power:* The capacity of an organization to influence and motivate organizational members (Harris, 2015).

- *Responsibilities:* Activities or tasks that teachers are typically expected to perform as a function of their job (Shedd & Bacharach, 1991, as cited by Cole, 1997).

- *Roles:* Expected behavior patterns attributed to a person of position in a social unit (Harris, 2015).

- *School Contexts:* The interrelationship that exits in a school (Erlandson et al. (1993) and their response to COVID-19.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Many historic events in education have forced administrators and teachers to reconsider current instructional practices. These events include the launching of Sputnik in the 1960s, the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in the 1980s, and the federal educational reform initiative, No Child Left Behind in 2002. In March 2020, a new event in history would again force educators to re-examine how they instruct students. It would not be a mandated educational reform initiative but a response to a national emergency issued by President Trump on March 13, 2020, due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The literature reviewed in this study focused on instructional practices prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the four stages of the COVID-19 pandemic: infection, social distancing, management, and eradication. The review also examined how educational processes, teachers' roles, and responsibilities changed due to the mitigations that were initiated to slow the spread of the virus. Finally, Mary Douglas's (1982) grid and group cultural theory was explained as it relates to this study.

Stages of a Pandemic

According to the Mayo Clinic (2020), coronaviruses are a family of viruses that can cause illness such as the common cold, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS).

In November 2019, a new coronavirus was first detected in Wuhan China. On February 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced an official name for the new virus, Coronavirus 2019 which would be abbreviated as COVID-19 (CDC, 2020). The "CO" stands for 'corona', "VI" for 'virus', and "D" for 'disease' (CDC, 2020). Signs and symptoms of the virus may appear 2-14 days after exposure (CDC, 2020; Mayo Clinic, 2020, WHO, 2020). Symptoms can include tiredness, shortness of breath, trouble breathing, muscle aches, chills, sore throat, loss of sense of smell or taste, headache, and/or chest pain (CDC, 2020; Mayo Clinic, 2020, WHO, 2020). In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic due to the number of reported cases (Mayo Clinic, 2020, WHO, 2020). According to the CDC (2019), a pandemic occurs when a virus emerges that easily infects people and spreads globally. Four phases of a pandemic will be examined for this study: infection, social distancing, management, and eradication.

Infection Phase

The infection phase started January 2020 and ended mid-March 2020 (Forrester, 2020). The virus was passing quickly, at a "one infected person infects two people" rate (Forrester, 2020). During this stage, planning occurred to determine mitigation strategies as more people become infected with the virus (CDC, 2016).

In March 2020, the CDC published mitigation guidelines for schools and childcare facilities. These guidelines ranged from minimal to substantial. According to the CDC guidelines (2020), minimal mitigation strategies included accessing current information, recognizing the signs and symptoms of the virus, establishing emergency procedures, encouraging staff and students who have developed symptoms to stay at

home, and increased handwashing. Minimal to moderate guidance suggested social distancing, temperature checks, and short dismissals of extracurricular activities while substantial included closing the cancellation of school-associated activities (CDC, 2020).

During this phase, all schools were still in session. Many were finalizing instruction in preparation for spring break. The information from the CDC was being analyzed by school administrators as well as state leadership. The transition from the pre-pandemic phase to the pandemic phase happened quickly; many schools and teachers thought they would have more time to prepare (Peroff, 2020; Turner et al. 2020).

Social Distancing Phase

The social distancing phase occurred from mid-March 2020 thru mid-May 2020 (Forrester, 2020). Due to the number of cases being reported, on March 15, 2020, the CDC recommended gatherings of no more than 50 people over the next eight weeks (Taylor, 2020). Between March 16, 2020, and March 23, 2020, 43 of the 50 states ordered schools to close while the other seven states recommended that schools close (Nagel, 2020). Most of the schools remained closed the remainder of the school year. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2020), 98,000 public schools were closed, affecting 50.8 million students across the United States.

With schools forced to close their doors, administrators were tasked with redesigning instruction for the remainder of the year. Distance learning plans would be implemented across the nation to keep students engaged in learning. According to Keegan (1986), distance learning occurs when there is a separation of the teacher and learner in an educational organization that requires the use of educational media for

instruction. This type of learning can occur asynchronously and synchronously. While distance learning provided students a flexible schedule allowing them to work at their own pace (Keegan, 1986), it presented challenges for many families due to sharing of technology among family members, assistance required by parents who were working at home, and the lack of direct instruction (Alexander & Ross, 2020; Harris, 2020; Strauss, 2020). Because students nationwide did not have adequate technology or internet access, and there were a significant number of schools that did not have the capacity to provide adequate technology for their students, schools resorted to mailing home packets with instructional materials for students (Schleicher, 2020). In many instances, parents were forced to provide the instruction in order for students to complete assignments.

Management Phase

According to Forrester (2020), the management phase started mid-May and would run into 2021. During this phase, pandemic management protocols (PMPs) guided ways of working, traveling, congregating, eating, moving, and connecting. These protocols have been and will continue to be constructed and maintained by governments, companies, schools, and all organizations in society (Forrester, 2020). While businesses, restaurants, and schools reopened during this phase, protocols have been implemented to keep the nation from reverting back to Phase One. In May, the CDC (2020) published new mitigation strategies for schools during this stage. Some of those strategies included screening students (temperature checks), face coverings, social distancing, and separating students who may exhibit signs of illness from the rest of the students and staff.

During this phase, all schools worked to develop plans to reopen and establish safety protocols for students, teachers, and parents (CDC, 2020). School administrators

were also tasked with developing an instructional plan based on needs of families as well as the community. Finally, communicating with all stakeholders was the key to ensuring the plans were successful (Harris, 2020; Reingold et al., 2020).

Plans to Reopen

Schools have been faced with the unprecedented decision on how to reopen schools safely during the management phase of the pandemic. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), National Education Association (NEA), and The School Superintendents Association (AASA), released a joint statement recognizing that children learn best when physically present in the classroom and that schools would need to work with local health officials to ensure safety for teachers, students, and staff (Miller, 2020). In order for schools to reopen safely, an extraordinary amount of planning had to occur. Reingold et al., (2020) encouraged schools to identify the knowns and unknowns as a starting point in planning for reopening. While schools may not have known how many cases of COVID-19 would be identified in their community when school starts, they did know that they would need to establish safety protocol for cleaning and disinfecting, face coverings, social distancing, temperature checks, and planning protocols if a student or teacher does test positive for the virus.

Safety Protocols

Keeping students and teachers safe when returning to school was a top priority for administrators. The CDC (2020) provided guidance for schools that choose to return students to classrooms in the fall. The mitigation strategies included frequent handwashing, disinfecting classrooms, temperature checks, social distancing, and face

coverings. Many of the recommendations costed school districts a significant amount of money to implement. Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act for states to respond to the COVOD-19 needs in K-12 schools (DOE, 2020; Reid, 2020). The bill included an Education Stabilization Fund, which provided 13.5 billion in K-12 formula grants to states (DOE, 2020; Reid, 2020). According to the guidelines provided by the DOE (2020), these funds could be used for cleaning supplies, face coverings, hand sanitizer, Plexiglas, technology, training, and social emotional support.

Instruction

There were many considerations that schools needed to explore for providing instruction for students during the management phase. Some of the suggestions from the CDC had minimal impact on instruction while others significantly affected how schools function. One example that directly impacted instruction was how to limit student and teacher contact through social distancing. Schools that followed social distancing reorganized their classrooms and cafeterias so that students were six feet apart. For many schools, this required most class sizes to be reduced by half. Reducing class sizes this drastically required a staggered schedule or a hybrid schedule to ensure all students were served (AFT, 2020; Kamenetz, 2020; Modan, 2020; Richards, 2020). A model of a staggered or hybrid schedule allowed for traditional in-person instruction for two days and online instruction the rest of the week. Half of the students would receive in-person instruction on Monday and Tuesday, and the other half on Thursday and Friday. Wednesday would be a cleaning day for custodial staff. Another option for schools was to provide half-day in-person instruction and half-day online instruction for students

(AFT, 2020; Kamenetz, 2020; Richards, 2020). Some schools had elected for students to be grouped into cohorts that remained the same day to day to minimize exposure (Schleicher, 2020). Finally, schools could have decided to start the school year continuing distance learning. In the spring of 2020, Education Secretary, Betsy DeVos, encouraged superintendents to plan for distance learning well beyond the fall of 2020 (Modan, 2020). She stated, "While there are unique public health situations facing each community, it is critical that everyone continue preparing and adapting with eyes focused on building capacity for distance learning and ultimately safely reopening soon" (Modan, 2020). To build capacity, schools might need to adopt an online platform for instruction. Modan (2020) cautioned educators about simply taking the traditional model of teaching and trying to make it fit into the online learning framework. Teachers would need training in how to use the instructional platform and how to modify curriculum to be taught in an online learning format.

Individual Needs

Meeting individual needs of students was also a consideration as schools plan to reopen. Some of the students' needs to consider were food, supplies to work from home, which may include technology and internet access, and social emotional support. Schools became a key resource for families needing food assistance (Richards, 2020). Breakfasts and lunches in buildings depended on food availability, school finances, and the number of students participating in the school lunch program (Richards, 2020).

Technology needs was an area of consideration for schools in supporting students during COVID-19. Millions of families across the United Stated did not have technology or internet access, which created an equity gap when it came to educating students using

an online model (Lieberman, 2020; Schaffhauser, 2020; Schleicher, 2020). Many districts were combating the digital divide by purchasing hot spots and laptops for families without adequate technology to ensure all students had the tools they needed for remote learning access (Liberman, 2020; Schaffhauser, 2020; Schleicher, 2020).

Social emotional support was also a factor when considering how students returned to class. Developmental experts said disruptions from the pandemic constitutes an "adverse childhood experience" for every child in America (Kamenetz, 2020). Communities faced unprecedented trauma resulting from direct impact, loss, and economic instability resulting from COVID-19 (Reningold et al., 2020). Many students needed mental health support along with wraparound services when they return to school (Kamenetz, 2020; Lieberman, 2020; Reingold et al., 2020).

Eradication Phase

Forrester (2020) described phase four as the eradication phase. This phase will occur when a vaccine becomes available (Forrester, 2020).

Communication During a Pandemic

Communication during a pandemic was essential to schools reopening. Harris (2020) described a five-step communication plan: (a) seek and disseminate credible information, (b) be transparent, knowledgeable, and communicative, (c) explain what your team is doing during the crisis, (d) be present, visible, and available, and (e) dedicate organizational resources.

Resources were available for schools to utilize during the pandemic. The World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control provided a plethora of information on their websites, which were updated regularly and provided specific

guidance for reopening schools. Schools also utilized information from state and local

agencies (Harris, 2020) such as health departments, local hospitals, and state

epidemiologists.

Communication and transparency with all stakeholders was the key during the

planning phase for reopening schools (Harris, 2020; Reingold, Goetchius, & Hewitt,

2020; Schleicher, 2020). Explaining what the district and school team was doing (Harris,

2020) and providing a high-level timeline for key decisions (Reingold et al., 2020)

decreased anxiety and established trust with stakeholders. Involving stakeholders in the

problem-solving process, either by communicating or asking for feedback, was an

important step in obtaining buy-in for the final plan (Reingold et al., 2020). This input

could have been obtained in the form of surveys, zoom meetings with teachers and

parents, Facebook posts, emails, or phone calls. It was important that leaders valued all

input and were available for all the district's stakeholders. Forming new relationships

(Harris, 2020) as well as strengthening previous ones was crucial during a crisis.

One of the outcomes of the pandemic will be a "new normal" for schools. Harris

(2020) stated that it is important for schools to support this more complex system with

dedicated resources as organizations move forward. The Federal Government was

supporting schools through this transition by providing funding to purchase supplies and

resources so that schools could reopen. Most of these resources, such as technology,

internet support, and instructional platforms, could be utilized for many years, supporting

schools and families in this new era of education.

Teacher Roles and Responsibilities

This section describes teachers' roles and responsibilities prior to COVID-19 and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pre-Pandemic Phase

There have been many educational reforms in history prior to COVID-19 that have affected the roles and responsibilities of teachers. Some of those events include the launching of the Sputnik satellite, the publication of "A Nation at Risk," "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB), and the "Every Student Succeeds Act" (ESSA)*.* The launching of the Sputnik satellite provoked intense conversations concerning educational reform in the areas of math and science in America during the 1960's (Oliver & Huffman, 2016). Twenty-five years after the launch of the Sputnik satellite, the release of "A Nation at Risk" ignited nationwide panic to institute changes in curriculum standards, assessments, school funding, and teacher certification requirements (McKean, 2013). In 2002, President Bush enacted the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) which held schools responsible for closing the achievement gap (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). NCLB required states to develop rigorous academic standards for reading/language arts, mathematics, and science; a state-wide accountability system that would inform parents of the school's progress; and a system for holding schools accountable for academic achievement and providing assistance or imposing consequences for schools in need of improvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). This resulted in achievement testing in reading, math, science, and social studies as a way to document student achievement. Many states also implemented a state-wide report card to demonstrate adequate yearly achievement and communicate progress to parents. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaced NCLB in 2015 (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). This reform was

yet another effort to close the achievement gap by increasing the rigor in academic standards and requiring interventions for students.

Teacher Roles

Harris (2015) defined the role of a teacher as a set of expected behavior patterns attributed to a person of position in a social unit. Some examples of behaviors that are expected of teachers would be to develop curriculum, deliver instruction, provide feedback to students and parents, and establish relationships (Frazier, 2014; Hattie, 2003, 2009; Marzano, 2003b, 2007; Marzano et al., 2001; Nye et al., 2004; Tanner, 1997; Urban & Wagoner, 2014). Studies conducted by Dewey and documented by numerous other scholars all emphasize how valuable the teacher's role is in the educational process (see, for example, Frazier, 2014; Hattie, 2003, 2009; Marzano, 2003b, 2007; Marzano et al., 2001; Nye et al., 2004; Tanner, 1997; Urban & Wagoner, 2014).

Curriculum Development and Instruction

Frazier (2014), Tanner (1997), and Urban and Wagoner (2014) all cited Dewey (1897), who claimed the teacher's role is developing curriculum and community to secure intellectual and emotional significance. Dewey stated that students should be active learners engaging in hands-on activities and engage with their peers in learning communities (Tanner, 1997). For this to occur, curriculum must be integrated, related to a child's life and experience, promote critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and support collaborative decision making.

Nye et al. (2004) focused on the importance of the teacher and how their role impacts student achievement. They conducted a study involving 79 elementary schools that focused on how much influence the individual teacher has on student achievement.

They found the difference in student achievement gains in a 25th percentile teacher and a 75th percentile teacher is over one-third a standard deviation in reading and almost half a standard deviation in math (Nye et al., 2004). Additionally, they found the difference in achievement gains between having a 50th percentile teacher and a 90th percentile teacher is about one-third a standard deviation in reading and somewhat smaller than half a standard deviation in math (Nye et al., 2004).

Marzano (2007) developed a framework for understanding effective schools and teachers that focused on effective classroom pedagogy, included instructional strategies (Marzano et al., 2001), effective classroom management strategies (Marzano, 2003a), and curriculum design (Marzano, 2003b). Each part of the framework is further divided into elements which provide design questions to help guide teachers as they develop curriculum and instructional practices for their classrooms. Marzano (2007) provided a list of the design questions to guide teachers in curriculum development in his book *The Art and Science of Teaching*:

- What will I do to establish and communicate learning goals, track student progress, and celebrate success?

- What will I do to help students effectively interact with new knowledge?

- What will I do to help students practice and deepen their understanding of new knowledge?

- What will I do to engage students?

- What will I do to establish or maintain classroom rules and procedures?

- What will I do to recognize and acknowledge adherence and lack of adherence to classroom rules and procedures?

- What will I do to establish and maintain effective relationships with students?

- What will I do to communicate high expectations for all students?

- What will I do to develop effective lessons organized into a cohesive unit? (p.7)

His framework and design questions support the curriculum development role of the teacher while focusing on the importance of academic achievement.

Hattie's (2009) research supported specific elements of Marzano's (2009) framework. Hattie (2009) analyzed data collected from 250,000 students and used effect size to measure the influence of almost 200 factors, conducting more than 800 meta-analyses. His analysis found that reciprocal teaching, which he defined as a scaffolding discussion technique that good readers use together to comprehend text, had a significant impact on student performance with an effect size of .74 (Hattie, 2009). Many of the elements in Marzano's (2007) framework reinforce integrated curriculum, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and relative curriculum, which were all components of Dewey's (1897) laboratory school.

Building Relationships

Hattie (2003, 2009) and Poulou (2015) focused on the importance of teachers building relationships with students. Poulou (2015) found there is a direct correlation between the behaviors of students and the relationship between the teacher and student. Students who tend to have positive relationships with their teachers tend to have fewer behavior issues. Hattie (2003, 2009) supported this idea when he found that teacher-student relationships had an effect size of .72. Hattie (2009) stated:

When students were asked about their best teachers, the common attributes were

teachers who built relationships with students, teachers who helped students to

have different and better strategies or processes to learn the subject, and

teachers who demonstrated a willingness to explain material and help students

with their work. (p.108)

Hattie's (2009) research supports Dewey's (1897) idea that teachers should develop

"learning communities" in their classroom in which students feel safe to be learners.

While Dewey (1897) never mentioned relationships in his work, it can be inferred that to

build a successful learning community, the teacher needed to establish a relationship with

their students.

Responsibilities

Researchers offer a variety of interpretations regarding what is considered the

responsibilities of teachers. For the purpose of this study, teacher responsibilities are

defined as types of activities or tasks that teachers are typically expected to perform as a

function of their job (Shedd & Bacharach, 1991 as cited by Cole, 1997). Lauermann

(2014) described seven general areas of teacher responsibility: teaching-related activities,

student outcomes, interactions with students, positive classroom atmosphere, interaction

with others involved in the students' education, school policies, and external regulations.

Some examples of these responsibilities include duty (bus, lunch, and hall), completing

reports, grading papers, attending meetings, and communicating with parents. Additional

findings concerning teacher responsibilities include giving your best constantly, trying to

improve, safety and well-being for all students, and positive relations with students

(Eacute & Esteve, 2000; Lauermann, 2015; Tsabar, 2017). A few examples of these

responsibilities are attending professional development opportunities, attending, or sponsoring after-school activities, and providing support for social-emotional needs. While some of these responsibilities can be accomplished during school hours, others are conducted after school and off contract time. Lauermann (2015) quoted a teacher in her research who stated, "It doesn't end after school and after students go home." This type of commitment to students can come at a personal cost such as hard work, lack of sleep, and less family time (Lauermann, 2014).

Pandemic Phase

Teachers around the world left their classrooms to teach remotely from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Once again, educators were faced with new challenges in providing instruction for students. Teachers would still develop curriculum, provide instruction, feedback, and continue to strengthen relationships with students and parents, but the context would look different, transitioning from the classroom to a computer screen. Research indicates that some schools made these changes more easily than others (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020; Gewertz, 2020; Iivari, 2020; Lieberman, 2020; Peroff, 2020; Reuters, 2020; Turner et al., 2020).

Curriculum Development and Instruction

During the social distancing phase of the pandemic, teachers were advised to focus on the essential skills necessary to finish the school year or review previously taught skills (Hamilton et al., 2020). To do this, teachers prepared curriculum using a variety of modalities, including videos, recorded lectures, power points, and discussion boards. Instruction was delivered either asynchronously or synchronously. Asynchronous instruction involved students engaged in learning on their own time, under the guidance

of a teacher (Acosta-Tello, 2015; Friend & Johnson, 2005; Murphy et al., 2011; Schleicher, 2020; Zucker & Kozma, 2003). The teacher and student are independent of each other and do not interact together. Tools for instruction are often housed within a learning management system such as Blackboard (Acosta-Tello, 2015), Canvas, or Google Classroom. Synchronous instruction functions more like classroom instruction (Axosta-Tello, 2015; Murphy et al., 2011), in which the teacher and student interact together. Instructional tools for synchronous learning include video conferencing (Axosta-Tello, 2015; Murphy et al., 2011), Zoom Meets, and Google Hangouts. Research indicates there are challenges for each (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020; Eacute & Esteve, 2000; Gewertz, 2020; Hamilton et al., 2020; Iivari, 2020; Turner et al., 2020). Some of those challenges include technology, student engagement, and time.

*Technolo**gy***

While students of today have been surrounded by digital technologies since birth (Iivari, 2020), not all their teachers are as familiar with the many tools that technology has to offer. A survey conducted by EdWeek (2020) found that 4% of teachers don't have high-speed internet at home and there are some that do not have devices. While districts are trying to accommodate teachers who do not have internet, there are various digital divides between those who have technology and have the skills to use the technology and those that don't (Iivari, 2020). This divide was evident during the recent transition to distance learning during COVID-19, which found many schools struggling to provide devices for students and found teachers struggling to learn the basic technological skills required to teach remotely (Iivari, 2020). Teachers were faced with learning the simplest instructional platform to teach their students (Rauf, 2020; Schleicher, 2020). While some

teachers had to figure out how to use Google Classroom to upload assignments and videos on their own (Iivari, 2020), others were offered ongoing professional development from their district (Rauf, 2020; Schleicher, 2020). As districts planned to reopen, ongoing professional development on how to use technology to provide instruction has been an essential component in evaluating academic achievement for students.

Student Engagement

As teachers transitioned to remote learning during the social distancing phase of COVID-19, one of the most significant challenges they faced was the ability to keep students engaged and motivated to learn remotely (Hamilton et al., 2020; Schleicher, 2020). Teachers who incorporated hands-on learning strategies in their classes struggled to find alternative instructional practices to replace those learning opportunities online (Hamilton et al., 2020). Acosta-Tello (2015) found in his study that online instruction is only effective if the student participates.

Researchers at the Center on Reinventing Public Education found that just one-third of districts held teachers accountable for providing instruction, tracking student engagement, or monitoring students' academic progress (Greenberg, 2020; Gross and Opalka, 2020). A survey conducted by EdWeek (2020) found similar results as 64% of teachers surveyed reported that there were "no consequences" for students who failed to meet standards during the coronavirus closures.

As schools made plans for the fall during the management phase of the pandemic, Swartz (2020) identified three priorities for schools to ensure student engagement: frequent, meaningful engagement; cognitively demanding work; and responding to formative assessments. Frequent required meaningful interactions with at least one

educator a day (Swartz, 2020). This could be in the form of a Zoom meeting or a phone call. Cognitively demanding work will require more than watching videos and filling in worksheets. Students should engage in activities such as analyzing text, participating in discussion boards, and receiving feedback from their teacher on work completed (Swartz, 2020). Finally, teachers need to check for understanding using common formative assessments (Swartz, 2020). Due to gaps in learning from spring, it is paramount that teachers monitor for understanding of the essential skills in the new content they are teaching (Shafer, 2020).

Time

According to Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, teachers were working harder than they ever have (American Federation of Teachers, 2020). Teachers were being asked to master an entirely new set of pedagogical practices for teaching online, including learning how to set up Zoom meetings, conducting online instruction, and for some, learning how to use the technology, and retrofitting or reinventing lessons to fit an online platform (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020; Gewertz, 2020; Iiviari, 2020; Turner et al., 2020). Iiviari (2020) reported that some teachers found distance teaching very laborious. In some instances, planning a single lesson took more time compared to normal teaching.

In addition to curriculum development, teachers also spent hours on the phone providing tech support for their students on how to log on to devices, access Zoom meetings, and maneuver Google Classroom (Gewertz, 2020). Many parents were unable to help their children with technology, so it is left up to the teacher to provide this support. Another area that was consuming teachers' time was communicating with

students and parents. Teachers were inundated with emails, texts, and calls from students and parents (Gewertz, 2020; Schwartz, 2020). Some of the emails and texts came in the middle of the night as students worked on assignments and had questions (Schwartz, 2020). Although communication was consuming an enormous amount of time, Yao et al. (2020) claimed effective guidance and communication was the key to success for both online and offline learning. Understanding that communication was key, some schools helped teachers set boundaries for the hours they spent communicating with parents (Schwartz, 2020), and provided websites with resources and communication concerning assignments, announcements, and tutorials.

Cultural Theory

Anfara and Mertz (2015) emphasized that "theory plays a key role in framing and conducting almost every aspect of the study" (p. 11). Harris (2015) claimed that the theoretical framework is a lens to view the world and bring multifaceted concepts into focus. The theory employed for this study is the cultural theory of grid and group. Social anthropologist Mary Douglas, the designer of grid and group, offers a framework to understand cultural inquiry as it relates to educational practice (Harris, 2015). It is the understanding of values and beliefs that are identified in this framework paint a picture of how decisions are made within an organization. Douglas (1982, 1986) defined grid as the amount of control that a member of the organization is willing to accept. Harris (2015) described grid as the degrees to which an individual's decisions are constrained within a system by regulations surrounding rules, procedures, and expectations. In this study, cultural theory was the lens used to analyze how teachers' roles and responsibilities have changed during the various phases of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Grid Dimensions

In Douglas's (1982, 1986) framework, grid refers to of the degree to which an individual's choices are constrained within a social system by imposed prescriptions such as role expectations, rules, and procedures. Grid is plotted on the vertical axis of a continuum from strong to weak. In a strong-grid organization, individuals have minimal autonomy, specifically defined roles, rules, and responsibilities, and there is a centralized power structure. In a school setting, teachers in a strong-grid school are grouped into departments at the secondary level and are organized by grades at the elementary level. Teacher autonomy is low due to specific rules and protocols. There is minimal choice in selecting instructional materials or determining instructional strategies. The principal is in charge, leaving little room for teachers to have a voice in making decisions. There is no collaboration and teachers function in silos, working alone in their classrooms, instead of cooperatively.

In a weak-grid organization, individuals have high autonomy, where there are loosely defined rules and responsibilities and there is a decentralization of power. In a school setting, teachers in a weak-grid school have the freedom to select curriculum and instructional methods. They are not isolated in grade levels or by departments, and there is significant autonomy due to the lack of rules and processes. The teachers have input in selecting the principal of the school who is seen as more of a higher-ranking teacher than one of authority. Teachers work collaboratively with each other and their principal to make decisions.

Power and authority play a significant role in the grid dimension. Harris (2015) defined power as "the capacity of an organization to influence and motivate its members"

(p. 39), while authority is the right to make decisions and instruct others in their work. In a strong-grid school setting, the power and authority would be granted to the superintendent and the principal due to their position in the organization. They would make all decisions and provide directives to the teachers. In a weak-group school, administrators usually move up from within the school or district and have "earned the right" to hold the position, which in turn gives them power. Figure 2 illustrates the grid dimensions of school culture.

Figure 2

The Grid Dimensions of School Culture
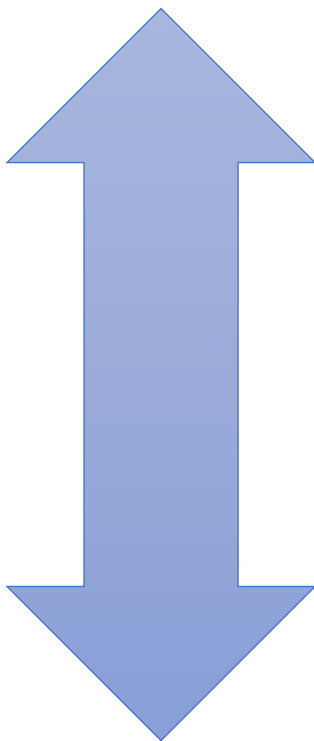
Strong Grid

- Minimum autonomy
- Specifically defined roles, rules, and responsibilities
- Centralized power and authority

Weak Grid

- Maximum autonomy
- Loosely defined roles, rules, and responsibilities
- Decentralized power and authority

Note. Adapted from "How schools succeed: Context, culture, and strategic leadership," by E. L. Harris, 2015, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Group Dimension

The concept of "group" focuses on the holistic picture of the social unit in the organization under study. According to Douglas (1982, 1986), group is defined by the members' loyalty to the organization. Harris (2015) referred to group as the degree to which people value collective relationships and their commitment to the larger social unit. Like grid, group has a continuum from strong to weak, except it is charted on the horizontal axis of the matrix. In a strong-group system, the commitment to the group as part of the organization is more important than the individual. Sometimes communities as a whole influence the group with long time traditions and school pride (Harris, 2015). Schools with a strong-group culture have considerable commitment to their schools from parents and community members. Carnivals, pancake breakfasts, silent auctions, school dances, and other school and community events are held regularly at the school. The school is decorated with signs and banners of the school logo, indicating school pride.

In a weak-group organization, there is little pressure to be part of the larger social group. The focus on each individual is dominant over the group. Harris (1995, 2015) cited Gross and Rayner (1985), stating, "when group strength is low, people are neither constrained by, nor reliant upon, a faction of others" (pp. 5-6). Schools with a weak group do not have strong traditions and value individual interests over the groups. Figure 3 illustrates the group dimension of school culture.

Figure 3

The Group Dimensions of School Culture

Weak Group	**Strong Group**
Weak allegiance to school	Strong allegiance to school
Minimal pressure to consider group goals and activities	Strong pressure to consider group goals and activities
Minimal social incorporation	Strong social incorporation
Individual's interests prioritized over the groups	Group's interests prioritized over the individuals

Note. Adapted from "How schools succeed: Context, culture, and strategic leadership,"

by E. L. Harris, 2015, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Grid and Group Matrix

Douglas (1982, 1986) identified four distinct prototypes of social environments

based on their grid and group classification:

- Bureaucratic (strong-grid and weak-group)

- Corporate (strong-grid and strong-group)

- Individualist (weak-grid and weak-group)

- Collectivist (weak-grid and strong-group)

A matrix is used to classify school contexts, allowing the observer to draw conclusions about teacher beliefs, values, and behaviors. The matrix is divided into four quadrants with distinctive characteristics: Bureaucratic, Corporate, Individualist, and Collectivist. Figure 4 provides a visualization of the *Grid and Group Typology.* Each quadrant of the matrix is described below (Douglas, 1882, 1986; Flinton, 2020; Harris 2005, 2015; Raleigh, 2017).

Bureaucratic

The top left quadrant depicts a bureaucratic culture with high-grid and weak-group. Teachers in this school have minimal autonomy and follow specific rules outlined for them by the administration (Harris, 2015). The principal and/or superintendent have authority and power in the school and district. This power is positional, ensuring everyone knows who is in charge. The weak group reflects minimal group or school activities, goals, and social interactions (Harris, 2015). Teachers in this school teach the prescribed curriculum in isolation. There is little teacher collaboration and certainly no input in decisions.

Corporate

The top right quadrant depicts a corporate culture, which supports tradition and order, and earns the label strong-grid and strong-group (Douglas, 1982). The roles in this quadrant are hierarchical with power at the top that is also distributed throughout the organization (Harris, 2015). There is a strong sense of unity among the group with a common focus. Teachers in a high-grid, strong-group school collaborate as a group and provide input for decisions. Committees frequently meet to provide input to the administration. Ultimately, the principal has the final say in the decision-making process,

however, there is a process in place for teachers to have a voice. There are many stakeholders who are involved in providing resources and support to the school as well as a strong sense of school pride that extends to teachers, students, parents, and the community.

Individualist

The bottom left quadrant, also referred to as the individualist quadrant, displays a weak- grid and weak-group organization. The dominant form of control in this quadrant is competition (Douglas, 1982). Teachers in this setting compete for resources, rooms, their rosters, duties, etc., by negotiating with the principal (Harris, 2015). There is power within the school, but ~~it is~~ not with the administration. The principal in an individualist school does not derive power from position, but rather it is given by the teachers (Harris, 2015). There are minimal school activities, which leads to minimal school pride. There is little teacher collaboration in the school and decisions are made by the individual teachers. There is the "silo" mentality of teaching in which teachers go in their classrooms and teach what they want.

Collectivist

The bottom right depicts a collectivist culture, which has weak-grid and high-group. This organization has a strongly bonded group that does not allow outsiders to join (Douglas, 1982). This school values high unity, equal distribution of supplies, and is suspicious of anyone who would want to help the school in any way (Harris, 2015). Teachers in this school have significant autonomy as well as a voice when making decisions and rules about consensus. The principal is seen as an equal and more of a

supporter of teachers than a leader (Harris, 2015). Status and rewards are valued. Due to

the high autonomy, teachers can either succeed or fail without affecting the group.

Figure 4

Grid and Group Typology

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Strong Grid

Bureaucratic

- Minimal autonomy
- Explicit roles and responsibilities
- Centralized power and authority
- Weak school allegiance
- Minimal consideration of group goals and activities
- Individual interests prioritized over group interest

Corporate

- Minimal autonomy
- Explicit rules and responsibilities
- Centralized power and authority
- Strong school allegiance
- Strong group goals and activities
- Strong social network
- Group interests over individual

Weak Group ← → **Strong Group**

Individualist

- Maximum autonomy
- Ambiguous roles and responsibilities
- Decentralized power and authority
- Weak school allegiance
- Minimal consideration of group goals and activities
- Individual interests prioritized over group interest

Collectivist

- Maximum autonomy
- Ambiguous roles and responsibilitie
- Decentralized power and authority
- Strong school allegiance
- Strong group goals and activities
- Strong social network
- Group interests are prioritized over individual

Weak Grid

</div>

Note. Adapted from "How schools succeed: Context, culture, and strategic leadership,"

by E. L. Harris, 2015, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield

For decades, Douglas's cultural theory (1982, 1986) has been used in numerous

educational studies to understand how school culture impacts the learning environment

for teachers and students. Specifically, the grid and group typology has been used in a variety of educational research, including successful superintendents' tenure, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), character education curriculum, professional development, and school improvement planning (Balenseifen, 2004; Flinton, 2020; Raleigh, 2017; Smith; 2009; White, 2013). Balenseifen (2004) studied the characteristics of successful superintendents which led to longer than national average superintendent tenure. In using Douglas's (1982, 1986) grid and group typology as a theoretical lens, he identified significant themes that described characteristics of a superintendent that would lead to longevity in the position. Each school he studied identified as a low-grid, high-group culture which shared consistent themes such as recognition, relationship building, student centeredness, financial skills, politics, and experience (Balenseifen, 2004). Flinton (2020) used Douglas's (1982, 1986) grid and group typology to study the role of the principal and teacher leader within professional learning communities. His findings revealed professional learning communities and PLC members that aligned with weak-group and weak-grid characteristics inhibited the progress and sustainability of the PLC, while those aligned with strong-group and strong-grid characteristics promoted the process (Flinton, 2020). Raleigh (2017) used Douglas's (1982, 1986) grid and group typology to describe how school culture shapes and is shaped by the implementation of a character education curriculum. His findings revealed two schools in the same district can have different results due to their grid and group typology. The school with the collectivist identity embraced the new character education curriculum much faster than the school with the corporate culture. Smith (2009) used Douglas's (1982, 1986) grid and group typology to explain teachers' perceptions of professional development. Her

findings identified two of the schools studied as corporate high-grid and high-group, and two as bureaucratic high-grid and low-group. While these findings were inconsistent with the professional development strategies practiced at each site, it did identify the school culture for each site and values to consider when planning professional development. Finally, White (2013) used Douglas's (1982, 1986) grid and group typology to explore the connections between school culture and improved student achievement as underperforming schools developed and implemented their School Improvement Plans through the WISE Tool. She studied a high school and an elementary school in the same district. The high school identified as a corporate strong-grid and strong-group while the elementary school identified as collectivist strong-group and weak-grid (White, 2013). Although both schools identified in different quadrants, there were similarities in how they implemented the WISE tool.

Harris (2015) stated that Douglas's (1982, 1986) typology of grid and group is useful to educators as it:

- provides a matrix to classify school contexts
- draws specific observations about individuals' values, beliefs, and behaviors
- is designed to consider the total social environment as well as interrelationships among school members and their context, and
- explains how constructed contextual meanings are generated and transformed.

School administrators around the globe worked to develop procedures and protocols to deliver instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Douglas's (1982, 1986) cultural theory provides a framework for understanding how teachers have adapted to the changes in their roles and responsibilities as a result of the new procedures and protocols.

Summary

This chapter presented literature that involves (a) the four phases of a pandemic and mitigation strategies for schools for each phase (b) the roles and responsibilities of teachers during each phase of a pandemic, and (c) Mary Douglas's (1982, 1986) cultural theory. The CDC (2020) and WHO (2020) have provided detailed protocols for schools to reopen in the fall. These protocols change often, and the most current information was used to write this chapter.

Teachers' roles and responsibilities prior to COVID-19 and during each pandemic phase were outlined. Marzano (2007), Nye (et al., 2004) and Hattie (2009) all emphasized the importance of the role of the teacher in curriculum development and instruction. One of the essential roles that Hattie (2003, 2009) emphasized was the importance of building relationships with students. During the social distancing and management phases, synchronous and asynchronous instruction were described as the type of instruction for online learning. Technology, student engagement, and time were all additional considerations when developing curriculum for online instruction. Lauermann (2014) discussed seven general areas of responsibility for teachers: teaching-related activities, student outcomes, interactions with students, positive classroom atmosphere, interactions involved with others in the students' education, school policies, and external regulations. Some of these responsibilities were also identified in the social distancing and management phases of COVID-19.

For decades, Douglas's (1982, 1986) cultural theory has been used in numerous educational studies in order to understand how school culture impacts the learning environment for teachers and students. For this study, Mary Douglas's (1982, 1986)

cultural theory provided a lens to analyze data from teachers, administrators, and district

leaders on how their roles and responsibilities have changed during COVID-19.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

For educators, change is not a choice, it is a professional way of life (Lukacs,

2015). This has certainly been the case for teachers and administrators across the nation

as they were forced to rethink instructional strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For many schools, the change in instruction occurred suddenly, which resulted in

minimal time for planning, teacher training, and achieving buy-in from stakeholders.

Additionally, the uncertainty of how schools will operate has educators analyzing and

planning for a variety of scenarios of how instruction might be delivered in the future.

In order to capture how teachers and administrators adjusted to their new roles and

responsibilities, during the infection, social distancing, and management phases of

COVID-19, a naturalistic inquiry approach was selected for this qualitative study.

Understanding the context in which teachers made a transition to online instructional

strategies, their challenges, and successes, along with their perspectives on how their

roles have changed in providing instruction required me to share in their realities. This

was achieved by engaging in conversations while collecting thick, rich data on how their

experiences and emotions during COVID-19 have shaped their reality. Erlandson et al.

(1993) explained that the naturalistic researcher uses thick descriptions of experiences to

pave the way for understanding shared constructions.

A quantitative study would have limited access to the teachers' experiences and therefore was not selected. This chapter outlines the methodological approach used to collect and analyze data, provides detailed descriptions for insuring trustworthiness, and explains how Mary Douglas's (1982) cultural theory will inform the research.

Statement of the Problem

The COVID-19 pandemic forced educators, and the districts in which they serve, to make significant changes in how they educate students. Schools had to adapt to different roles as well as meet state responsibilities and mandated standards (OSDE, 2020; Rauf, 2020; Schwartz, 2020b). While all districts were forced to make significant changes in their roles and responsibilities because of the COVID-19 pandemic, research indicates that some school contexts adjusted to these changes more readily than others (Gewertz, 2020; Peroff, 2020; Reuters, 2020; Turner et al., 2020). One explanation for these differing adjustments can be found in the tenets of cultural theory, which explain how members' roles, values, beliefs, and behaviors in an organization, along with the rules that govern the organization, are important in understanding how contextual meaning is constructed and transposed when implementing change (Harris, 1995; Harris, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this naturalistic study is to explore, through the lens of cultural theory, how selected school contexts adapted roles and responsibilities in educational processes during three of the COVID-19 pandemic phases: (a) infection, (b) social distancing, and (c) management.

Research Questions

1. What were administrator and teachers' roles and responsibilities prior to COVID-19?

2. How did teachers and administrator' roles and responsibilities change during three of the phases of the pandemic?

> a. Infection?

> b. Social Distancing?

> c. Management?

3. What have leaders done and what are teachers doing to adapt to the changes?

4. How does cultural theory explain the above?

Research Design

The epistemological perspective informing this study is constructivism. Crotty (1998) stated that constructivism takes the unique sense of each of us and validates the way we view the world. How teachers view their roles and responsibilities prior to the pandemic will be important in understanding how they adapt to their roles and accept their responsibilities during the-infection, social distancing, and management phases of the pandemic stage.

One methodology that compliments constructivism is naturalistic inquiry. Naturalistic inquiry characteristics used in this study include the following: research takes place in a natural setting, qualitative methods, purposive sampling, inductive data analysis, emergent design, human based instrument, special criteria for trustworthiness, and case study reporting. Observing teachers and their interactions with peers in their natural setting during the post-pandemic stage corresponds with the mentioned

characteristics. Erlandson et al. (1993) asserted that the essence of naturalistic research is the ability to get inside the social context and share in the constructed realities with the stakeholders in that context. Mary Douglas's (1982) cultural theory will be the lens in which the social context is explored, and constructed realities are explained.

Methodological Procedures

In naturalistic inquiry, the purpose of gathering data is to gain an understanding or construct reality by experiencing events alongside participants of the study (Erlandson et al., 1993). For this study, data was collected in the teachers' natural setting to experience the reality that exists therein. *Natural setting* is described by Creswell (2014) as the site where participants experience the issue or problem that the researcher is studying. In aligning with naturalistic research, data was gathered through interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts (Erlandson et al., 1993) along with the grid and group questionnaire. Creswell (2014) asserted that using multiple forms of data collection methods, rather than rely on a single source, will triangulate, or verify, the accuracy of collected data.

Participant Selection

The school sites and interview participants were selected using purposeful sampling procedures. Patton (2015) described the importance of purposeful sampling as:

> The logic and power of qualitative purposeful sampling derives from the emphasis on in-depth understanding of specific cases: information rich cases. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research: thus, the term purposeful sampling. (p.53)

Meriam (1998) supported this claim when she explained that purposeful sampling "is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 61). This study used purposeful sampling to identify a school district in Oklahoma that had established innovative educational plans during the infection, social distancing, and management phases of COVID-19. The superintendent of this district is known statewide for his leadership and innovation during the pandemic, Also, this superintendent was a prominent voice in mentoring others in the state. Through a tele mentoring platform, he was able to help schools in every county of the state. In addition, in this superintendent's schools, purposeful sampling was used to select two teachers with ten or more years of experience and two with less than ten years of experience to be interviewed. The targeted years of experience provided a perspective from teachers who are relatively new in their careers and those who are considered master teachers. The respective school's building principals and district superintendent were also interviewed to gain additional perspectives during each phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data Collection

According to Erlandson et al., (1993) there are four general data sources used in naturalistic research: interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts. In addition, Harris's (2015) Cultural Theory survey was given to teachers and administrators at each site. Involving all teachers in the survey provided a broader picture of the school culture that existed at each site. All data collection strategies that were used are summarized in Table 1.

Survey

The Cultural Theory Survey, as seen in Appendix A, was given to all teachers and administrators prior to conducting any of the interviews. The survey was given to all educators in order to gain a better understanding of the school culture at each site. The results of the survey are discussed in chapter four. According to Erlandson, et al. (1993), the researcher is the primary research instrument in a naturalistic study, and the survey instrument was just one data source that was used in the holistic assessment of the contexts.

Interviews

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), interviews allow the researcher and respondent to reconstruct the past, interpret the present, and predict the future. For this study, one-on-one interviews were conducted at each school site in selected teachers' classrooms. Merriam (1998) suggested using an interview guide, which is a list of questions that were asked during the interview. Merriam's guidelines included: (a) ask open-ended questions that are free from confusing jargon, (b) utilize probes to learn more about significant information, and (c) establish a rapport with the interviewees. A list of open-ended questions was designed using Merriam's guidelines to facilitate the interview process; these interview questions are located in Appendix B. Creswell (2014) provided an interview protocol that were followed during each interview. The protocol consists of a heading which includes the date, place, and name of interviewee, instructions for the interviewer to follow, questions, follow up questions, a thank you statement, and a log to record notes about the setting. Each participant was asked each question and had the opportunity to talk as long as they needed to answer the question. All questions,

responses, and dialogue that took place in interviews were transcribed as soon as possible after each interview.

Observations

A third source of data used was observational data which was collected during faculty meetings, department meetings and/or professional learning community meetings. Erlandson et al. (1993) explained that observations allow the researcher to discover the here-and-now inner workings of the environments by using the five senses. Lincoln and Guba (1981) affirmed that observations allow the inquirer to see the world as the participants see it. Observational data was collected from multiple visits to each school site. Descriptions of classrooms, hallways, and the school itself was included in the data collection. The following ten questions served as a guide for my observations during the meetings I attend: (a) How are the teachers interacting with each other? (b) How is the room arranged? (c) What mannerism do I notice that are occurring between teachers and administrators? (d) How is the meeting conducted? (e) Is there an agenda? (f) Who is conducting the meeting? (g) What interactions are occurring between the person conducting the meeting and the audience? (h) Are there norms or protocols that are followed during the meeting? (i) Who is in attendance during each meeting? (j) What are the main topics being discussed during the meeting? Observational data was collected through detailed field notes, which were converted to text as soon as possible after each observation.

Documents and Artifacts

The final source of data that shaped this study are documents and artifacts. Erlandson et al. (1993) asserted that documents can range from written and symbolic

records, as well as other materials and data. Documents included in this study are mission and vision statements, strategic plans, resources on school websites, resources provided to teachers, teacher websites, and teachers' lesson plans.

Artifacts provide an additional layer of data for a naturalist research study. They provide insight to the culture's technology, social interactions, and physical environment (Erlandson et al., 1993). Items such as artwork, poster, and bulletin boards, as well as other physical evidence available, were used for this study. All artifacts and documents were cataloged, coded, and analyzed with the other data that was collected. Due to the pandemic, I made the most of digital and online resources. Examples of these sources can be seen in Appendix C.

Table 1

Data Collection Strategies

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Observations	Artifacts	CT Survey
What were the selected contexts' roles and responsibilities in educational processes before the COVID-19 pandemic?	2,3,4,5	School Environment	Strategic Plan for 2019-2020 Mission and Vision Statement	Grid Considerations 3, 4, 5, 7, 9 Group Considerations 1, 2, 4, 9, 11
How did selected school contexts adjust roles and responsibilities in each pandemic stage?	2,3,4,5,7, 8,9	School Environment Classroom Observation	Return to Learn Plan 2020 Lesson Plans Digital Programs	Grid Considerations 3, 4, 5, 7, 9 Group Considerations 1, 2, 4, 9, 11

How does cultural theory explain the above?	6,7,8	Faculty Meeting, PLC Meeting	School Webpage	Grid Considerations 1-12
			Teacher Websites	Group Considerations 1-12
			Hall Decorations	

Note. Data Collection Strategies Interrelationship with Research Questions

Data Analysis Strategies

"Analysts have an obligation to monitor and report their own analytical procedures and processes as fully and truthfully as possible" (Patton, 2015, p. 531). "Data analysis involves taking constructions gathered from the context and reconstructing them into meaningful wholes" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.333). For this study, the following steps were followed to construct meaning from the data: (a) Organize, prepare, and read data, (b) Code data, (c) Generate themes or categories, and (d) Convey findings and interpret meaning. Mary Douglas's (1982) grid and group matrix was utilized to analyze data and construct meaning.

Organize, Prepare, and Read

Patton (2015) stated, "the challenge of qualitative analysis lies in making sense out of massive amounts of data" (p. 521). Organizing and preparing the data for analysis provided a means for interpreting the data. All interviews were transcribed using an app called Otter and stored on a flash drive. Each transcription was member checked for accuracy. Artifacts and documents were sorted by school, cataloged, and used as data to support the observation and interview data.

Code Data

Erlandson et al., (1993) posited that unitizing data requires disaggregating data into the smallest pieces of information that can stand alone as independent thoughts. After each interview and observation were transcribed, they were coded line by line using the In Vivo Coding strategy described in Saldaña (2016). Short phrases from participant's own words were used as descriptors allowing natural sorting to occur. Journal transcriptions along with documents and artifacts were sorted as well. A chart was developed to record the short phrases from the transcript and allowed two columns for coding. Value coding was also applied to reflect the participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspective or worldview (Saldaña, 2016).

Generate Themes or Categories

Harris (1995) posited that the researcher must allow the framework to guide and inform, rather than determine and force the emerging research design and process. To allow themes to occur naturally, the coded data was reviewed to identify emergent themes and categories. I outlined the themes and descriptions of school culture and the teachers' roles and responsibilities during COVID-19. Application of Douglas's typology of grid and group classifications was *a posteriori*, "theory later," consideration (Harris, 2015). I compared each school site and overall district data in context with Douglas's grid and group criteria. Grid assessment considerations included: Is the individual autonomy defined by the rules and expectations (strong-grid), or is individual autonomy maximized by minimal rules and expectations (weak-grid)? Also, is there centralized power and authority (strong-grid) or decentralized power and authority (weak-grid)? Group considerations will include: Is there strong school allegiance and strong group

goals (strong-group), or is there a weak school allegiance and minimal group goals and

activities (weak-group)? Also, is the group's interest prioritized over individual interests

(strong-group), or is individual interest a priority over the group's (weak-group)? These

considerations allowed me to place each school environment and teacher roles in the grid

and group continuum and identify a dominant quadrant for each on the matrix (Douglas,

1982; Harris, 2005).

Convey Findings and Meanings

"One of the characteristics of naturalistic inquiry is that it empowers the various

people who are involved in it" (Erlandson et al., p. 40). The obligation of writing the case

study so that the reader is actively engaged is left up to me. Findings of the study are

presented in a narrative format along with charts and graphs. Themes, subthemes, and

perspectives of each participant are conveyed in the findings along with the results from

the survey using Mary Douglas's (1982) cultural theory.

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Researcher Role

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Researcher Bias

During the COVID-19 pandemic when schools shut down, it was my job to

develop a distance learning plan in a two-week period. Just like many districts across the

nation, my district was not equipped with adequate technology for all students, and most

teachers were inexperienced in using Google Classroom, Google Meets, and Zoom.

Additionally, students and parents were not prepared to receive instruction at home.

During the management phase, it was my responsibility to work with site

principals and teachers to ensure they were ready to teach in a traditional school setting,

in a distance learning setting, and to provide support to our virtual academy. There were

numerous Google Hangout and Zoom meetings to seek teacher and parent input, develop professional development for teachers, identify technology needs of the district, design classrooms that would allow for social distancing, and develop curriculum for a variety of learning platforms. In addition, a new school would be formed to allow students to learn from home while being part of our district. Curriculum would have to be purchased, procedures and protocols established, teachers identified to support students, and a budget created in three months. During this time, I also wrote several federal grants to assist in funding for COVID-19 needs.

Due to my own experiences and reality in designing an instructional plan during the COVID-19 pandemic, I was mindful to listen more and talk less during interviews. I also made sure not to interject my opinions and experiences. It was imperative that the participants experiences were analyzed, not mine.

Peshkin (1998) reminded researchers to identify their own biases and to be aware of subjectivity. I am aware that my approach to the pandemic may differ from participants' practices, and I was consciously aware of that to ensure it did not affect how I portrayed the schools, teachers, and administrators in my writing as well as how I interpreted the data.

Ethical Considerations

Merriam (1998) claimed qualitative research can present ethical dilemmas during the research process. To ensure trustworthiness and credibility, ethical considerations were employed regarding data collection, data analysis, and data interpretations.

Data collection ethics. Multiple ethical considerations were addressed when collecting data for this study. Patton (2015) and Creswell (2013) described several ethical

practices that were applied to this study: (a) IRB approval, (b) informed consent and

confidentiality, (c) gaining access to sites, (d) limiting disruptions at the research site, and

(e) interview protocol. Each of these considerations are described below.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained from the university

before research began. A detailed outline of the proposed study, along with who

participated in the study, was submitted. Upon receiving approval, superintendents from

each identified district were contacted, and I explained the research study and presented

them with the IRB approval. Any paperwork required by the district was filled out and

returned. When the study was approved by the superintendent, I sent an email to site

principals explaining the study and requesting permission to conduct the study at their

sites.

When principal approval was obtained, potential candidates were contacted via

their school email address and invited to participate in this study. Email addresses were

accessed from the school website. In the email, teachers were asked to respond to the

email with how many years they had taught and if they were willing to participate. An

explanation of the study and their role as participants was discussed with the

understanding that they can choose to exit the study at any time. When participants sent

back acceptance to participate, an informed consent form was sent to them, and a

schedule was set for interviews and observations.

Data analysis and interpretation of ethics. Ethics regarding data analysis and

interpretation included assigning pseudonyms, securing data collected, and ensuring

accurate interpretation of data collected (Creswell, 2009). Protecting the participants

confidentiality was paramount in conducting research. To ensure confidentiality,

pseudonyms were used for all participants, each site, and the districts. Member checking was used to ensure that all the participants' words were accurately represented. Table 2 outlines security procedures that were followed to ensure confidentiality pertaining to documents, audio recordings, and written transcripts.

Table 2

Data Storage and Security

Data Type	Storage Location	Security Techniques	Length of Researcher Possession
Field notes form observations and interviews	Researcher's notebook; stored in desk drawer	Handwritten notes will be scanned into a digital format and stored on a flash drive. Paper copies will be shredded	Paper copies will be shredded as soon as transcription occurs. Digital copy will be kept for five years.
Audio recordings of interviews	Researcher's cell phone and flash drive	After the interview is transcribed, the recording will be copied to a flash drive and deleted from cell phone.	One year after data collection. Digital copies kept for five years.
Transcriptions of interviews	Researcher's laptop and flash drive	Transcriptions were given a pseudo name to protect their identity. A spread sheet with the real names and pseudo name will be kept on laptop in a folder with a password.	Transcripts will be kept for five years
Documents	Stored in desk drawer	Documents will be scanned into a digital format and stored on a flash drive.	Paper copies will be shredded after scanned to flash drive. Digital copies will be kept for five years

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted, "The credibility of your findings and interpretations depends on your careful attention to trustworthiness" (p. 685). Erlandson et. al (1993) confirmed this when they posited that trustworthiness allows the researcher to make a claim to methodological soundness. This study focused on the four criteria outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) which included credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that credibility is the qualitative substitute for internal validity. This criterion contains seven components: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checks, and reflexive journal (Erlandson et al., 1993). Each of these components are described in Table 3. Incorporating all these components into this study provided accountability of the data, which lends credibility to the findings.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts or settings because of shared characteristics (Erlandson et al., 1993). In naturalistic research, thick (is this the descriptor commonly used?) descriptions, purposive sampling, and reflective journals are all techniques that provide a means for reasonable transfer of information.

Thick Description

According to Erlandson et al. (1993), it is important to use all senses when writing thick descriptions. It is important to stop and look, listen, smell, and feel the surroundings and the interactions around you (Erlandson, et al., 1993). Detailed descriptions of data in context provide validity for the transferability of data. This study contains thick, rich descriptions of each school site, classroom, and any events attended.

Purposive Sampling

"The purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (Patton, 1990). School districts, school sites, and teachers were purposefully selected for this study to provide the maximum information possible. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated the objective is to focus on the many details that give context its unique flavor.

Dependability and Confirmability

"There is no validity without reliability and thus no credibility without dependability" (Guba, 1981a, as cited by Erlandson et al., 1993). Both dependability and confirmability are established by an audit of the data and analysis by an outside person. The auditor establishes dependability and confirmability by ensuring all documents are accurate, research is cited, and attention to details have been met.

Table 3

Trustworthiness Criteria and Examples

Credibility		
Criteria/Techniques	*Result*	*Examples*
Prolonged engagement	• Build trust • Build relationships • Collect a wide scope of data	In the field from August to October, communicated though email and face to face conversations
Persistent observation	• Obtain accurate data • Provide depth and context to observation	Observations of participants in faculty meetings, trainings, PLC meetings, and department meetings
Triangulation	• Verify data	Multiple sources of data: interviews, observations, documents, artifacts, surveys
Peer debriefing	• Additional perspective from a trusted colleague	Discussion emergent themes and findings with trusted colleague
Member checking	• Verify documentation and conclusions	Participants were asked to verify the interview transcripts and findings to ensure accuracy of the data
Purposive sampling	• Site and teacher selection will provide a wide range of data	Purposeful sample was used to identify the districts, school sites, and teachers to be interviewed
Transferability		
Criteria/Techniques	*Result*	*Examples*
Thick description	• Provide the reader with as much detail as possible to make sound judgements about transferring finding to other contexts	Write detailed descriptions about observations, settings, participants, and other salient details
Dependability/Confirmability		
Criteria/Techniques	*Result*	*Examples*

Inquiry audit	• Confirm accuracy of results and trustworthiness of study	All transcripts and documents make available for review
Reflective journal	• Provide my own perspective of interview and observations	Researcher memo and notes will be included as data in the study

Note. Adapted from "Naturalistic Inquiry" by Y.S. Lincoln & E.G. Guba. Copyright 1985 by SAGE.

Limitations

The presence of the researcher was one limitation that Creswell (2009) described regarding interviews of participants. The research in this study relied on the participants to be candid in their responses to collect accurate data. Limitations were minimized by establishing a presence in the school through being seen in the school at faculty meetings, department meetings, and professional learning community meetings. Being present helped to establish a rapport with teachers which made the interview process be less intrusive. Each participant was also interviewed in his/her classroom to provide a comfortable setting and ease the stress of being interviewed and recorded.

Another limitation was the researcher's limited experience in interpreting findings and providing meaning to data. Merriam (1998) cited Guba and Lincoln (1981), who warned that case studies can appear to account for the whole, when in fact, they are only portraying a slice of what indeed occurred. It was my responsibility to ensure descriptions are rich with detail to illustrate how teacher roles and responsibilities changed during each phase of the pandemic.

Summary

Chapter three describes the research methodology in great detail. This study is bound to a school district that has been identified as a leader during COVID-19. An elementary, middle school, and high school were selected from this district, two teachers

with ten or more years of experience, and two teachers with less than ten years of experience were purposefully selected to participate. In addition, the researcher's bias is introduced and a plan for managing the bias is outlined throughout the trustworthiness section and data verification protocol was outlined to ensure the validity and credibility of the research being conducted. Finally, Mary Douglas's (1982) cultural theory is described throughout the chapter.

CHAPTER IV

NARRATIVE PRESENTATION OF CASES

The purpose of this naturalistic study is to explore how selected school contexts adapted roles and responsibilities in educational processes during three of the COVID-19 pandemic phases: (a) infection, (b) social distancing, and (c) management. The theoretical framework was Douglas's (1982,1986) Cultural Theory.

The following cases are presented from my perspective as a researcher and the perspective of the participants who volunteered to participate in the study. A rich description of the district is provided. Then each participant is introduced along with observations and narratives of their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Site Selection

Rolling Hills School District, located in the northeast part of Oklahoma, was selected for this study based on innovativeness in curriculum and instruction, and its partnerships within its community. The superintendent of this district is known statewide for his leadership and innovation during the pandemic. Also, this superintendent was a prominent voice in mentoring others in the state. In order to represent all grade levels, three school sites within the district were selected for this study: Rolling Hills High School, Rolling Hills Middle School, and Franklin Elementary. All three schools had received national recognition for their work in the *Leader in Me* program.

The middle school and high school had relatively new principals, while Franklin Elementary had a principal with more than ten years of experience.

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District Context of Rolling Hills Public Schools

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Rolling Hills was a rural community with the population of 9,379 people (United States Census Bureau, 2019). The school district was comprised of five school sites: three elementary schools (grades PreK-5), an Early Childhood Center, a middle School (grades 6-8), a high school (grades 9-12), and a Virtual Academy (Rolling Hills Website, 2020). The district enrollment encompassed 2600 students with the demographics of 45% white, 30.7% Native American, 15.9% Multi Race, 6.8% Hispanic, .8% Black, .8% Asian/Pacific Islander, 2.6% Bilingual Students, and 55.6% free and reduced lunches (Rolling Hills Website, 2021).

Leadership

Rolling Hills School District has a history of longevity in leadership at the superintendent level. Dr. Reynolds had been an educator for more than 33 years with this being his thirteenth year as superintendent, while his predecessor served the district for 40 years in that position (Reynolds, interview, March 31, 2021). Dr. Reynolds explained how his role this last school year was more difficult than years past. He described the 2020-2021 school year as a "marathon of sprints" (Reynolds, interview, March 31, 2021). He stated, "You're going 100 miles an hour. When you get one thing figured out, then it is time to deal with something else" (Reynolds, interview, March 31, 2021). Although Dr. Reynolds made many decisions throughout the year. He was proud of how the district kept their core values at the forefront of all of them:

We did not know a lot about the virus, so there were assumptions made early that

changed as things evolved, and there was a fluid situation with information and

guidance. So, you know, we go back to the core of what we do; we take care of

our people, and we take care of our kids. (Reynolds, interview, March 31, 2021)

Challenges

Dr. Reynolds's plan was not without challenges. During the implementation of

the plan, he had to address the lack of student engagement even though students were in

school, manage the media, and maintain the trust of all the stakeholders.

Student Engagement. Dr. Reynolds shared one of the biggest challenges during

COVID-19 was student engagement. "We've lost a lot of kids that are no longer engaged,

and not just the kids who are online" (Reynolds, interview, March 31, 2021). The lack of

student engagement started in the spring of 2020 when students had to learn with a

distance learning model, and it carried over into the next school year even though

students were in class.

Media. Another challenge experienced by Dr. Reynolds was managing the media.

He explained how the press would call daily asking for COVID-19 numbers so they

could publish them. Dr. Reynolds felt like the constant media attention on the number of

COVID-19 cases increased the anxiety and trepidation in parents, students, and staff who

were already were concerned about the pandemic and what school would look like in the

fall. "I don't think they [the media] helped us in any way, especially as we were trying to

start to reassure parents that we were going to do things that we think will help get our

kids back in a safe environment" (Reynold, interview, March 31, 2021).

Trust. Dr. Reynolds explained how everything they did was based on trust, which happened to be one of the district's values. One of the first things he had his teachers and administrators do is make sure they knew where every kid was when they shut down in the spring of 2020. "I wanted every kid accounted for. I wanted to know what's going on with them. We were intentional about making sure we had some kind of connection going with them" (Reynolds, interview, March 31, 2021). This allowed for the district to continue to solidify their relationships with families which would strengthen trust as Dr. Reynolds and his team developed a plan for the fall.

Dr. Reynolds had to find a way to maintain the trust he had established with the community. One way he did this was through communication and listening. He held Zoom meetings with his teachers, posted videos on the district website, and communicated through email the procedures and protocols that were in place for students to return to school safely in the fall. "This is a safety issue, an unknown, unique challenge that we're having to deal with. So, as the instructional leader and education leader of this district, you're the face of that and they need to hear from you" (Reynolds, interview, March 31, 2021). He answered every email from parents as well as every question or concern from administrators and teachers. He gave an example of how he listened to parents who wanted the option to switch back to the regular classroom if they chose virtual and didn't like it. "We listened to our parents and allowed them one change anytime during the semester" (Reynolds, interview, March 31, 2021). Originally, switching was not an option.

Another area that was essential to the function of the district was the trust between the superintendent and the school board. Dr. Reynolds explained how the board trusted

him and his team to write the *Return to Learn Plan (2020)*. He shared one piece of the plan required students to attend in-person school to participate in extracurricular activities. Dr. Reynolds was very passionate about this. "I dug my heals in and my board was very supportive" (Reynolds, interview, March 31, 2021).

He credits the success of in-person learning this past year, with only minimal closures, to the way the district implemented their plan. "We made our plan when we were not emotional. We worked the plan" (Reynolds, interview, March 31, 2021). The administration did not make adjustments along the way. They did what they said they would do in the *Return to Learn Plan (2020)*. "We built a strong plan. We felt good about it, and I still do," Dr. Reynolds said (Reynolds, interview, March 31, 2021).

Roles and Responsibilities

*"*When you look at the components of leadership in a superintendent role, there are a lot of pieces to it that people maybe don't realize (Reynolds, interview, March 31, 2021). These roles and responsibilities include legal, finances, instruction, transportation, food service, and parent communication. Dr. Reynolds (2021) stated, "we probably feed more people than any restaurant in the community and are driving budgets bigger than any other industry." This past year, COVID-19 procedures and protocols were added to the list of responsibilities Dr. Reynolds had to manage. "It was a fun challenge." (Reynolds, interview, March 31, 2021). He also stated, "We were not drinking from a firehose, we were drinking from Niagara Falls" (Reynolds, interview, March 31, 2021). Even though there was a plethora of information to process and apply, the district stayed true to its values, managed the challenges, and maintained the trust of all stakeholders.

Community Support

The community of Rolling Hills was very supportive of its school district. Since 2009, the community had passed four bond issues with the most recent bond totally $85.35 million dollars (Rolling Hills website, 2021). The 2018 bond provided upgrades to all the facilities in the Rolling Hills District. A few of the upgrades included a new ninth grade wing, a softball and baseball complex at the high school, a new gym that served as a safe room at the middle school, new STEM lab at Franklin Elementary, and new construction at the Ag Facility, and transportation facilities (Rolling Hills Website, 2021).

Mission and Vision

Rolling Hills School District took great pride in ensuring that all teachers, students, and families knew the mission and vision statements, and what was valued by the district. Each building had a poster that displayed the mission and vision statements, listed, and described what was valued by the district, and explained how the district was successful in accomplishing these things. The poster was divided into three sections. The first section defined the mission statement, *working together to provide a quality education that equips and challenges all students,* and the vision statement, *Rolling Hills Public Schools will use quality and creative instruction to nurture intellectual curiosity, innovative thinking and inspire lifelong learning*. The next section was dedicated to the district's values: respect, communication, commitment, and trust. Each value had a description of how students, teachers, and staff implemented it. The final section described four tenants the district implored to be successful: (a) invest in our staff, (b) maintaining an academic focus, (c) character development, and (d) career pathways:

finding their passion. Each tenant had actions steps that were taken to identify success. This document can be viewed in Appendix D.

District Initiatives

Rolling Hills School District had two significant initiatives support teaching and learning. The first being late start Wednesdays that supported teacher collaboration to increase student achievement. The second was a character education program, *The Leader in Me* that the district had implemented which was designed around the *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey.

Late Start Wednesdays

Rolling Hills secondary sites had late start Wednesdays to provide teachers collaboration time to work in their PLC to analyze student data, plan interventions, or focus on culture, and climate goals. This time was also used for faculty meetings or department meetings, and to engage in conversations about the district wide program, *The Leader in Me.* Each site had autonomy on what they focused on each week.

The elementary sites scheduled time during the school day for collaboration which focused on the same practices instead of participating in late start Wednesdays. There were plans in place to consider some type of late start or early release for the elementary sites next year.

Character Education

Rolling Hills School District implemented *The Leader in Me* program at all their sites eleven years ago. Dr. Reynolds shared in his interview that this program was started due to the need to address student engagement (Reynolds, interview, March 31, 2021). He said he was gifted the book *The Leader in Me* which started the conversation with his

administrative team about what this could look like across the district. Teachers and

administrators implemented the strategies presented in *The Leader in Me* which included

creating a leadership culture, achieving school goals, engaging the community, and

beginning with the end in mind (Covey et al, 2008). Since the inception of this program,

all the school sites in the district have been awarded Lighthouse Status Certification. This

accomplishment was achieved in May 2020, after ten years of continuous work with the

program. The Rolling Hills School District is the only district in the world to achieve this

recognition.

Return to Learn Plan

The COVID-19 Pandemic caused schools to evaluate their practices and

procedures on how they would conduct school for the 2020-2021 school year. Rolling

Hills School District made their plan public on July 17, 2020 (*Return to Learn Plan*,

2020). The plan was introduced with a letter from Superintendent Reynolds highlighting

the changes of in-person learning, support for parents, and the research that had been

done to design the plan. The document contained specific information regarding safety

protocols for returning to school, academic options, and additional resources for parents

to help them navigate the new procedures for the year.

Research

The district administration followed guidance from the American Academy of

Pediatrics (AAP), along with recommendations from the Center of Disease Control

(CDC). The AAP strongly advocated that all policy considerations for the coming school

year should start with a goal of having students physically present in school. Dr.

Reynolds shared that his administrative team discussed the best place for their students to

be during the pandemic and collectively decided it was at school (Reynolds, interview, March 31, 2021). They used the advocacy from the AAP to support this decision and relied on guidance from the CDC to determine how to safely have students learning in the classroom. The CDC guidance that was included in the plan explained how COVID-19 spread by respiratory droplets being released when people talk, cough, or sneeze, and how face coverings could help lower the risk of exposure. There was also guidance provided on handwashing, cleaning surfaces, and staying home when you were sick. The plan included a checklist of symptoms for families to use to self-assess their health each day (*Return to Learn,* 2020*)*. The district created magnets of the checklist for each family to put on their refrigerators at home as seen in Appendix E. The CDC also provided a list of symptoms that the district used to make a comparison chart of COVID-19, the flu, a cold, and the symptoms of allergies found in Appendix F. This chart was provided as a resource to parents in the plan.

Academic Options

In the district's *Return to Learn Plan* (2020), there were three scenarios for students who wanted to attend school. The first scenario described how students would attend school as normal but with safety precautions such as social distancing, wearing a face covering, and temperature checks. The second option described a short-term closure of three days. This scenario was initiated if student attendance dropped at a particular site or if the community spread of COVID-19 increased. The third option was at-home learning due a long-term closure (more than three days). This option required teachers to teach from home in a distance learning format using the new Learning Management System (LMS), Schoology. Teachers uploaded instructions and assignments to the LMS.

Students then accessed their assignments and turned in their work using Schoology. Using the LMS required some type of a computer and internet access. Rolling Hills was a one-to-one district, meaning every student was provided a Chromebook to take home. While all students had a device, not all families had internet access. The district did their best to provide hotspots to families who needed internet support.

There was also a virtual school option for students and families who did not feel safe attending school in person. Each student who selected this option was assigned a faculty member as their support teacher. The support teacher met virtually with each student weekly to answer questions and provide support where needed.

Elementary students used an online curriculum published by Edmentum, and students in grades sixth through twelfth were enrolled in the FuelEd Curriculum (*Return to Learn,* 2020*).* While the curriculum platforms were different for elementary and secondary students, both curricula ran fundamentally the same way. Students logged in and completed daily assignments that were outlined in the program. Each program tracked when students logged in for each subject and how long they spent engaged in instruction. Students upload their completed assignments to the platform where they were graded. The program recorded the grades in the platform's gradebook.

The district established boundaries for students who enrolled in the virtual program. Students who chose to enroll in the virtual program had only one opportunity to change their decision by a specified date each semester (*Return to Learn Plan,* 2020*).* Meaning, if the student did not like the virtual program, they could transfer back to school in person. The district also retained the right to dismiss students from the virtual program who were not meeting the programs standards. Additionally, the district set the

expectation that students must attend school in person to be eligible to participate in extra-curricular activities (*Return to Learn Plan,* 2020*).*

Mitigation Strategies

The district incorporated several layers of mitigation strategies in their plan that included the hiring of additional staff, safety protocols for all students, staff, and visitors, and cleaning procedures. These mitigation strategies were implemented at each site and across all district buildings.

Additional Staff. Rolling Hills School District hired additional school nurses for the 2020-2021 school year ensuring each site had someone available full time. They also hired a nurse's assistant for each school. Each school nurse was responsible for contacting parents of students who were sick at school as well as parents of students who were in close contact to a student who had been positively diagnosed with COVID-19. The school nurse oversaw the contact tracing documentation for their building and communicated the data with the principal and superintendent. The nurses made all the calls to parents concerning contact tracing and their recommendation of who needed to quarantine was final. Dr. Reynolds said the school nurses were the health experts, and he and his team supported and reinforced their decisions (Reynolds, interview, March 31, 2021).

The nurse assistants rode the buses each morning and conducted temperature checks as students boarded the bus. They also ensured students were sitting in their assigned seats and that they were social distanced while boarding and exiting the bus. The school nurse assistants also supervised the isolation room at each site. This room was

used for students who were being sent home due to displaying COVID-19 symptoms and were waiting for their parents to arrive.

Safety Protocols. There were protocols and procedures put in place to provide as much protection as possible to prevent the spread of COVID-19 for students and staff. Some of the protocols each person followed when entering any Rolling Hills facility included wearing a face covering, temperature check, and social distancing (*Return to Learn,* 2020*).*

Face Coverings. Face masks were required for all students, teachers, staff, and parents who entered any Rolling Hills facility. There was signage outside each building stating that all visitors would be required to wear a mask. A picture of that sign is found in Appendix G. The face masks had to follow the dress code and be appropriate for school. Students in grades PreK through fifth were required to wear face masks in common areas but not in the classroom. The exceptions to the face mask requirement were meals, naptime, recess, and PE if social distancing could be maintained. Face masks were provided for students or visitors who did not have one. Additionally, the district provided face masks and face shields for all teachers and staff.

Temperature Checks. Any person entering a Rolling Hills facility had to have their temperature checked. The district purchased two walkthrough temperature check scanners for each building. A picture is found in Appendix H. Directions on how to use the scanner were posted on each device. A copy of those directions are in Appendix I. The principal at each site determined where the scanners would be placed. All patrons would enter the building wearing a face covering and walk through the scanner. If

someone had a temperature of 100.0 or higher, a loud buzzer would go off and they would not be allowed to enter the building.

Social Distancing. All students and staff were required to social distance while in the buildings and on buses. There were signs on the walls and floors encouraging students to stand six feet apart. An example of a sign is found in Appendix J. Additionally, each principal had to develop a traffic flow pattern to maintain social distancing in the hallways, develop a plan for seating at lunch, and create classes that were small enough to maintain social distancing between desks in the classroom. Students who rode the bus were assigned a socially distanced seat and would be seated with their siblings.

Cleaning Protocols. There were several layers of cleaning protocols that were followed by the district. The first protocol the district employed was to sanitize all desktops, lockers, hallways, countertops, restrooms, locker rooms, hallways, classrooms, kitchens, and offices with a product called PreventX24/7 (*Return to Learn,* 2020*)*. This product was a preventative treatment that was advertised to last up to 90 days. The second layer was the daily cleaning of desks and shared supplies. Each teacher was given a spray disinfectant to clean desks between classes. They were also required to clean all materials that were shared by students after each class. Finally, the custodial staff spent extra time cleaning doorknobs, sinks, soap dispensers, and any areas that were frequently touched by students throughout the day. If a student was sick and thought to have COVID-19, the room was vacated for at least a half hour and cleaned with hypochlorous acid. If a student was confirmed to have COVID-19 then the room would be cleaned a second time with Clorox 360 or Betco PH7Q (*Return to Learn,* 2020*)*. Playground

equipment was also cleaned with the hypochlorous acid if a student who was suspected of having COVID-19 was in contact with the equipment.

Rolling Hills High School

This section introduces the participants involved in the study and provides a description of Rolling Hills High School. Information describing the workplace, learning loss during the pandemic, and instructional challenges are also included in this section.

Introduction of Participants

At Rolling Hills High School, I interviewed the principal and one assistant principal, along with four classroom teachers. Two of the teachers, John, and Elizabeth, were veteran teachers who had been teaching more than ten years, while Marc and Diane were novice teachers who had taught less than five years. The administrators who were interviewed, Mr. Jones and Sarah, had each been in the education profession more than twenty years but were new, less than five years, in their current positions.

Mr. Jones - Principal

Mr. Jones was an enthusiastic and positive administrator who was in his second year as the principal of Rolling Hills High School. He had been an educator and coach for 33 years. Mr. Jones became an educator to coach football. He shared how over the years his desire to win football games had transitioned to building relationships with kids. His passion for students was evident. He showed me several pictures of former students and artwork that students had given him over the years. He took great pride in telling me each student's story that accompanied the artifact.

Sarah – Assistant Principal

Sarah was in her second year as the assistant principal at Rolling Hills High School. She previously taught K-12 Spanish and English. Sarah had a BA in Education and a master's in educational leadership with the desire to pursue a doctorate in the near future.

Sarah was new in her position when schools shut down due to COVID-19 in March of 2020. "I knew it was going to be tough since I was new to the job. I really hadn't figured out my place quite yet." (Sarah, interview, March 24, 2021). Prior to COVID-19, she and the principal did a lot of "tag teaming" in responsibilities as they learned their new roles. However, during the planning phase for the following year, it was evident that defined roles needed to be established for the amount of work that was required. "My job became highly instructional" (Sarah, interview, March 24, 2021). She worked with the instructional coach at her school to develop a plan for curriculum and how they were going to move forward. She was also highly involved in the launch of their learning management system, Schoology.

Marc – Special Education Teacher

Marc was in his fourth year of teaching math and science to special needs students. He started his career as a special education paraprofessional and that experience led him to pursue an alternative teaching certification. He had a heart for teaching and for his students. He shared "I am kinda a role model for my students." (Marc, interview, April 9, 2021). He described a positive work environment where teachers were "going to do everything they can for the learner, for the students. (Marc, interview, April 9, 2021). He also mentioned several times, "I love my job! It is a great job!" (Marc, interview, April 9, 2021).

Diane – English Teacher

Diane was a second-year English teacher whose life had been "molded and changed by educators and coaches" who influenced her to be a teacher (Diane, interview, April 9, 2021). She's known since high school that she wanted to be an English teacher. Teachers had made an impact on her life, and she wanted to do that too.

John – Social Studies Teacher

John had 32 years of teaching experience and was currently teaching secondary social studies at Rolling Hills High School. While he did not originally choose teaching as a career, he credited the influence of former teachers and coaches for his career in education. He felt like his role was to enable learning to occur and have a positive influence on students, however, this year he shared he had to find a balance of wisdom and empathy to support the students during the uncertain times (John, interview, March 25, 2021). His passion for students and his appreciation for the administration of his school and the district was evident when he explained how they celebrated the seniors when the schools initially shut down:

> The seniors went on spring break never came back. So, they got yard signs for all the Seniors, divided amongst staff and we went out and put those in their yards. And when it didn't look like they were going to get to have a graduation or a baccalaureate, we had a parade for them. They got to sit in car and ride down main street with friends and families waving at them. (John, interview, March 25, 2021)

He went on to explain that the seniors eventually did get to graduate wearing masks and social distancing.

Elizabeth – English Teacher

Elizabeth was completing her 21st year of teaching. However, she did not start out as an education major in college even though education ran deep in her family. Elizabeth started out as an accounting major and quickly realized that accounting was not for her:

> About week two of accounting, I decided that I hated it. It struck me that being a teacher was it. The idea of never being in a classroom, never hearing lockers slam, and smelling that weird cafeteria smell was terrifying to me. (Elizabeth, interview, March 25, 2021)

She spoke highly of the district where she had worked for all 21 years of her career. She said, "Rolling Hills has been just a really good school district. We're doing really great things here, and I am just really proud to be able to be here (Elizabeth, interview, March 25, 2021). She went on to say that she hoped I was able to see that during my visit.

Rolling Hills High School Description

Rolling Hills High School was a visually appealing campus. The exterior of the buildings consisted of blonde brick and dark blue trim. Above the main entrance walkway was a figure of their mascot. The main entrance was clearly labeled as was the gymnasium that was off to the side. As I entered the building, I immediately noticed the face mask signage on the glass door. Upon entering the building, I noticed a tall temperature scanner with directions on how to take your temperature. There was also a teacher greeting students and visitors. She directed me to the front office to check in. As I looked around the front office area, I could see that everyone was wearing a face covering, and students were walking as socially distanced as they could. I noticed a large statue of a panther as I exited the office as well as banners, posters, and quotes. One of

the hallways had the quote, "The future depends on what you do today" ~ Ghandi painted across the top of the wall. Under the quote each senior had a card with their name on it as seen in Appendix K. As I continued to walk the halls of the high school, it was evident that they were proud to be panthers and they valued excellence. There were permanent signs with quotes throughout the building that said things like *Expect Excellence Panthers,* and *Excellence Make It Happen.* There was also a wall that recognized academic achievement by listing the names of students who were National Merit Scholars, Oklahoma Academic All Staters, and Oklahoma Academic Scholars. Each award had the year and the student's name written on plexus glass and displayed under lights. Additionally, a graphic of the school's motto, lift, lead, learn was displayed around the school. An example is found in Appendix L. New this year were banners with reminders about COVID-19 protocols. For example, one of the posters read *6 Feet Apart, Panthers at Heart* can be found in Appendix M. There were also floor signs reminding students to walk six feet apart.

Staffing

The high school had an administration team made up of a principal, two assistant principals, a virtual academy director, and an alternative learning academy director. There were 57 certified teachers along with approximately 30 support staff. The high school had an instructional coach that supported teachers with curriculum, and there were teachers in each subject area assigned to provide technology support in their department. They also had a school nurse and a nurse's assistant. The nurse's assistant was a new position this year.

Configuration and Construction

Rolling Hills High School was in its first year as a ninth thru twelfth grade school with approximately 700 students. Prior to COVID-19, it was decided that the freshman would transition from the junior high to the high school during the 2020-2021 school year. In preparation for the reconfiguration of grade levels, the community passed a bond in 2018 to add additional classroom and renovate existing ones. The school was still undergoing renovations in certain parts of the building to accommodate the extra students. Temporary walls could be seen throughout certain sections of the school and the noise of construction was heard during the day. The ninth grade wing was complete, and students were attending classes in the new classrooms. There was also a new fine arts wing, a new auditorium, as well as new band, orchestra, and vocal music rooms. Outside the building was a new baseball and softball complex that was near completion.

Portrait of a Graduate

Rolling Hills High School had created a document that described the attributes that all students should be able to demonstrate upon graduation. A copy of this document is found in Appendix N. The portrait encompasses attributes such as academic preparation, communication, character, critical thinking, and leadership. Under each attribute were examples of tasks that would qualify for proof of mastery. Additionally, words such as integrity, curiosity, responsibility, dedication, and teamwork were listed to support the main attributes. All the attributes aligned with *The Leader in Me* program.

<div align="center">Valuing Students and Workplace</div>

Action Team Meetings

On Wednesday mornings, teachers met in either their action teams, PLC teams, or for a faculty meeting. Action team meetings are part of the *Leader in Me* program which

focuses on students as leaders. Each team consisted of a department with elective and specialized teachers. Each group was to finish planning activities around the assigned category of social emotional learning, school climate, or academic achievement. The group I observed had school climate and discussed ways to create a fun environment for students in the cafeteria. Since students have to social distance and are limited to the number of people who can sit at a table, the teachers were wanting something fun for the students the last nine weeks of school. One teacher suggested creating a playlist of music to play during lunch. After a robust discussion about song lyrics, it was finally decided that the student council officers could create the playlists with school appropriate songs to be played. One of the social studies teachers would ensure the sound system was working in the cafeteria so this would be possible.

The conversation involving the students aligned with the belief that all students can be leaders. This is an element of the *Leader in Me* program. Sarah, the assistant principal, explained that "their [students] interests are their gifts" (Sarah, interview, March 24, 2021). This was evident in the conversation today.

Building Relationships

Another focus for administrators and teachers was building relationships with students. Mr. Jones's passion for students was evident as he showed me several pieces of artwork that had been given to him by a student. Mr. Jones said, "Everyone has a genius" (Jones, interview, March 24, 2021) and this student's genius was art. While I was there Mr. Jones also took a picture with a senior who was in her cap and gown. He said, "I have always liked kids, but now it is the only reason to be here. This is the best thing I have done today" (Jones, interview, March 24, 2021).

Teachers and administrators shared their struggle to build relationships with their students due to the mask mandate. Diane explained how she worked hard to build relationships with her students. She gave them candy on their birthdays and talked with them about their interests (Diane, interview, April 9, 2021). She said it was hard to get to know them without being able to see their entire face. Sometimes when students were taking a drink of water and had their masks pulled down, she would stare at them. She told one student, "I just want to know what you look like" (Diane, interview, April 9, 2021). John felt the same way. He shared that he had students pull down their masks "just to see their smile" (John, interview, March 25, 2021). He also told me about the time he was sitting at his desk working and he pulled down his mask to take a drink and a student remarked, "I didn't know you had a mustache" (John, interview, March 25, 2021). To which John replied, "Yeah, for 30 years but you wouldn't know that, right?" (John, interview, March 25, 2021).

Administrator Support

Mr. Jones's passion for relationships didn't stop at students, it extended to his teachers and staff. He was especially attentive to the challenges his teachers were experiencing such as connecting with their students and managing their workload. He said he went to a faculty meeting shortly after the school year had started and no one was talking. He could tell the stress level was high, so he went in with a supportive approach. He said, "We have a lot of smart people confused. That means we have led people down a path that they weren't ready for, or we didn't do a very good job of preparing them. So, we are just gonna take a step back." (Jones, interview, March 24, 2021). He said that approach made a difference in how teachers felt. One teacher told him the only reason

she was not going to quit was because he was so supportive during that meeting (Jones, interview, March 24, 2021).

Being in School

Every person I interviewed, whether a teacher or administrator, commented on what a great district Rolling Hills was and how it was a great place to work. The most common reason given was that they had been able to be in school. Each commented on how they knew colleagues or friends in other districts who had to do distance learning for extended periods of time. They all expressed gratitude that they had been in school except for three days when sites were closed due to high numbers of quarantined students. Marc said, "The priority of the district was to get the kids back in school and in front of a teacher, which they did" (Marc, interview, April 9, 2021). Diane stated that the district followed through with their plan and had not "backed out for anything" (Diane, interview, April 9, 2021). "We have been way ahead of most people" (John, interview, March 25, 2021), John replied when asked about the success of the plan. Marc wanted me to know that "this school is just a great school to work, and we are reaching 100% of our students" (Marc, interview, April 9, 2021). Elizabeth agreed stating, "We are doing great things and I am really proud to be here" (Elizabeth, interview, March 25, 2021).

Quarantined Students and Learning Loss

During my visit to the high school, I heard several conversations about student apathy and lack of engagement during distance learning. Mr. Jones said students were not doing their work and teachers were taking assignments up to three weeks late (Jones, interview, March 24, 2021). This concern was echoed by his assistant principal, Sarah. She said:

Kids wanting to transfer back and forth between in-person learning and virtual school was causing them to get behind and not be able to catch up. We are going to have a huge credit recovery that we are going to have to figure out. (Sarah, interview, March 24, 2021)

The school counselor reinforced this when she explained how students who were transitioning back to in-person learning were behind because they did not turn in their assignments and as a result were failing. Graduation was approximately eight weeks away so the conversation focused on how long teachers had to wait before students would receive zeros for their missing work. I could tell teachers were frustrated due to the significant number of assignments that were outstanding yet concerned about what zeros would do to the student's grade.

When I talked with the teachers, they felt like they were not able to cover as much material because they had to reteach students who were returning from quarantine. Elizabeth explained how she did not feel like she was able to cover the content she used to (Elizabeth, interview, March 25, 2021). She said, "I feel like I am really having to go a lot slower" (Elizabeth, interview, March 25, 2021). She attributed this to students who were working from home (quarantined) and may not have adequate internet to complete the assignments. She discussed how she had always extended grace to students who may not have completed their assignments due to an absence. However, this year she said, "it's a heaping handful of grace all of the time" (Elizabeth, interview, March 25, 2021). I had a similar conversation with John where he shared that he tried being understanding to what the students may have to do while they were at home, such as babysitting younger siblings. He also stated some students were treating quarantining as "vacation time" and that it made

sense to "hold them accountable" (John, interview, March 25, 2021). He shared that he always "teaches hard, tests hard, and gives grace", but this year teachers have been told to make sure that they give students grace when it comes to missing assignments (John, interview, March 25, 2021). Marc also shared students were not always engaged in the lessons that were posted on the learning management system (Marc, interview, April 9, 2021). When students returned, he had to reteach the lesson.

<div align="center">

Instructional Challenges

</div>

Social Distancing

One of the mitigation strategies implemented by the district in response to COVID-19 was social distancing. This modified the way teachers provided in-class instruction. Marc, who teaches a special education class, explained, "I did a lot of group work, a lot of group activities, and hands on things with the students [Pre-COVID]. At the beginning of the year, I had to change my stance. I had to think outside the box." (Marc, interview, April 9, 2021). The activities he did this year were done individually or with a partner who was social distanced. While I was observing his classroom, he had students drawing life size diagrams of the digestive system. In previous years, he would have had students working in groups of four or five with everyone taking a turn drawing part of the diagram. This year, students were still in groups, but much smaller and spaced apart. One person oversaw drawing while the other group members provided input on what to label. Diane shared she "is a big group work person" (Diane, interview, April 9, 2021). She explained some creative ways she was still able to group work on a smaller scale. She said that she was able to do "online messages between groups of three or four" when she was trying to do group work in class (Diane, interview, April 9, 2021). Students stayed in their seats to do

this and were still able to collaborate. She said sometimes she would have students get up and go to a corner of the room for small group discussions if they would stay six feet apart (Diane, interview, April 9, 2021). Marc explained keeping students six feet apart in the classroom also affected students' attitudes in class. He shared how his students thought social distancing was "stupid and dumb" (Marc, interview, April 9, 2021). He said he stood his ground and explained that this was something they had to do. He also said, "it was difficult because they [students] just wanted to be taught and be by each other" (Marc, interview, April 9, 2021).

Materials

How materials were managed in compliance with the mitigation strategies for cleaning also influenced instruction. Markers, pencils, and even books had to be sanitized and quarantined for several days before another student could use them. This also affected how students worked collaboratively. Diane and Elizabeth both shared how they used to have a class set of novels that were shared among the classes. "I used to have a book on every desk and they [students] would come in and use that book and leave it for the next class" (Elizabeth, interview, March 25, 2021). This year, the district purchased a novel for each student that stayed in their possession until the teacher was ready to check it in. While I observed classes reading the novel, students sat in rows facing one direction, and all discussions were whole class rather than small groups. Diane shared, "I have students go to the board for class activities, but I have them go one at a time and make sure everyone has their own individual marker" (Diane, interview, April 9, 2021). She took the used markers at the end of the class period and sanitized them according to the district protocols.

She stated, "You can still do these things, you just have to be smart about it" (Diane, interview, April 9, 2021).

Technology

Another area that created challenges for teachers and students revolved around technology. While all students were issued a Chromebook to take home, the lack of adequate internet service was a barrier in completing online assignments for many students. The district provided as many hot spots as they could, but accessing technology were still issues for some students.

Schoology

Schoology was the LMS the district administration selected for teachers to use during a distance learning scenario for the upcoming school year. Teachers were given "the gift of time" before school started to learn the new LMS, but it was a lot to learn (Diane, interview, April 9, 2021). Diane appreciated having the extra three days to learn Schoology and "get the curriculum into the program" (Diane, interview, April 9, 2021). Marc and John both commented on the training teachers went through to learn Schoology. Marc was appreciative of the training from the instructor, but also the time he had to "play around with it" to learn to upload lessons (Marc, interview, April 9, 2021). While John was appreciative of the time and professional development offered, he felt like it was an "information dump" (John, interview, March 25, 2021). He stated, "I'm the old guy, and you know, it just seems overwhelming" (John, interview, March 25, 2021). He continued to share, "It was a high stress time among teachers on how to use the program, and uncertainty about what teachers would encounter while using it" (John, interview, March 25, 2021). John also shared that there was very little paper and pencil instruction this year.

He explained that he had to learn a new digital social studies curriculum, develop the lessons for the new curriculum, and learn how to post assignments and instruction on Schoology.

Elizabeth was a veteran teacher who also had to learn more technology to teach this school year. She described how she liked her students to put pen to paper, and they had not been able to do a lot of that this year (Elizabeth, interview, March 25, 2021). "Going digital was a huge learning curve. It was really scary at first for teachers and for students" (Elizabeth, interview, March 25, 2021). She continued to explain how it had been a challenge to learn how to give feedback to students on the computer versus providing feedback on paper. Marc also commented on having to learn the LMS at the beginning of the year, but it did not seem like a steep learning curve for him. "You have your lessons on paper and now you are having to put them into a Learning Management System. It was just time consuming" (Marc, interview, April 9, 2021). He went on to say he was "young and it did not take him as long to catch on" (Marc, interview, April 9, 2021). However, he did explain that he was constantly "re-teaching his students" how to use Schoology so they would be ready if they had to quarantine (Marc, interview, April 9, 2021).

Rolling Hills Middle School

Introduction of Participants

At Rolling Hills Middle School, I interviewed the principal, who was in the process of transitioning to an assistant superintendent position at the administration office, and four classroom teachers. Two of the teachers, Jay, and Becky, had taught less than ten years, while Barbara and Mandy had taught well over ten years. Mr. Smith, the principal, had been in education for 25 years.

Mr. Smith – Principal

Mr. Smith was a veteran educator with 25 years of experience. He had experience teaching all grade levels in a variety of classes, central office experience, and site administration experience. Currently, he was working two positions as he transitions to the assistant superintendent position at the central office.

Mr. Smith's grandmother had been a teacher, and he remembered watching her interact with her students and how she had made them feel important. He always found that admirable and thought early on he wanted to be a teacher too. However, he recognized teachers did not make a lot of money, so he chose accounting as his college major. He found accounting boring, but his advisor noticed how good he was with kids and encouraged him to be an educator.

During the pandemic, Mr. Smith felt like his role was to support the teachers in learning how to teach with the new LMS. "I knew that [technology] would be a struggle for a lot of my staff members who were not tech savvy, and I wanted to become an expert (Smith, interview, April 1, 2021). He attended trainings on Schoology to learn everything he could, so he was equipped with a skill set to answer his teachers' questions and truly understand their experience in learning something new.

Barbara - Social Studies Teacher

Barbara changed her major during her sophomore year of college after realizing she was always helping her friends with their homework. She enjoyed helping others learn and decided being a teacher allowed her to do that. Barbara had completed 19 years in education, with the last three being at Rolling Hills Middle School. She explained how the new initiatives this year challenged her confidence as a veteran teacher. She felt like

after almost 20 years of teaching she should know how to do everything that was being asked of her, but she didn't (Barbara, interview, March 31, 2021).

Mandy - Reading Teacher

Mandy completed 27 years of teaching this past year. Her experience in education consisted of teaching PreK, first grade, second grade, seventh grade ELA, and serving in the role of a school librarian. This year was her first year to teach seventh grade reading. She shared the many changes that occurred this year, including the implementation of Schoology, which had been a challenge for her. She was grateful she had a son who could help her navigate the new LMS so she could post assignments and grades (Mandy, interview, March 31, 2021).

Becky - Math Teacher

Brittany taught seventh grade math and was nearing the completion of her fifth year as an educator. She began her career in the medical field, but the time commitment was not sustainable for her when she thought long term about her life. She had to overcome obstacles to become alternatively certified but said she loved the challenge of teaching and connecting with the kids (Becky, interview, April 1, 2021).

Jay - Social Studies Teacher

Jay grew up in a house of educators, however, he chose the corporate route before seeking an education degree. He felt there was not enough meaning in his job, so he started substitute teaching while he pursued an alternative certification. He taught sixth grade at one of the elementary schools last year and made the transition with the sixth graders to the middle school this year. Jay not only taught his sixth-grade students in

person, but he also managed the online dashboard for students who chose to learn virtually.

Rolling Hills Middle School Description

Rolling Hills Middle School was a blonde brick building with minimal outside markings. There were silver colored lettering labeling the school on one side. At first glance, it appeared to be an older building. The entrance was identified by the long walkway with a few steps leading to the front door. Outside the entrance to the school, there were two large flowerpots with flowers which added a welcoming touch to the building. As I entered the building, I noticed face mask signage on the front door along with directions on how to take your temperature with the scanner. I walked through the scanner and went to the office to check in. This site had me show a driver's license and put my information into "the system" in order to print a visitor badge. The badge printed on a sticker with my name, the school's name, date, and time. This was the first site that had me do this.

The entry way outside the front office had three hallways that led to different parts of the building. I noticed right away that the building had new carpet and fresh paint. There were motivational sayings on the walls such as "*Leadership is about taking responsibility, not making excuses.*" ~ Mitt Romney. An example of this banner is found in Appendix O. There were also banners with Stephen Covey's *"7 Habits of Highly Effective People"* which is found in Appendix P. Right outside the office area there was a large wall that had colored, decorated sheets of card stock with words that described the district's mission statement, *working together to provide a quality education that equips and challenges all students*. Each teacher created a sign that had a word and picture they

felt best described the mission for their site. Some of those words were value, believe, inspire, strive, commit, journey, and purpose. The heading above the display of words said, "Meeting our mission one word at a time." An example is found in Appendix Q. As I walked down the halls, I noticed signs on the floor to remind students about social distancing. These were the same signs I saw at the high school.

Staffing

The middle school had an administration team made up of a principal and an assistant principal. There were 51 certified teachers along with approximately 25 support staff. The middle school had an instructional coach who supported teachers with curriculum, and there were teachers in each subject area assigned to provide technology support. The middle school also had a school nurse and a nurse's assistant.

Configuration and Construction

Rolling Hills Middle School was in its first year as a sixth thru eighth grade school with approximately 650 students. Prior to COVID-19, it was decided that this site would transition from a junior high to a middle school during the 2020-2021 school year. In 2018, the community passed a bond to add additional classroom and renovate existing ones. There was a new gymnasium that would also serve as the school's safe room. There were also new locker rooms, athletic office space, and a state-of-the-art weight room. The cafeteria had been renovated as well. There were three serving lines, which had grab-and-go meals. There were long tables that filled most of the space, but there were also tall tables with tall chairs where a person could sit or stand. The science wing also had a new science lab, which was larger than a regular classroom and had lab tables and a lot of storage for equipment.

Faculty Meeting

Every Wednesday morning, teachers meet in their PLCs or as a faculty for a meeting. The morning I visited the teachers had a short faculty meeting followed by a PLC meeting. The teachers met in the library where there were tables spread out in the center of the room. While the tables were six feet apart, the teachers sitting at them were not. However, they were all wearing a mask. The room felt very welcoming, and many teachers came up and talked to me. There was anticipation in the air as the administrators walked in.

Everyone knew the principal had been hired at the administration office as an assistant superintendent. This decision occurred several weeks before my arrival. The news announced at the faculty meeting was his replacement. The staff was very happy to hear the assistant principal was being moved into the principal position. The assistant principal acknowledged there had been many rumors circulating and he wanted them to know that he was indeed taking the position. He also shared that they would be hiring two new assistants. The staff was excited to hear they would be getting a third administrator. During my interview with Jay, he shared, "it speaks to our building that he [Mr. Smith] can be gone so much [transitioning to a new job] and we kind of self-pilot" (Jay interview, March 31, 2021).

Valuing Students

As I talked with the teachers and made observations, they expressed a sense of pride throughout their school. The hallways were decorated with motivational posters and banners which were kept clean. Students moved around the building in an orderly way and were respectful to each other. Barbara said. "We really do have a great faculty and

that the kids are really good here" (Barbara, interview, March 31, 2021). Jay echoed the same saying "The culture is really good here. I love my job" (Jay, interview, March 31, 2021). It was evident the teachers genuinely cared for students and had respect for each other. Leadership opportunities, school pride, and student success all align with the tenants of the *Leader in Me* program that the entire district practices.

Transition Program

Mr. Smith had a leadership team that consisted of his assistant principal, counselor, instructional coach, *Leader in Me* Director, and student leaders. Mr. Smith wanted me to know "We really work as a team. There is not one person making a decision" (Smith, interview, April 1, 2021). This team redesigned how the school transitioned the sixth and seventh graders to the middle school this year. Previously, the middle school had a program called Panther Bridge Camp. This camp was designed for the new students to the school to team up with eighth graders to learn the middle school procedures, find their locker, walk their schedules, and eat lunch in the cafeteria (Smith, interview, April 1, 2021). Mr. Smith explained that both the sixth and seventh graders were new to the building and the safety protocols would not permit the camp to be held in person (Smith, interview, April 1, 2021). "We did a more blended video where our student lead team and some of our other students put the entire bridge camp model onto a video" (Smith, interview, April 1, 2021). They videoed different members of the leadership team as they opened a lock and locker, walked the halls, showed each classroom, and explained how the cafeteria procedures work (Smith, interview, April 1, 2021). The video was uploaded to the school's website for students and parents to access in preparation for transitioning to the middle school.

Return to Learn Plan

There were several parts of the *Return to Learn Plan* (2020) that Mr. Smith and his team had to manage. One of the mitigation strategies in the plan was social distancing and traffic flow in the halls. The student leadership team was given the task of figuring out the best traffic flow pattern in the school that also created the best opportunities for staying socially distanced. Mr. Smith said, "We really felt like, let's ask the people that do the walking in the halls which are the students" (Smith, interview, April 1, 2021). The student team created a traffic flow plan, shared their ideas with Mr. Smith and his executive team, and then put the plan into action.

Caring for Students

Caring for students was discussed by several of the teachers during the interviews. Jay talked about how he was concerned about his students who were quarantined. He said, "It may be that students have never missed a day of school in their life and now they are out for two weeks. That can be tough on some kids" (Jay, interview, March 31, 2021). He talked about how they were stressed, and it was his job to take some of that pressure away. He said, "If you're doing your role right, then you're absorbing it [pressure]" (Jay, interview, March 31, 2021). Barbara explained how she spent class time counseling her students telling them, "Not everyone who got COVID-19 would die" (Barbara, interview, March 31, 2021). She said when they talked about current events and the number of people who had died from COVID-19 came up, students had a difficult time processing the information. "I have to remind myself that they are just 12 and 13 years old" (Barbara, interview, March 31, 2021).

During Mandy's interview, a new student came into the room. He had been doing virtual school and had just return to in-person learning. He was struggling to reacclimate himself with the school procedures. A friend brought him to see Mandy and asked if the new student could put his milk in her refrigerator. She said, "Just set it on that chair and I will do it for you" (Mandy, interview, March 31, 2021). She then explained to me the new student was shy and could not find his locker, so she was happy to help (Mandy, interview, March 31, 2021).

Support for Teachers

Technology

District leadership support was mentioned by all four teachers during their interviews. Barbara commented that prior to COVID-19 the district had provided all teachers smart boards and each student a Chromebook, which was very helpful when students had to quarantine (Barbara, interview, March 31, 2021). However, additional technology was identified as a need in the spring when all sites transitioned to distance learning. The district responded by providing teachers webcams, microphones, and document cameras. While all the teachers had their own personal challenges preparing for the unknowns they encountered during the year, they all were appreciative of the technology they were provided to prepare for distance learning, and the support they received to learn how to teach virtually.

Instructional Coaches

The district ensured every school had an instructional coach this year. Barbara appreciated that the middle school's instructional coach provided support on how to use Schoology, but also how to adapt curriculum to fit the new form of instruction (Barbara,

interview, March 31, 2021). This was important to her as she was writing a new social studies curriculum while learning the new LMS and protocols for the year. She also expressed gratitude for the extra help while she learned to use the new technology the district had provided.

Time

Dr. Reynolds had delayed the start of school for teachers to receive training on how to use Schoology. Mandy commented on how fast the training happened (Mandy, interview, March 31, 2021). Using technology to teach was new for her which required her to spend more time getting help to use the program (Mandy, interview, March 31, 2021). Barbara added she appreciated the extra time to collaborate with her colleagues on the best way to manage Schoology for their content area (Barbara, interview, March 31, 2021). She said, "We had a week where we had a couple of days to learn to use Schoology and then we could go basically work on building things and talk to our counter parts and figure out what we were going to do" (Barbara, interview, March 31, 2021).

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Instructional Challenges

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Rolling Hills Middle School teachers experienced new changes that had a direct impact on their teaching and elevated the teacher stress levels this year. Some of those new initiatives included new grading periods, new curriculum, and programs. These were not COVID-19 related but had been in motion before the pandemic started. Schoology, technology, and student engagement were additional challenges in response to the pandemic that effected the teacher's workload and forced teachers to think differently about instruction.

Trimesters

The decision to make the change from two semesters to three had been made prior to COVID-19. The building administration made this decision to coincide with the reconfiguration of grades. Moving the ninth graders out of the building and welcoming sixth graders created this opportunity for change. Mandy explained that instead of having four nine-week periods, they had three twelve-week periods (Mandy, interview, March 31, 2021). She said, "At first it was hard to get used to the twelve-week grading periods" but she had made the adjustment by the third trimester (Mandy, interview, March 31, 2021).

Technology

A new LMS, Schoology, was implemented this year in response to the need to provide quality distance learning instruction if a classroom, school, or the district had to close due to high COVID-19 numbers. Teachers were given a brief overview, or in Mandy's words, a "crash course" (Mandy, interview, March 31, 2021) on how to use the program prior to the start of school. While Becky and Jay were more comfortable with learning to use the LMS, Barbara and Mandy had a steeper learning curve. Barbara was honest with her students and informed them that she really did not know what she was doing. She said, "Just hang on and we're going to learn this together" (Barbara, interview, March 31, 2021). Both Mandy and Barbara explained that learning the technology was stressful because it was not how they had taught during their tenure as a teacher (Barbara and Mandy, interview, March 31, 2021).

While Jay was comfortable with technology, he also found using Schoology to be stressful. He said, "Schoology was the biggest barrier on the teaching side of things"

(Jay, interview, March 31, 2021). He shared that it took seven months of working with Schoology and the technology department of the district for Schoology to read Tyler (the district's student information system). Teachers were having to enter grades twice, once into Schoology and then into Tyler. He said, "There was a lot of pushback with teachers in the beginning. I am still not a fan" (Jay, interview, March 31, 2021). He felt Schoology did not do anything different than Google Classroom, which they were already using. He said, "Why are we reinventing the wheel when the car can already move? (Jay, interview, March 31, 2021).

Teaching In-Person and Virtually at The Same Time

Teachers designed instruction each week to be taught either in person or online if it became necessary to transition to distance learning. They were also prepared to support students at home who were quarantined. In addition to the teachers learning how to use Schoology, the students were also taught how to use the LMS. Barbara shared, "We have days in my class where we pretend, we're distance learning so they [students] know how to do it" (Barbara, interview, March 31, 2021). Barbara wanted her students to be prepared in case they had to quarantine or if they had to all transition to distance learning. She said, "I'm not just teaching them for the, present, but trying to teach them for the future" (Barbara, interview, March 31, 2021).

Even after preparing the students how to use Schoology and having prepared lessons, one of the most stressful challenges was teaching the students who had to quarantine while simultaneously teaching the students in the classroom. Barbara explained, "Figuring out how to teach the kids who were here, but at the same time respond to questions that are coming in through email was overwhelming" (Barbara,

interview, March 31, 2021). Jay shared a similar story about students being quarantined.

He said, "Keeping kids who were quarantined engaged was a challenge. I had to give up

the battle of missing assignments this year" (Jay, interview, March 31, 2021). He also

explained the pressure students were feeling about not getting their work done. He said,

"I spend a lot of time reassuring students they would not get behind to alleviate some of

their stress" (Jay, interview, March 31, 2021). Becky echoed stating "Serving students

who were quarantined had been the biggest challenge" (Becky, interview, April 1, 2021).

She shared that she was not comfortable with posting videos of herself teaching, so she

used videos from YouTube or a video library so students could see the instruction

(Becky, interview, April 1, 2021). She also said, "Keeping up with who was gone and

keeping them caught up with the rest of the class was a big challenge" (Becky, interview,

April 1, 2021).

New Curriculum

In addition to learning Schoology to provide online instruction, the social studies

teachers adopted a new curriculum. This new adoption was in response to the state

department's schedule for selecting state approved curriculum. Barbara explained how

teachers previewed curriculum provided by textbook companies and then voted on which

publisher they wanted. She said, "The social studies teachers were not really happy with

the book they chose for us" (Barbara, interview, March 31, 2021). It was not what they

had voted for. She shared that the layout of how the continents and countries were taught

was confusing, so she and the other social studies teachers decided to write their own

curriculum (Barbara, interview, March 31, 2021) that aligned with the state standards.

Assessment Programs

Istation and USA Test Prep were two new assessment programs added this year to support reading and math. Teachers began using Istation in January and would test three times during the spring semester: January, March, and May, according to Mandy (Mandy, interview, March 31, 2021). This program assessed students on targeted concepts and then assigned them to an intervention path to develop deficient skills. USA Test Prep provided teachers with content specific questions that are like the questions students saw on the state test in April. She said, "We had a short training for each program, and we are still trying to figure it out" (Mandy, interview, March 31, 2021).

Student Engagement

Social distancing affected group work and student collaboration in the classroom. Jay described how it was difficult to keep students engaged for seventy-minute class periods and not have them get out of their seats. He said, "Everything we were taught about engagement, movement, and cooperative learning was a struggle early in the year" (Jay, interview, March 31, 2021). Since COVID-19 numbers had dropped during the spring semester, Jay had started doing small group activities again. Mandy described how she allowed students to sit on the floor while she read a novel out loud to them (Mandy, interview, March 31, 2021). She made sure they were socially distanced around the room before she started reading. Becky also commented on how social distancing affected her instruction. She shared, "I was a little afraid of having them do group work or pair shares when school started" (Becky, interview, April 1, 2021). She said she liked to have students share with each other as a strategy to help them learn but could not do that at the beginning of the year. As numbers decreased in the spring, she started allowing students to pair up again to share their learning (Becky, interview, April 1, 2021).

Franklin Elementary School

The purpose of this section was to provide a description of Franklin Elementary School, its history, and mission and vision statement. In addition, each teacher and administrator who participated in the study was introduced along with how they viewed their roles and responsibilities during COVID-19.

Participant Profiles

At Franklin Elementary School, I interviewed one of the assistant principals who was in her second year in the position, two teachers who had taught five years or less, and two who had taught more than five years. Cindy and Derek had both taught for 27 years, while Pam was in her fifth year as an educator and Nikole was in her first year.

Ms. Lynn – Assistant Principal

Ms. Lynn had ten years in education with this year being her second year as an assistant principal at Franklin Elementary School. Outside of her office door hung a picture of her and where she attended college (all the teachers and administrators had this information outside their doors). Her office was decorated with Wizard of Oz memorabilia. The décor made it feel very comfortable and student friendly. In fact, it really did not feel like a principal's office at all. When I asked Ms. Lynn why she became a teacher she explained that school had always been her safe place (Lynn, interview, March 30, 2021). Her answer explained to me why she had chosen such décor for her office. She had created a "safe place" for students to come when they were sent to see her.

Ms. Lynn was extremely proud of her district and school. When I asked her if there was anything she wished I had asked her, she replied, "What makes us the best

school in this part of the state?" (Lynn, interview, March 30, 2021). So, I asked her. She replied with the *Panther Tenants* (Lynn, interview, March 30, 2021). She continued to explain that all schools understand the "why" and the "how" of the work (Lynn, interview, March 30, 2021). "We know why we are here, what we are trying to accomplish, and how we are going to accomplish it. We are all on the same page and that is truly due to the leadership in our district" (Lynn, interview, March 30, 2021). She expressed many accolades for the superintendent. She even commented, "He is one of those leaders that any of us would seriously walk-through coals for" (Lynn, interview, March 30, 2021).

Nikole – Third Grade Teacher

Nikole shared that she had always been drawn to kids from a young age. She would play school with her younger brothers where she was always the teacher. She had many influential educators in her life, but the one who was her biggest supporter was her third-grade teacher (Nikole, interview, March 30, 2021). Her teacher was there for her during the loss of her grandmother, and the support she received made an impression on her. Nikole also commented on how much she admired how her elementary principal engaged with the students. With the amazing educators that had surrounded her as a child, she said she could not see herself doing anything else but being a teacher (Nikole, interview, March 30, 2021).

Nikole is in her first year of teaching. While doing her student teaching last spring, she was sent home like all the other teachers in the state. This resulted in her completing the remainder of her student teaching experience virtually. Many of the things she had to do as a student teacher to finish out the year would be used to start the school

year in her new teaching assignment. She was prepared to use Zoom, if needed, and was comfortable learning Schoology, the learning management system. Nikole explained using a learning management system in college helped prepare her to use one at her new school (Nikole, interview, March 30, 2021).

Pam – First Grade

Pam became a teacher due to the influence her kindergarten teacher had on her at a young age. She said she loved her so much that when she became a teacher, she wanted to be just like her (Pam, interview, March 30, 2021). Pam felt like she is an exact copy of her former teacher (Pam, interview, March 30, 2021).

Pam's classroom had all the elements of a first-grade classroom—a rug for story time, a rocking chair, individual desks, cubbies, shelves with manipulatives and game, a sink with a water fountain, and a horseshoe desk. However, how these items were used this year was different. When students came in from recess, they all had water bottles with their names on them. They lined up at the sink so Pam could fill them. I asked her if she had bought the water bottles or if the school had bought them, and she replied:

> I bought water bottles for every kid with my own money because I couldn't handle a first grader being thirsty. I only had two kids who would bring them every day. The water fountains are turned off so if they didn't have a water bottle, they would not have anything to drink all day. (Pam, interview, March 30, 2021)

While I was observing her class, two students switched water bottles. When Pam noticed this had happened, she stopped what she was doing and washed their water bottles so they would not spread anymore germs.

Cindy – Title I Reading Teacher

Cindy is in her twenty-seventh year of teaching. When I asked her why she became a teacher, she responded back with a question, "What else is there to do?" (Cindy, interview, April 30, 2021). She continued to explain that she had always loved teaching and kids and could not ever see herself doing anything different (Cindy, interview, April 30, 2021).

Derek – Fifth Grade Math

Derek did not start out with the ambition of being a teacher. He was content working at a job he had during high school after graduation, however, financial and family values became important to him which resulted in finding a more sustainable job. He shared that while making a career decision, he wanted something that would stimulate his mind, help others, and use his love for math (Derek, interview, March 30, 2021). He decided that being a math teacher met all those criteria. Derek had taught math to elementary students for 27 years (Derek, interview, March 30, 2021). He shared the most rewarding moments for him as a teacher occurred when students recognized him when he was out in the community. He shared several stories of when students would see him and initiated a conversation by telling him he was his/her favorite math teacher (Derek, interview, March 30, 2021). He said, "it means a lot" (Derek, interview, March 30, 2021).

Derek considered himself a traditional teacher who loved to work math problems with his students (Derek, interview, March 30, 2021). The spring semester of the previous year was a challenge for him because he could not do that. He did not have the technology skills to teach math online and was frustrated that the math assignments were all done via a packet. He considered retiring because this was not how he believed children should be taught math (Derek, interview, March 30, 2021).

Franklin Elementary Description

Franklin Elementary School was a blonde brick school with a front circle drive. There was a playground to the side of the front of the building that has swings, climbing equipment, and space to run and play. Outside the front doors hung a long banner identifying the school as a "School of Character" in their state. On the front doors, there were masking signs and temperature check signs posted.

As I walked up the front walkway, I heard music playing. I was greeted by a teacher at the front door who explained how to use the temperature screener and told me to make sure to check in at the front office. As I walked through the temperature screener, I saw students dancing in the hallway in front of the library with a teacher. They had a boom box playing appropriate elementary dance music. As students and teachers walked by the group that was dancing, the dancers greeted them and wished them a "good day."

Outside the main office doors there was a large bulletin board divided into three parts. Across the top it said *Panther Pride,* the first section said *Believe in Yourself*, the middle section said *Goals,* and the third section said *Make Every day Count.* Examples can be found in Appendix R and Appendix S. Each site administrator had a designated section of the bulletin board where they posted pictures of students demonstrating the identified theme.

As I walked through the hallways there was student work posted outside each classroom. One classroom had student writing posted. Each student colored a frog and wrote a short story about it. An example is in Appendix T. Outside the library, there was an Art Gallery where students had drawn and colored pictures of birds which are found in Appendix U. There were also motivational posters hung throughout the building just like

the other three schools. These posters displayed Stephen Covey's *7 Habits:* be proactive, begin with the end in mind, put first things first, think win-win, seek first to understand then to be understood, synergize, and sharpen the saw. An example is found in Appendix V.

Staffing

Franklin Elementary School had an administration team made up of a principal and two assistant principals. There were 42 certified teachers along with 33 support staff. This site also had an instructional coach who supported teachers with curriculum. Franklin Elementary also had a school nurse and a nurse's assistant. Prior to this year the school did not have a nurse's assistant.

Configuration and Construction

Franklin Elementary was composed of first through fifth grades. Pre-K and kindergarten were taught at the Early Childhood Center, which was in a building that was adjacent to Franklin Elementary. This was the first year that the sixth graders were not located in an elementary site. The reconfiguration of the high school and junior high allowed the sixth graders to move to the middle school.

During the last bond cycle, Franklin elementary received a new STEM lab, computer lab, art room, and storm shelter space. The front office and kitchen were both renovated. The playground also received an upgrade with the addition of new sod.

School Culture

I attended a faculty meeting where the assistant principal showed a short a short video about the "Black Dot" at the end of the meeting. The video showed a teacher handing her students an assignment. The assignment was a black dot in the middle of a

piece of paper. Students were to write what they saw. At the end of class, the teacher read the writings out loud. All the students had written about the black dot, but no one had written about all the white space surrounding the dot. The teacher explained that in our lives it is easy to focus on the black dots in life that might be causing us stress without seeing that there are so many things that are good. The teacher went on to explain that we should focus on the blessings in our lives and not the black dots. The assistant principal reminded her teachers there were many things to celebrate that they had accomplished during the pandemic. After the video, the teachers gathered in a group huddle. Everyone put their hands in the center and repeated, "One team. Our team. Stay fun, positive, and strong. One, two, three, teacher power." It was clear that this was something the staff was used to doing. The teachers appeared united as they echoed the phrase.

Teachers were proud of what they accomplished during the pandemic. Franklin Elementary only had two days of school-wide distancing learning during the year, and the teachers commented on this accomplishment. Derek said, "We did our best, we did a good job" (Derek, interview, March 30, 2021). Pam also felt they had done their best teaching by staying in school. She said "We have made most of our goals this year. Some of our students are a little behind but we are going to keep working with them as much as we can" (Pam, interview, March 30, 2021). Nikole commented, "We have done a really good job of making sure that everyone is staying safe and following the guidelines" (Nikole, interview, March 30, 2021), while Cindy valued the student experience and was proud that the district was able to have sporting events and homecoming using the protocols that were in place (Cindy, interview, April 30, 2021).

Instructional Challenges

Franklin Elementary School was not immune from instructional challenges. Some of the challenges they experienced included teaching students in person and virtually at the same time, the management of materials, student engagement, and how to teach quarantined students. Even their intervention program that was already in place had to be changed to align with the safety protocols of the district.

Teaching In-Person and Virtually at The Same Time

One of the biggest instructional challenges that Ms. Lynn felt teachers have faced was the use of Schoology, the district's LMS. "Learning Schoology was very stressful for our teachers. Most of our teachers are not necessarily tech savvy" (Lynn, interview, March 30, 2021). She explained how the instructional coach at their site held the hand of every teacher to support them in whatever they needed to be successful (Lynn, interview, March 30, 2021). In addition, teachers ended up posting assignments on Schoology and had to manage the LMS for students who were quarantined while being required to teach in person. This required teachers to prepare for and teach their regular classes during the school day, then post assignments and answer questions via email for students who were quarantined.

Pam explained, "Last year it was all about the kids in the classroom, but now we are responsible for a digital platform" (Pam, interview, March 30, 2021). She went on to share that she felt it was double the work this year and was just harder (Pam, interview, March 30, 2021). Derek shared some of the same experiences:

I check my email on my breaks because I constantly have kids that are in quarantine that need my help. Sometimes when the students are working here [in the classroom], I'll get on my computer and start helping a child that's at home

and start working a problem with them, talking them through it. I make sure I

have an instructional video or some type of instruction for every single page. It

has been a difficult year because we have spent more time, more hours working.

(Derek, interview, March 30, 2021)

Students moving in and out of quarantine created a challenge for teachers. Derek

explained that a large majority of students who participated in distance learning during

quarantine struggled. "I did not have my students on a regular basis. I had students

coming in and out constantly. That is a huge challenge for math because math builds"

(Derek, interview, March 30, 2021). He explained that math concepts build on each other

and if they missed something or didn't learn a concept correctly, they would be behind

when they returned (Derek, interview, March 30, 2021). This resulted in Derek reviewing

and reteaching more than he had in the past. Pam also commented that when her entire

first grade class had to quarantine for two weeks it was a challenge for students to access

and upload assignments. She said it was "crazy" (Pam, interview, March 30, 2021).

Technology Support

Another challenge Derek shared concerning instruction for his quarantined

students was the lack of internet access. He said, "At night, I'll have two or three kids

sitting right here [points to an outside wall] so they can get internet from my room"

(Derek, interview, March 30, 2021). While the district provided as many hotspots as they

could, the need for internet support still existed.

Teachers also provided support to parents about how to use the new LMS. Derek

commented, "My role has changed from the teacher to more of a tech person" (Derek,

interview, March 30, 2021). He shared that he had to learn a lot of technology to be able

to teach on the LMS and support students. Nikole said that her work on an LMS at the collegiate level helped her to be prepared to teach this year and to support students. She said, "I kind of had an idea of how to use it [Schoology] because we used Blackboard in college" (Nikole, interview, March 30, 2021). She went on to explain, "I caught on quicker, and I could show everyone. Whereas our older teachers or teacher that have not ever had to deal with this much online were completely lost" (Nikole, interview, March 20, 2021).

Intervention Program

Another challenge was the implementation of the reading intervention program. The school used Istation as their testing program to monitor student growth in reading throughout the year. They used the data to group students into flex groups based on the specific skill the students needed extra instruction to learn. These groups were developed across grade levels. However, due to the safety protocols outlined in the *Return to Learn Plan* (2020)*,* students were not allowed to mingle with students in other grades. This resulted in restructuring how the targeted skills for each child were addressed. Ms. Lynn shared, "Teachers were so bought in to the idea of focusing on specific skills, that they did not want to abandon it" (Lynn, interview, March 30, 2021). So instead of grouping across the grades, they found a way to make it work among the grade levels. "Everyone wore a mask and the teachers made sure everyone was social distanced so students could receive targeted skill instruction" (Lynn, interview, March 30, 2021). Pam described what "flex" looked like in her class:

We have Istation which is a monthly reading assessment on the computer.

Students reassess each month and we make groups based on what they are low in.

There are five subcategories, vocabulary, comprehension and spelling and we make groups based on the lowest scores. We switch students in the morning for 30 minutes and focus on the lowest skill for that group to try to catch them up a little more. I think it has been one of our biggest things that has helped them [students]. (Pam, interview, March 30, 2021)

Student Engagement

Previously, students worked in groups at proximity to each other, however, social distancing made cooperative learning and group work a challenge. Nikole explained she had hoped to incorporate science lessons in her classroom that she had previously taught while student teaching. These lessons were abandoned because they required students to share materials and work in table groups (Nikole, interview, March 30, 2021). She shared:

I did a cotton ball race when I did my internship that talked about velocity and how things move fast or slow depending on how much pressure you put on it. We couldn't really do that this year because we had to wear masks so we couldn't blow on something to make it move. (Nikole, interview, March 30, 2021)

Pam shared:

Last year and all the years I have been here, we have really focused on collaboration and group work. This year it has been more of find ways that they do not have to work together. Or if they do work together, they work with the same person for a month. Just finding ways to keep them in their seats and not sharing materials is a struggle. (Pam, interview, March 30, 2021)

She also shared that first graders needed to work one on one with the teacher for reading instruction:

> This has been the most challenging year I've had. It was really hard at the beginning to figure out how to set up small groups. At this young age they [students] need to have one on one time to really work on reading skills. We had to figure out how to do small groups and centers or something engaging instead of just sitting and doing a worksheet packet for 15 minutes. (Pam, interview, March 30, 2021)

Cindy commented on the social distancing protocol as well. She said, "I've always sat with my kids at my reading table around me. I couldn't do that this year. For the first time ever, I have rows that are six feet apart" (Cindy, interview, April 30, 2021). She taught a Title 1 reading class where students had reading buddies and would read orally to each other. Immediately, when you walk into Cindy's classroom, you could see the safety measures that had been put in place to prevent students from transmitting respiratory droplets when they read. Cindy had clear shower curtains hanging from her ceiling separating the room into quadrants as seen in Appendix W. Since students did not have clear face shields, she hung shower curtains in her room to separate the reading buddies so they could safely read out loud (Cindy, interview, March 30, 2021).

Another challenge concerning student engagement was face coverings. All four teachers commented on how they had to constantly remind students to pull their mask up over their mouth and nose. Derek reported that he had to tell his fifth-grade students many times to pull up their masks, "Its rough, I say it a lot, I tell them a lot to pull up their masks" (Derek, interview, March 30, 2021). Pam, who taught first grade, shared,

"Students forget to pull them up or wear it over their eyes. They also lose them constantly, break them and trade them" (Pam, interview, March 30, 2021). Nikole had a different perspective on the face coverings. She wanted to be able to see the students' faces to see how they were feeling (Nikole, interview, March 30, 2021). Cindy also had a different challenge concerning the face masks. She shared, "I can't see their mouths to see if they're forming their letters correctly" (Cindy, interview, April 30, 2021).

Materials Management

Cleaning of materials was a new responsibility for teachers. Any materials that were used in class had to be cleaned following the specific guidelines outlined in the *Return to Learn Plan* (2020). Students could not share materials. Nikole explained, "I went through a lot of the materials [base ten blocks] that I had multiples of and split them up and put them into baggies so every student would have their own" (Nikole, interview, March 30, 2021). Previously, students were able to share the blocks and work in groups. She also had a library of books in her room. She explained after a students would check in a book, she would disinfect the book, and it would be quarantined for three days. Cindy shared how she had to have six books, one for each student, since books could not be shared (Cindy, interview, April 30, 2021). She said, "Each student has a basket that is theirs where we put the weekly assignments. They have their own pencil, their own eraser, and their own markers. Everything has been individualized (Cindy, interview, April 30, 2021). She also described her quarantine closet where all the materials that had been used during the week were put for disinfecting and would stay there for at least two weeks (Cindy, interview, April 30, 2021). In Pam's class, students had their own supplies. She explained:

We have cubbies with their personal supplies, and they have a basket under their

chair with additional supplies, and they each have a tote by the door with their

name on it with their extra stuff in it. So, if they need a new pencil or glue stick,

they have to go get it out of their tub. Before COVID, we dumped all the crayons

into a bucket, and they would just go get one when they needed it. (Pam,

interview, March 30, 2021)

<div align="center">**Teacher Support**</div>

More emphasis was given to supporting teachers during the pandemic. Social-

Emotional support was not just for students. There was a focus on supporting the teachers

as well. Teachers were also supported with time at the beginning of the year to learn the

new LMS and prepare for a different way of teaching.

Social-Emotional Well-Being

Something new this year was the focus of the emotional well-being of the staff.

Ms. Lynn explained:

Teachers aren't able to teach the way they know is best practice for their kids and

that's frustrating them. And so, their satisfaction in their day-to-day activities is

down. So, trying to keep them inspired and motivated and realizing that it's

temporary had been the biggest challenge. (Lynn, interview, March 30, 2021)

Social emotional well-being also included the principals. Ms. Lynn shared many

accolades concerning the district leadership. She discussed how supportive all the district

administrators were this year. Ms. Lynn stated:

We were told as principals from the district administration that the social

emotional well-being of everyone is most important. You have to take care of

yourself to be able to take care of them [teachers]. (Lynn, interview, March 30,

2021)

She said the district administrators encouraged principals to talk to them if they were not

doing okay. She reinforced that they were constantly asking, "How are you, and how can

I help you?" (Lynn, interview, March 30, 2021). She said she believed that it was very

intentional on their part to be so supportive through this stressful time (Lynn, interview,

March 30, 2021). Nikole echoed this support when she shared, "I have felt very

supported. My principals were always texting me asking me if I needed any help with

anything" (Nikole, interview, March 30, 2021).

Time

Teachers appreciated the training they received on Schoology before school

started. Derek was thankful that Dr. Reynolds recognized they had to do something

different with instruction this year and researched an LMS to support students who had to

do distance learning at home (Derek, interview, March 30, 2021). He shared, "It was

overwhelming to learn the new system, but we had tech instructors and an instructional

coach in the building to support us. We had a lot of support" (Derek, interview, March

30, 2021).

Teachers were also given additional professional development time at the

beginning of school year. Pam commented:

They took our professional development days that were put into the calendar and

front loaded them. We spent two weeks of professional development to prepare

for this year. It was mainly how to use Schoology and work with other first grade

teachers in the district to learn how to use it. And then we had a lot of time in our rooms to get things ready. (Pam, interview, March 30, 2021)

Successful Plan

Teachers expressed they were proud of the *Return to Learn Plan* (2020) that was implemented. Derek said, "Our administration felt like in-person learning was the best" (Derek, interview, March 30, 2021). Franklin Elementary only had two days of school-wide distancing learning during the year, and the teachers were proud of this accomplishment. Derek said, "We did our best, we did a good job" (Derek, interview, March 30, 2021). Pam also felt like they had done their best teaching by staying in school. She said, "We have met most of our goals. Some of the kids are a little behind but we are going to keep working with them." (Pam, interview, March 30, 2021). Nikole commented that, "I think it is as smooth as it could be for being in a pandemic" (Nikole, interview, March 30, 2021), while Cindy valued the student experience and was proud that the district was able to have sporting events and homecoming using the protocols that were in place (Cindy, interview, April 30, 2021). "We have done a really good job of making sure that everyone stayed safe and followed the guidelines" (Pam, interview, March 30, 2021).

Summary

Chapter IV introduced three schools in the same district along with teachers and administrators from those sites. A description of each school was accompanied with the stories and experiences of the teachers and administrators during COVID -19 was presented. Chapter V will analyze how the school culture of each site impacted the teachers and administrators' roles during COVID-19.

CHAPTER V

EXPLAINING DATA THROUGH A CULTURAL THEORY LENS

The purpose of this naturalistic study is to explore how selected school contexts

adapted roles and responsibilities in educational processes during the COVID-19

pandemic phases: (a) infection, (b) social distancing, and (c) management. This chapter

will analyze data using the information presented in Chapter IV. The framework used as

the lens for analysis for this study is Douglas's (1982, 1986) Cultural Theory. This

chapter discusses the application of cultural theory in relationship to the roles and

responsibilities of the participants during COIVD-19.

Cultural Theory

Mary Douglas (1982, 1986) provides a typology that enables educators to meet

the conceptual and methodological challenges inherent in cultural inquiry and educational

practices. According to Harris (2015), her typology is suitable for schools as it

- provides a matrix to classify school contexts,

- draws specific observations about individuals' values, beliefs, and behaviors,

- is designed to consider the total social environment and interrelationships among

  school members and their context, and

- explains how constructed contextual meanings are generated and transformed.

Grid and Group Typology

In Douglas's (1982, 1986) framework, grid refers to the degree to which an individual's choices are constrained within a social system by imposed prescriptions such as role expectations, rules, and procedures. Grid is plotted on the vertical axis of a continuum from strong to weak. In a strong-grid organization, individuals have minimal autonomy, specifically defined roles, rules, and responsibilities and there is a centralized power structure. Individuals located in the high grid portion of the continuum would not interact with other individuals. The principal is in charge, leaving little room for teachers to have a voice in making decisions. In a weak-grid organization, individuals have high autonomy, there are loosely defined rules and responsibilities and there is a decentralization of power. In a school setting, teachers in a weak-grid school have the freedom to select curriculum and instructional methods. They are not isolated in grade levels or by departments, and there is significant autonomy due to the lack of rules and processes.

Power and authority play a significant role in the grid dimension. Harris (2015) defines power as "the capacity of an organization to influence and motivate its members" (p. 39), while authority is the right to make decisions and instruct others in their work. In a strong-grid school setting, the power and authority are granted to the superintendent and the principal due to their position in the organization. They make all decisions and provide directives to the teachers. In a weak-group school, administrators usually move up from within the school or district and have "earned the right" to hold the position, which in turn gives them power.

The concept of "group" focuses on the holistic picture of the social unit in the organization under study. Harris (2015) refers to group as the degree to which people value collective relationships and their commitment to the larger social unit. Like grid, group has a continuum from strong to weak, except it is charted on the horizontal axis of the matrix. In a strong-group system, the commitment to the group as part of the organization is more important than the individual. In a weak-group organization, there is little pressure to be part of the larger social group. The focus on each individual is dominant over the group.

Grid Considerations

Strong or weak grid was determined for Rolling Hills High School, Middle School, and Franklin Elementary School by considering observations, interview data, and survey findings. Harris (2015) explains that triangulating observational data with survey findings was the best way to elicit and portray the divergent constructs of reality that exist with a context.

Rolling Hills High School

Rolling Hills High School survey results established it as a strong-grid school. Twenty-eight participants completed the survey. Twenty-three answered in the strong-grid quadrant, while five of the participants felt the school identified as weak grid. Many of the points plotted in the strong-grid quadrant also hovered around the axis. One possible explanation could be new leadership. Mr. Jones, principal, and Sarah, assistant principal, were still new in their leadership roles with this being their second year. Sarah explained, "I knew it was going to be tough since I was new to the job. I really hadn't figured out my place quiet yet" (Sarah, interview, March 24, 2021).

Leadership Control

Mr. Jones was a novice leader who recognized early in the pandemic that his teachers would need support. He was especially attentive to the challenges his teachers were experiencing reaching their students and managing their workload. He responded to their stress in a faculty meeting by informing them that, "We have a lot of smart people confused. That means we have led people down a path that they weren't ready for, or we didn't do a very good job preparing them. So, we are gonna take a step back" (Jones, interview, March 24, 2021). While Mr. Jones did not explain what "take a step back" meant, he did share that his approach kept one of his teachers from quitting that day.

Mr. Jones made some decisions concerning assignments that were not popular among the teachers. "We have had to be a lot more lenient as far as taking papers three weeks late. If we don't, we are not getting any work" (Jones, interview, March 24, 2021). While Mr. Jones was in his right to exercise his power as the principal to require taking work late, not all the teachers agreed. Elizabeth explained, "We have always extended a lot of grace to students, however, this year it's a "heaping handful of grace all of the time" (Elizabeth, interview, March 25, 2021). John said, I always, "teach hard, test hard, and give grace", but this year teachers have been told to make sure that they give students grace when it comes to missing assignments (John, interview, March 25, 2021).

Minimal Autonomy

Due to the mitigation strategies that were implemented by the district in the *Return to Learn Plan* (2020), teachers were forced to change the way they delivered instruction. Marc, who taught a special education class, explained, "I did a lot of group work, a lot of group activities, and hands on things with the students [Pre-COVID].

Instead of having students work in groups of three or four, he had them work individually or in groups of two but made sure they were social distanced. Teachers also had to post assignments on Schoology so students could work from home. John shared that there was very little paper and pencil instruction this year. He explained that he had to learn a new digital social studies curriculum, develop the lessons for the new curriculum, and learn how to post assignments and instruction on Schoology. Elizabeth was a veteran teacher who also had to learn more technology to teach this school year. "Going digital was a huge learning curve (Elizabeth, interview, March 25, 2021). She described how she liked her students to put pen to paper, and they had not been able to do a lot of that this year (Elizabeth, interview, March 25, 2021).

The way teachers managed materials also affected instruction. Markers, pencils, and even books had to be sanitized and quarantined for several days before another student could use them. Diane and Elizabeth both shared how they used to have a class set of novels that were shared among the classes. "I used to have a book on every desk and they [students] would come in and use that book and leave it for the next class" (Elizabeth, interview, March 25, 2021). This year, the district had purchased a novel for each student that stayed in their possession until the teacher was ready to check it in. Diane shared, "I have students go to the board for class activities, but I have them go one at a time and make sure everyone has their own individual marker" (Diane, interview, April 9, 2021). After class, the used markers were sanitized according to the district protocols.

Rolling Hills Middle School

The survey results from Rolling Hills Middle School identified it as a strong-grid school. The school was organized into three grade levels, sixth, seventh, and eighth. Sixth grade was new to the middle school due to the district's grade reconfiguration. Teachers taught a traditional five period day with an advisory period.

Leadership Control

In managing the pandemic, the principal at Rolling Hills Middle School demonstrated a coaching leadership style which consisted of support and collaboration. One area he knew would require support for his teachers was the implementation of a learning management system. He attended the same training as the teachers so he could provide assistance to them as they set up their online classrooms. "I knew that [technology] would be a struggle for a lot of my staff members who were not tech savvy, and I wanted to become an expert (Smith, interview, April 1, 2021). Mandy and Barbara confirmed this when they explained how learning the technology was stressful because it was not how they had taught during their tenure as a teacher (Barbara and Mandy, interview, March 31, 2021).

During the pandemic, the principal also modified procedures and programs that had previously existed. One of the protocols he elaborated on was the movement through the hallways and how to maintain social distancing. The student leadership team was given the task of figuring out the traffic flow in the hallways. "We really felt like, let's ask the people that do the walking in the halls which are the students" (Smith, interview, April 1, 2021). The students determined the traffic patterns for the building and presented their plan to the admin team (Smith, interview, April 1, 2021).

The student leadership team was also involved in modifying Panther Bridge Camp. The leadership team created the camp virtually so new students could tour the building and learn some common rules and procedures before school started. While Mr. Smith provided opportunities for students to be involved in the planning of the hallway procedures and Panther Bridge Camp, it was ultimately his decision as the building principal to approve both plans.

Minimal Autonomy

Mitigation strategies in the *Return to Learn Plan* (2020) affected the teacher's autonomy in how they presented curriculum. Social distancing affected student collaboration in the classroom. Jay described how it was difficult to keep students engaged for seventy-minute class periods and not have them get out of their seats. He said, "Everything we were taught about engagement, movement, and cooperative learning was a struggle early in the year" (Jay, interview, March 31, 2021). Becky also commented on how she liked to have students pair share as a strategy to help them process information but was a little afraid of having them do group work or pair shares when school started (Becky, interview, April 1, 2021).

Students who were quarantined also impeded the autonomy teachers had prior to COVID-19. Teachers were required to teach the students in their classrooms and provide instruction online. Barbara explained, "Figuring out how to teach the kids who were here, but at the same time respond to questions that are coming in through email was overwhelming" (Barbara, interview, March 31, 2021). Jay shared a similar story about students being quarantined. He said, "Keeping kids who were quarantined engaged was a

challenge. I had to give up the battle of missing assignments this year" (Jay, interview, March 31, 2021).

Teachers also had to find time to learn and implement a new program called Istation and USA Test Prep. Istation assessed students on targeted concepts and then assigned them to an intervention path to develop deficient skills. USA Test Prep provided teachers with content specific questions that are like the questions students saw on the state test in April.

Franklin Elementary

Franklin Elementary was a PreK-5 school that identified as a strong-grid site. The building was arranged by grade level teams. Teachers were hired to teach a specific grade level and district adopted curriculum. There was a principal and two assistant principals.

Leadership Control

During this school year, Ms. Lynn shared how the social-emotional well-being of not only students but of the staff was a priority (Lynn, interview, March 30, 2021). For example, I attended a faculty meeting led by Ms. Lynn where she presented the "Black Dot" video. The video showed a classroom of students who had been given a piece of paper with a black dot in the center and told to write about it. All students wrote about the dot instead of the white area surrounding it. The teacher explained that in our lives it is easy to focus on the black dots in life that might be causing us stress without seeing that there are so many things that are good. The assistant principal reminded her teachers that there were many things to celebrate that they had accomplished during the pandemic. The video was meant to encourage and motivate the teachers to make it through the last six weeks of school.

After the video, the teachers gathered in a group huddle. Everyone put their hands in the center and repeated, "One team. Our team. Stay fun, positive, and strong. One, two, three, teacher power." It was clear this chant was a ritual they did when they would all come together as a building. The teachers appeared united as they echoed the phrase.

Minimal Autonomy

The *Return to Learn Plan* (2020) caused teachers to relinquish some of their autonomy to implement the mitigation strategies which had a direct impact on instruction. One of the main challenges was implementing the LMS, Schoology while teaching students who were present in their classroom. For example, Pam explained, "Last year it was all about the kids in the classroom, but now we are responsible for a digital platform" (Pam, interview, March 30, 2021). Derek said, "Sometimes when the students are working here [in the classroom], I'll get on my computer and start helping a child that's at home" (Derek, interview, March 30, 2021). Managing in-person instruction and online instruction forced teachers to manage their day differently to meet the needs of their students.

How teachers managed materials was also outlined for them in the *Return to Learn Plan* (2020) and affected how teachers ran their classrooms. For example, Cindy said, "Each student has a basket that is theirs where we put the weekly assignments. They have their own pencil, their own eraser, and their own markers. Everything has been individualized" (Cindy, interview, April 30, 2021). In Pam's class, students had their own supplies this year. She explained, "We have cubbies with their personal supplies, and they have a basket under their chair with additional supplies, and they each have a tote by the door with their name on it with their extra stuff in it" (Pam, interview, March 30,

2021). She said, "Before COVID-19, we dumped all the crayons into a bucket, and they would just go get one when they needed it" (Pam, interview, March 30, 2021).

Managing the masks disrupted instruction and was a challenge for the teachers. Derek reported that he had to tell his fifth-grade students many times to pull up their masks. Pam, who taught first grade, shared, "Students forget to pull them up or wear it over their eyes. They also lose them constantly, break them and trade them" (Pam, interview, March 30, 2021). Cindy shared, "I can't see their mouths to see if they're forming their letters correctly" (Cindy, interview, April 30, 2021). Seeing the students' mouths was important as she taught students to read.

Group Considerations

Stansberry (2001) stated, the "group variable indicates individuals" interactions to expose the extent to which they are willing to devote effort and energy to creating or maintaining a group synergy." Strong or weak group was also determined for each site through observations, constructs of reality that exist within each context.

Rolling Hills High School

The survey results identified the High School as a strong-group school. A few characteristics of a strong-grid school are school allegiance, strong considerations of goals, and group interests over individual interests.

School Allegiance

As you walked through the school there was evidence of "Panther Pride" everywhere you looked. There were banners that said, *Expect Excellence Panthers, and Excellence, Make It Happen,* there were plexiglass displayed of National Merit Scholars, Oklahoma Academic All Staters, and Oklahoma Academic Scholars, and a large statue of

a panther when you walked out of the front office. Additionally, a graphic of the school's motto "Lift, Lead, Learn" was displayed around the school.

School allegiance was expressed by the teachers as they shared accolades about Rolling Hills High School. John said, "We have been way ahead of most people [being in school]" (John, interview, March 25, 2021). "This school is just a great school to work, and we are reaching 100% of our students" Marc said (Marc, interview, April 9, 2021), and Elizabeth expressed, "We are doing great things and I am really proud to be here" (Elizabeth, interview, March 25, 2021).

Strong Group Goal

Value of Students. One of the tenants of the *Leader in Me* program focused on the students' interests. Sarah explained, "Their [students] interests are their gifts" (Sarah, interview, March 24, 2021). Mr. Jones shared a story about some artwork that had been given to him by a student. He said, "Everyone has a genius and this student's genius is art" (Jones, interview, March 24, 2021). The idea of student leadership was also the topic of the action team meeting I attended. For example, teachers were working in groups to find a way to create a fun climate in the cafeteria the last nine weeks of school. The involvement of the students to create a play list aligned with the *Leader in Me* tenant.

John also shared with great pride how the teachers and administrators came together to celebrate the senior class from the previous year. He said, "The administration got yard signs for all the Seniors, divided amongst staff and we went out and put those in their yards" (John, interview, March 25, 2021). He also described a parade where students sat in car and rode down main street with friends and families waving at them (John, interview, March 25, 2021).

Relationships. Building relationships with students was important to the teachers and administrators at the High School. Mr. Jones took a picture of with a student in her cap and gown in the cafeteria. He said, "I have always liked kids, but now it is the only reason to be here. This is the best thing I have done today" (Jones, interview, March 24, 2021). While face coverings created challenges for teachers, they still found a way to connect with students. Diane took advantage of opportunities to see students' faces when they would take a drink out of their water bottles. Sometimes she would get caught staring at a student. She simply replied, "I just want to know what you look like" (Diane, interview, April 9. 2021). John felt the same way. He had students pull down their masks "just to see them smile" (John, interview, March 25, 2021).

Group Interest over Individual

Instruction at School. Regardless of what each individual teacher thought about the COVID-19 virus and the mitigation strategies that were in place, participants expressed appreciation for being able to be teaching in their classrooms in person. Marc said, "The top priority was to get the kids back in school, in front of a teacher (Marc, interview, April 9, 2021). Diane stated that the district followed through with their plan and had not "backed out for anything" (Diane, interview, April 9, 2021). Being in-person was not without it challenges. Teachers found creative ways to engage students with curriculum and still followed the COVID-19 mitigation strategies in the classrooms. Diane valued group work and found a few creative ways to still have students interact together. For example, she used online messaging between groups and sometimes had them move into groups six feet apart (Diane, interview, April 9, 2021). Diane said," You can still do these things; you just have to be smart. (Diane, interview, April 9, 2021).

Rolling Hills Middle School

School Allegiance

Rolling Hills Middle School survey results identified it as a strong- group school. Evidence of this was seen as you walked into the building and saw banners with Stephen Covey's "*7 Habits of Highly Effective People*", and a display of pictures with adjectives that described the mission statement, *working together to provide a quality education that equips and challenges all students*. Each teacher created a sign that had a word and picture they felt best described the mission for their site. Some of those words were value, believe, inspire, strive, commit, journey, and purpose. The heading above the display of words said, "Meeting our mission one word at a time." It was clear as you walked through the building what the administration, teachers, and students valued.

School allegiance was also voiced by teachers. Barbara said, "We really do have a great school here (Barbara, interview, March 31, 2021). Jay echoed that when he said, "The culture is really good here. I love my job" (Jay, interview, March 31, 2021). He also shared his observation of how the faculty had handled the transition in leadership. He shared, "It speaks to our building that he [Mr. Smith] can be gone so much [transitioning to a new job] and we kind of self-pilot" (Jay, interview, March 31, 2021).

Strong Group Goals

Valuing Students. One area that stood out at this school was the collective focus on the students. Jay shared his concern about the students who were quarantined during the pandemic. He said, "It may be that students have never missed a day of school in their life and now they are out for two weeks. That can be tough on some kids" (Jay, interview, March 31, 2021). He talked about how stressed the students were, and that it was his job

to take some of the pressure away (Jay, interview, March 31, 2021). He said, "if you're doing your role right, then you're absorbing it [pressure]" (Jay, interview, March 31, 2021). Barbara shared how during class discussions of current events, she would counsel students and let them know that "not everyone who got COVID-19 would die" (Barbara, interview, March 31, 2021). "I have to remind myself that they are 12 and 13 so it is hard for them to process it all" (Barbara, interview, March 31, 2021).

Students also valued each other. An example of this occurred during Mandy's interview. Two students came into the room. One of the students had been doing virtual learning all year and was reacclimating himself to in-person learning. The friend brought him to Mandy's room because the new student did not know what to do with his milk. He asked Mandy if he could keep it in her refrigerator and she told him. "Just set it on that chair and I will do it for you" (Mandy, interview, March 31, 2021). This student's behavior aligns with the *Leader in Me* program.

Support for students was evident during online instruction. For example, Barbara hosted distance learning days in her classroom so students could experience what it would be like to learn from home using Schoology if they ever had to quarantine. Barbara explained "I'm not just teaching them for the present but trying to teach them for the future" (Barbara, interview, March 31, 2021). Becky spent time searching for just the right video from YouTube or a video library that would engage students in the concept she was trying to teach (Becky, interview, April 1, 2021).

Franklin Elementary

School Allegiance

Franklin Elementary School identified as a strong-group school. School pride was seen right away as I entered the building. There were students dancing to music in the front hallway welcoming students and teachers as they walked to their classrooms. Outside the main office doors there was a large bulletin board divided into three parts. Across the top it said *Panther Pride,* the first section said *Believe in Yourself*, the middle section said *Goals,* and the third section said *Make Everyday Count.* Each site administrator had a designated section of the bulletin board where they posted pictures of students demonstrating the identified theme. There was also student work hung in the hallway celebrating what they had learned.

Teachers also expressed pride about what they accomplished during the pandemic. For example, Pam also felt like they had done their best teaching by staying in school. She said, "We have made most of our goals this year. Some of our students are a little behind but we are going to keep working with them as much as we can" (Pam, interview, March 30, 2021). Nikole commented, "We have done a really good job of making sure that everyone is staying safe and following the guidelines" (Nikole, interview, March 30, 2021), while Cindy valued the student experience and was proud that the district was able to have sporting events and homecoming using the protocols that were in place (Cindy, interview, April 30, 2021).

Strong Group Goals

Student Focused. Teachers at Franklin Elementary School remained student focused during the pandemic. They were doing whatever it took to make sure the student's needs were met during COVID-19. Ms. Lynn shared how the teachers worked together to make the necessary modifications to their reading intervention program,

"Teachers were so bought in to the idea of focusing on specific skills, that they did not want to abandon it" (Lynn, interview, March 30, 2021). Teachers found a way to make their program work in each grade level. Ms. Lynn said, "Everyone wore a mask and the teachers made sure everyone was social distanced so students could receive targeted skill instruction" (Lynn, interview, March 30, 2021).

Modifications to instruction were made by creating individualized materials to ensure the safety of students. Cindy explained, "I went through a lot of the materials [base ten blocks] that I had multiples of and split them up and put them into baggies so every student would have their own" (Nikole, interview, March 30, 2021). Cindy said, "Each student has a basket that is theirs where we put the weekly assignments. They have their own pencil, their own eraser, and their own markers" (Cindy, interview, April 30, 2021).

Pam also ensured that students essential needs were met. Pam shared, "I bought water bottles for every kid with my own money because I couldn't handle a first grader being thirsty" (Pam, interview, March 30, 2021). The water fountains had been turned off and students were supposed to bring their own water bottle from home to use at school. However, most of the students did not bring one. Without a water bottle, the students would have been thirsty all day.

Grid and Group Comparisons

This section will analyze the roles and responsibilities of the teachers, students, and leadership at each school site through the lens of Mary Douglas's Cultural Theory (1982, 1986). All three schools identified as a Corporate site. A few characteristics of a Corporate School are: (a) minimum autonomy, (b) specifically defined roles, rules, and

responsibilities, (c) centralized power and authority, (d) strong pressure to consider group goals and activities, (e) strong social incorporation, and (f) group's interests prioritized over the individuals (Harris, 2015).

Rolling Hills High School: Corporate Context (Strong-Grid, Strong-Group)

Leadership (Roles and Responsibilities)

The leadership roles of the high school principals changed during the pandemic. Prior to COVID-19 Mr. Jones and Sarah did a lot of "tag teaming" in responsibilities as they learned their new roles. However, during the planning phase, it was evident that defined roles needed to be established for work that was required. "My job became highly instructional" (Sarah, interview, March 24, 2021). As Sarah worked with the instructional coaches to develop a plan for how teachers would teach online, Mr. Jones role became focused on implementing the *Return to Learn Plan* (2020) that was put in place by the superintendent.

Students (Roles and Responsibilities)

Students' roles as learners changed whether they attended school in person or virtually. If they attended in person they were required to social distance in the classrooms, hallways, and cafeterias. They had to have their temperature checked upon entering the building and were required to wear a face covering at all times (*Return to Learn Plan*, 2020).

Their instruction was modified to meet the safety guidelines in the *Return to Learn Plan* (2020). An example of how instruction changed was explained by Diane. She explained some creative ways that she was still able to group work on a smaller scale. She said that she was able to do "online messages between groups of three or four" when

she was trying to do group work in class (Diane, interview, April 9, 2021). Students stayed in their seats to do this and were still able to collaborate. Students were not allowed to share materials and group work was limited.

Students who attended in-person learning but had to quarantine, accessed their assignments on Schoology. They would retrieve assignments and post completed work to this LMS.

Students who participated in virtual learning had to learn a new curriculum called FuelEd (*Return to Learn,* 2020*).* This was an online curriculum where students worked at their own pace.

Teachers (Roles and Responsibilities)

Teachers' role of providing instruction changed as they implemented the district's mitigations strategies outlined in the *Return to Learn Plan* (2020*).* Teachers had to rethink group work and materials management as they planned for instruction to meet the social distancing requirement. Teachers also had to support students who were quarantined while teaching in-person. When students returned, they had to catch them up. When I talked with the teachers, they felt like they were not able to cover as much material because they had to reteach students who were returning from quarantine. For example, Elizabeth said, "I feel like I am really having to go a lot slower" (Elizabeth, interview, March 25, 2021).

Teachers also had to learn how to use Schoology. John and Elizabeth both commented on the training teachers went through to learn Schoology. While John was appreciative of time and professional development offered, he felt like it was an "information dump" (John, interview, March 25, 2021). He stated, "I'm the old guy, and

you know, it just seems overwhelming" (John, interview, March 25, 2021). He continued to share, "It was a high stress time among teachers on how to use the program, and uncertainty about what teachers would encounter while using it" (John, interview, March 25, 2021).

Rolling Hills Middle School: Corporate Context (Strong-Grid, Strong-Group)

Leadership (Roles and Responsibilities)

New to Mr. Smith's administrator responsibilities for this year was implementing the district's *Return to Learn Plan* (2020). This forced Mr. Smith to examine current procedures and make modifications where needed. He elicited help from his student leadership team to modify their Panther Bridge Camp and develop hallway procedures to meet the social distancing requirement while he made other modifications to meet the requirements of the plan.

Mr. Smith also focused on instruction. He attended all the trainings on Schoology so he could provide guidance to his teachers on uploading assignments.

Students (Roles and Responsibilities)

Students' roles as learners changed regardless of if they attended school in person or virtually. If they attended in person they were required to social distance in the classrooms, hallways, and cafeterias. They had to have their temperature checked upon entering the building and were required to wear a face covering at all times (*Return to Learn Plan*, 2020).

Instruction for students changed as well. Students had to social distance in the classrooms which limited group work. Students were required to do more individual seat work than previously. Jay described how it was difficult to keep students engaged for

seventy-minute class periods and not have them get out of their seats (Jay, interview, March 31, 2020).

Students were assessed more this year. They learned a new reading assessment program called Istation. This program was used to assess student progress on targeted reading skills and the data was used to provide interventions for students for skills in which they were deficient. They also took USA Test Prep assessments to prepare for their state test.

Teachers (Roles and Responsibilities)

Teachers' roles and responsibilities were adapted to meet the mitigation strategies outlined in the *Return to Learn Plan* (2020). One of those strategies was social distancing. Becky commented how social distancing affected her instruction. She shared, "I was a little afraid of having them do group work or pair shares when school started" (Becky, interview, April 1, 2021). She said she liked to have students share with each other as a strategy to help them learn but could not do that at the beginning of the year. Marc shared a similar experience when he said, "Everything we were taught about engagement, movement, and cooperative learning was a struggle early in the year" (Jay, interview, March 31, 2021).

Teaching students in person and supporting students who were quarantined was a new responsibility teachers had this year. Barbara shared, "Figuring out how to teach the kids who were here, but at the same time respond to questions that are coming in through email was overwhelming" (Barbara, interview, March 31, 2021). Becky commented, "Keeping up with who was gone and keeping them caught up with the rest of the class was a big challenge" (Becky, interview, April 1, 2021).

Teacher also had to learn to use Schoology to upload assignments. Some teachers videoed themselves teaching while others posted assignments. Becky shared that she was not comfortable with posting videos of herself teaching so she used videos from YouTube or a video library in order for students to see the instruction (Becky, interview, April 1, 2020).

Franklin Elementary: Corporate Context (Strong-Grid, Strong-Group)

Leadership (Roles and Responsibilities)

Ms. Lynn had to modify protocols and practices to implement the mitigation strategies required by the district. One example was the school's reading intervention program. Previously, students would see teachers in other grade levels based on their needs. COVID-19 mitigation strategies would not permit this level of mixing students. So instead of grouping across the grades, they found a way to make it work among the grade levels. Ms. Lynn said, "Everyone wore a mask and the teachers made sure everyone was social distanced so students could receive targeted skill instruction" (Lynn, interview, March 30, 2021).

Ms. Lynn also became more intentional about checking on her teachers' social-emotional well-being. This was not something she had not done in the past but was now a part of her day. She shared that trying to keep teachers inspired and motivated while helping them realize this is temporary had been the biggest challenge. (Lynn, interview, March 30, 2021)

Students (Roles and Responsibilities)

Students had new responsibilities this school year. They had to wear a face mask which was a challenge for some of the first graders, "Students forget to pull them up or

wear it over their eyes. They also lose them constantly, break them and trade them" (Pam, interview, March 30, 2021). Derek, who taught fifth grade said, "Its rough, I say it a lot, I tell them a lot to pull up their masks" (Derek, interview, March 30, 2021).

Instruction looked different for students when they were absent. Previously, they would get their assignments when they returned from school but due to the length of quarantining, the district had all students using Schoology to access and turn in assignment when they were absent. Students also had to use their own materials and not share them like they were accustomed to. Each student had their own tub at their desk with materials for the day. In Pam's class, students also had their own water bottle.

Teachers (Roles and Responsibilities)

Mitigation strategies outlined in the district's *Return to Learn Plan* (2020) affected how teachers delivered instruction. One of the biggest instructional challenges that Ms. Lynn felt teachers faced was the use of Schoology, the district's LMS. "Learning Schoology was very stressful for our teachers. Most of our teachers are not necessarily tech savvy" (Lynn, interview, March 30, 2021). Teachers were instructed to post assignments on Schoology and had to manage the LMS for students who were quarantined while being required to teach in person. This required teachers to prepare for and teach their regular classes during the school day and then post assignments and answer questions via email for students who were quarantined.
Pam explained, "Last year it was all about the kids in the classroom, but now we are responsible for a digital platform" (Pam, interview, March 30, 2021).

Teachers also provided support to parents on how to use the new LMS. Derek commented, "My role has changed from the teacher to more of a tech person" (Derek,

interview, March 30, 2021). He shared that he had to learn a lot of technology to be able to teach on the LMS and support students.

Materials management was a new responsibility for teachers. Previously, teachers would put crayons, glue sticks, and pencils in tubs for students to share. This year, students had individual tubs for supplies, books, paper, and any manipulative used for instruction. Any instructional materials that were to be used again had to be disinfected and quarantined for two weeks before they were used again.

Enforcing the face mask requirement for students was also challenge. Teachers commented on how they had to constantly remind students to pull their mask up over their mouth and nose. Derek said, "Its rough, I say it a lot, I tell them a lot to pull up their masks" (Derek, interview, March 30, 2021). Cindy had a different challenge concerning the face masks. She said "I can't see their mouths to see if they're forming their letters correctly" (Cindy, interview, April 30, 2021).

Administrator, teacher, and student roles and responsibilities changed during COVID-19. Many of the changes were consistent across the three schools described in this study. Table 4 presents the nuances in corporate values for each school during the pandemic.

Table 4

Nuances in Corporate Typology for Each School

Corporate Values	Rolling Hills High School	Rolling Hills Middle School	Franklin Elementary

Leadership Control	Grace in turning in late assignments	Revised Panther Bridge Camp Student involvement	Social Emotional Focus on teachers
Minimal Autonomy	Online group work New late work policy	Istation USA Test Prep Trimesters	Materials Management
Explicit Rules	Teacher input	Student input Teacher input	Teacher input
Centralized Power	New leadership	Veteran leadership	New leadership
Strong Group Goals	Graduation Academic Excellence Student led activities	Student engagement Social emotional support for students	Intervention program Student support

Note. Mary Douglas's (1982, 1986) Corporate Typology result for Rolling Hills High School, Middle School, and Franklin Elementary School.

Summary

All three schools selected identified as a Corporate (Strong-Grid, Strong-Group) site. While a Corporate Culture was defined, points plotted for each site hovered closely to the axis indicating there were characteristics from the other domains evident in school practices. While each site had autonomy to establish practices and protocols within their schools, there were common elements that each site followed from the district level. All the school sites made decisions aligned with the district's mission and vision statements and core values that were documented in the *Panther Tenants.* Ms. Lynn explained the

importance of the Panther Tenants which was a document of what the district believed and what they valued. She shared:

> All schools understand the "why" and the "how" of the work. We know why we are here, what we are trying to accomplish, and how we are going to accomplish it. We are all on the same page and that is truly due to the leadership in our district. (Lynn, interview, March 30, 2021)

The main focus identified in the document was taking care of their students. Schools also followed the district's *Return to Learn Plan* (2020) that was written by Dr. Reynolds and his central office team which focused on keeping students in school. Principals and teachers made the necessary modifications outlined in the plan to their specific role. Finally, school allegiance was modeled at each site through banners, posters, student work, and statements of pride from the participants. This aligned with the *Leader in Me* program in which all school across the district participated.

CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECCOMENDATIONS

The final chapter of this study includes a presentation of the findings and

conclusions of the research. This will be done by answering the research questions that

guided this study. In the conclusion section, I consider the broader meaning of the

findings through the theoretical framework, Grid and Group. Finally, implications of this

study are included along with recommendations for future research.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore through cultural theory how selected school

contexts adapted roles and responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The

following research questions guided the study:

  1. What were administrator and teachers' roles and responsibilities prior to COVID-19?

  2. How did teachers and administrators' roles and responsibilities change during three

of the

   phases of the pandemic?

      a.   Infection?

      b.   Social Distancing?

      c.   Management?

3. What have leaders done and what are teachers doing to adapt to the changes?

4. How does cultural theory explain the above?

Question 1: What were administrator and teachers' roles and responsibilities prior to COVID-19?

Administrator Roles and Responsibilities

Harris (2015) defined roles as expected behavior patterns attributed to a person of position in a social unit. Prior to the pandemic, the administrator's role was to be the leader of the building. More specifically, Mr. Smith felt his role was to be the instructional leader of the building (Smith, interview, April 1, 2021).

A few examples of the administrator's responsibilities were building the master schedule, managing school procedures, supporting teachers and students, and developing instruction (Jones, interview, March 24, 2021). Mr. Smith shared some of his responsibilities that included review policy and procedures in the building and work collaboratively with his leadership team (Smith, interview, April 1, 2021), while Ms. Lynn focused on attendance as her primary responsibility (Lynn, interview, March 30, 2021).

Teachers Roles and Responsibilities

Prior to COVID-19, the teacher's role included expected behaviors such as developing curriculum, deliver instruction, provide feedback to students and parents, and establish relationships (Frazier, 2014; Hattie, 2003, 2009; Marzano, 2003b, 2007; Marzano et al., 2001; Nye et al., 2004; Tanner, 1997; Urban & Wagner, 2014). Teachers in the Rolling Hills School District had autonomy in how instruction was presented in

each classroom. A few examples included cooperative learning, movement, pair-share strategies, and hands-on activities.

Responsibilities was defined as types of activities or tasks that teachers are typically expected to perform as a function of their job (Shedd & Bacharach, 1991). Teachers were observed doing hall and cafeteria duty, engaging in curriculum development, communicating with parents, taking attendance, and entering grades into the student management system.

Question 2: How did teachers and administrators' roles and responsibilities change during three of the phases of the pandemic?

The administrators' and teachers' roles did not change during the pandemic, but how they performed their roles did as they incorporated the mitigation strategies from the *Return to Learn Plan* (2020) into their work. Teachers learned to teach from home on a Chromebook using Google Classroom. They also provided packets of instructional material for students who did not have internet access. Principals and teachers learned how to use an LMS called Schoology, while at the same time supporting students at home. They also enforced face coverings, managed the cleaning of supplies, and modified curriculum to meet the social distancing requirement.

Infection Phase

According to Forrester (2020) the infection phase started January 2020 and ended mid-March 2020. During this time, the Rolling Hills School District was providing in-person instruction and holding large group gatherings.

Administrator Roles and Responsibilities. Principals performed their roles as instructional leaders. They worked at their school sites, held meetings in person, and

carried out their responsibilities. Some of their responsibilities included building the master schedule, managing school procedures, and supporting teachers and students. In Franklin Elementary, during the infectious phase of COVID-19, one of the specific responsibilities of Ms. Lynn was monitoring attendance. She focused on students who were not at school and worked with families to ensure their child was in attendance daily (Lynn, interview, March 30, 2021). Mr. Smith at Rolling Hills Middle School said that it was his job to support teachers learning the new LMS (Smith, interview, April 1, 2021). At Rolling Hills High School, Mr. Jones and Sarah "tag teamed" their responsibilities as they learned their new positions in the school (Jones, interview, March 24, 2021). Mr. Jones shared one of the last things he did during this phase was to hold an assembly celebrating their teachers and students for being named a Lighthouse School for their implementation of the *Leader in Me* program (Jones, interview, March 24, 2021).

   Teacher Roles and Responsibilities. During this phase, teachers taught in person, in their classrooms. They taught district adopted curriculum and used Chromebooks and Google Classroom to enhance their instruction. Teachers organized students into cooperative groups and allowed students to share materials in the classrooms. The elementary school had a school-wide reading intervention program, where students changed classes, worked in groups, and shared materials. Teachers supervised students during passing periods, lunch, and at recess.

Social Distancing Phase

   While teachers and administrators were on spring break, the social distancing phase started resulting in schools shutting down. Administrators and teachers had to learn to perform their roles and manage responsibilities differently.

Administrator Roles and Responsibilities. Administrators were tasked with developing a way to deliver instruction to students at home. However, they first had to learn how to work from home. Administrators had to learn to use technology to conduct meetings using Zoom. Mr. Jones at Rolling Hills High School shared how he did not know how to use Zoom before the pandemic. He said, "he hardly used technology at all" (Jones, interview, March 24, 2021). He stated that he knew what Google Docs and Google Sheets were but never had to use them (Jones, interview, March 24, 2021).

The high school administration also had to develop a new plan for graduation. John, a teacher, shared in his interview that the district bought yard signs for all of the seniors and the teachers took part in displaying them in each student's yard (John, interview, March 25, 2021). Seniors participated in a parade down main street where they rode in cars with friends and family members waiving at them (John, interview, March 25, 2021).

Teachers Roles and Responsibilities. Teachers were also working from home and had to learn how to use Zoom for meetings and communicating with students. For students who had adequate internet access, teachers posted assignments on Google Classroom and provided instruction via Zoom. For the students who did not have adequate internet access, teachers created packets of instruction that were delivered to students at their homes (Reynolds, interview, March 31, 2021). Teachers also reached out to their students to ensure they were doing okay, and their needs were being met. This was a directive from Dr. Reynolds, "I wanted every kid accounted for. I wanted to know what's going on with them (Reynolds, interview, March 31, 2021).

Management Phase

The management phase started mid-May 2020 and would run into 2021. During the summer of 2020, Rolling Hills School District's administrative team developed a *Return to Learn Plan* (2020) that included mitigation strategies for returning to school in person.

Administrator Roles and Responsibilities. In the fall of 2020, administrators were required to modify procedures in their buildings to include the mitigation strategies in the *Return to Learn Plan* (2020*).* This required a new mindset on how to lead. Mr. Smith, at Rolling Hills Middle School, felt like his role was to be more proactive in trying to predict and access situations that may have never been thought about before (Smith, interview, April 1, 2021). He felt like he was to support the teachers in learning how to teach online while navigating the new LMS. He attended trainings on Schoology*,* so he was equipped with a skill set to answer his teachers' questions (Smith, interview, April 1, 2021). Sarah, the assistant principal at Rolling Hills High School, felt like her role became highly instructional as she worked to learn the new LMS and teach teachers how to post assignments and provide instruction virtually (Sarah, interview, March 24, 2021). At Franklin Elementary, Ms. Lynn role became more focused on social-emotional support for her teachers (Lynn, interview, March 30, 2021). Ms. Lynn explained that teachers were not able to teach how they were used to and how they knew was best practice for kids (Lynn, interview, March 30, 2021). She said one of her new responsibilities was to try to keep them inspired and motivated and get them to realize that this [COVID protocols] was temporary (Lynn, interview, March 30, 2021).

Previous responsibilities, such as hallway, cafeteria, and locker procedures had to be modified to reflect the new social distancing requirement. Leadership teams were

utilized at some sites to assist with this work. Adjusting the master schedule to allow for cleaning between classes was another responsibility principals had to address. Ms. Lynn explained that she had to allow for more time to change classes due to desk and materials having to be clean, and she had to minimize the number of students who were in the hallways at the same time (Lynn, interview, March 30, 2021). These mitigation strategies took time away that was usually used for instruction.

Instruction was redesigned to fit Schoology. This required the administrators to provide training and time for teachers to make the necessary modifications to their curriculum. Additional resources, such as instructional coaches and technology leaders, were provided to support teachers in this work.

Teacher Roles and Responsibilities. How teachers performed their roles as an educator changed during the management phase of COVID-19. Teachers had to learn how to use a new LMS called Schoology, teach in person while providing support to quarantined students, and implement the safety protocols outlined in the *Return to Learn Plan* (2020).

Schoology. A new LMS, Schoology, was implemented this year in response to the need to provide quality distance learning instruction if a classroom, school, or the district had to close due to high COVID-19 numbers. This required teachers to prepare for and teach their regular classes during the school day, and then post assignments and answer questions via email for students who were quarantined. Teachers were given a brief overview, or in Mandy's words, a "crash course" (Mandy, interview, March 31, 2021) on how to use the program prior to the start of school. Both Mandy and Barbara, who taught at Rolling Hills Middle School, explained that learning the technology was

stressful because it was not how they had taught during their tenure as a teacher (Barbara and Mandy, interview, March 31, 2021). Jay, who also taught at the middle school, was comfortable with technology, however, he found using Schoology to be stressful. He said, "Schoology was the biggest barrier on the teaching side of things" (Jay, interview, March 31, 2021). Teachers were having to enter grades twice, once into Schoology and then into the student management system. Pam explained that last year it was all about the kids in the classroom, but now we are responsible for a digital platform (Pam, interview, March 30, 2021).

Quarantined Students. Teachers designed instruction each week to be either in person or to transition to distance learning, if necessary. They also prepared to support students at home who were quarantined. Barbara shared that she would host pretend distance learning days in her classroom so she could teach students how to log in to Schoology, find the assignments, and upload them once completed (Barbara, interview, March 31, 2021). She said she would explain to the students that she was not just teaching them for the present but trying to teach them for the future (Barbara, interview, March 31, 2021).

One of the most stressful challenges was teaching the students who had to quarantine while teaching the students in the classroom. Barbara explained it was stressful trying to teach the students who were in front of her, while responding to questions that were being sent through email for students who were quarantined (Barbara, interview, March 31, 2021). "Trying to do both was overwhelming" she said (Barbara, interview, March 31, 2021). Becky said keeping up with who was gone and ensuring they were caught up with the rest of the class was a big challenge (Becky, interview, April 1,

2021). Students moving in and out of quarantine created a challenge for teachers. Derek explained that a large majority of students who participated in distance learning during quarantine struggled. He said math concepts build on each other and if students missed something or didn't learn a concept correctly, they were behind when they returned (Derek, interview, March 30, 2021). This resulted in Derek, who taught at Franklin Elementary School, reviewing and reteaching more than he had in the past. The high school teachers shared the same frustrations about students being behind when they returned from being quarantined. Sarah, the assistant principal, said, "We are going to have a huge credit recovery that we are going to have to figure out" (Sarah, interview, March 24, 2021).

Safety Protocols. Mitigation strategies were implemented so students could attend school safely. Some of the protocols included wearing a face covering, cleaning desks, supply management, and social distancing. These protocols affected how teachers delivered instruction in their classrooms.

Students and teachers were required to wear a face covering while in the building. This requirement created challenges for teachers in delivering instruction and managing their classrooms. At Franklin Elementary School, Derek reported that he had to tell his fifth grade students many times to pull up their face coverings (Derek, interview, March 30, 2021). Pam, who taught first grade, said her students constantly forgot theirs or pulled it over their eyes. She also said her students liked to trade face coverings. She constantly had to tell them they can't do that (Pam, interview, March 30, 2021). Jay, who taught at the middle school, experienced different challenges concerning wearing a face covering. He shared that face coverings muffled his voice and his students' voices making it hard to

hear. He also stated his voice did not carry as well which made instruction a struggle (Jay, interview, March 31, 2021). Cindy at Franklin Elementary had a different concern. She shared that she could not see the students' mouths to tell if they were forming their letters correctly (Cindy, interview, April 30, 2021).

The cleaning of materials created a new set of challenges for teachers. Any materials that were used in class had to be cleaned following the specific guidelines outlined in the *Return to Learn* (2020) plan. Students could not share materials. This resulted in students having their own tubs of crayons, markers, and glue sticks. Regardless of the grade level or school, students could not share materials.

The cleaning protocols also included wiping down the desks between classes. Pam said the cleaning protocol had made a lot more work for teachers (Pam, interview, March 30, 2021). I watched Derek have his students line up to go to the library and before they left, he sprayed and wiped down each desk. He explained that he wanted to be the one to clean the desks because he did not want a student to get sick from cleaning another student's desk (Derek, interview, March 30, 2021). Cindy had shower curtains strategically placed around her room so she could clean sections of her room at a time and still have students working. She said she did not have time to clean between each class, but the shower curtain set up allowed her to always have a section of her room clean for incoming students (Cindy, interview, April 30, 2021).

Social distancing affected group work and student collaboration in the classroom. At Franklin Elementary School, students could not work in groups so there was not much project-based learning occurring, which Ms. Lynn referenced was the most effective way to learn (Lynn, interview, March 30, 2021). She made the comment that they used to be

very hands on with instruction and now they were hand off (Lynn, interview, March 30, 2021). Jay described how it was difficult to keep students engaged for seventy-minute class periods and not have them get out of their seats. He said everything they were taught about engagement, movement, and cooperative learning was a struggle early in the year (Jay, interview, March 31, 2021). Nikole, who taught at Rolling Hills Middle School, explained she had hoped to incorporate science lessons in her classroom that she had previously taught while student teaching. Unfortunately, these lessons were abandoned because they required students to share materials and work in table groups (Nikole, interview, March 30, 2021). Social distancing also impacted learning at the high school. The teachers shared how they had to think outside the box for students to do group work. Marc shared how he had students work in pairs standing six feet apart (Marc, interview, April 9, 2021), while Diane had her students working in groups electronically. She said, "You can still do group things, you just have to be smart about it" (Diane, interview, April 9, 2021).

Question 3: What have leaders done and what are teachers doing to adapt to the changes?

District Leadership

The district leadership developed the *Return to Learn Plan* (2020) with mitigation strategies outlined to keep students and teachers safe at school. The plan also added support to each site in the form of additional school nurses, nurse assistants, instructional coaches, professional development, and time (*Return to Learn Plan*, 2020). Additional teacher days were added to the school calendar to allow teachers to receive training on

how to use Schoology and to upload instructional materials and assignments (Reynold, interview, March 31, 2021).

Communication was essential to maintaining trust in the district. Dr. Reynolds held Zoom meetings with teachers, posted videos on the district website, and communicated via email with parents and teachers (Reynolds, interview, March 31, 2021). Dr. Reynolds said, "As the instructional leader and educational leader of the district, you're the face of that and they need to hear from you" (Reynolds, interview, March 31, 2021).

Site Leadership

Site administrators worked to implement the plan in their schools. They decided where the temperature checking machines would be located, revised master schedules to reduce class sizes, redesigned hallway, drop off and pick up procedures to meet social distancing requirements, and established cleaning protocols for their buildings. They also provided extra social-emotional support to teachers by checking on them often to ensure they were adapting to the changes.

Teachers

Teachers adapted to the changes by collaborating with their instructional coaches and tech leaders as they learned Schoology. They modified existing curriculum by creating instructional videos, using online resources, and uploading documents so students could be successful at home. Teachers showed grace to students when it came to turning in assignments. High School teachers reported taking assignments several weeks late. They were instructed to give grace to students who had missed school due to quarantining (John, interview, March 25, 2021). At the middle school, Jay did not worry

about students make-up assignments. He retaught the curriculum when the students returned to school (Jay, interview, March 25, 2021).

Teachers also modified curriculum in the classroom to meet the mitigation protocols. There was less hands-on learning. When possible, teachers would divide supplies for each student to have their own for individual activities. Group work was done with a partner, and they were social distanced. At the high school, Diane adapted her group work by having students use online messaging (Diane, interview, April 9, 2021). Curriculum was also taught at a slower pace. Elizabeth explained that she was not able to cover as much content as she previously did. She was having to move a lot slower through the content (Elizabeth, interview, March 25, 2021).

Teachers also figured out how to manage the cleaning of desks in their rooms between classes. At Franklin Elementary School, Derek cleaned all of the desks while students waited in the hallway when I was there (Derek, interview, March 30, 2021). However, most teachers I observed had students cleaning desks at the end of class. Cindy used shower curtains to divide her room into quadrants so she could have several small groups at a time enter her class before she had to clean the desks (Cindy, interview, April 30, 2021). Each teacher had a routine for managing materials that was unique to their classrooms. Pam had a tub and cubby for each student to have their own supplies (Pam, interview, March 30, 2021) while Cindy provided students supplies and took them up each week to clean and quarantine them (Cindy, interview, April 30, 2021).

Teachers gave up some of their autonomy in how they structured and delivered instruction in order to follow the guidelines in the *Return to Learn Plan (2020).* While

this was not ideal for some teachers, they did appreciate understanding why changes in procedures had to be made.

Question 4: How does cultural theory explain the above?

In viewing all three school contexts through the lens of Douglas's (1982, 1986) Cultural Theory, this study showed Rolling Hills High School, Middle School, and Franklin Elementary School displayed characteristics aligned with a strong-grid and strong-group identification. The strong-grid was displayed in everyone knowing the rules in the *Return to Learn Plan* (2020) and what to expect. The rules (plan) did not change. Mr. Reynolds stated, "We made our plan when we were not emotional. We worked the plan" (Reynolds, interview, March 31, 2021). The administration did not make adjustments along the way. They did what they said they would do in the *Return to Learn Plan* (2020). This strong commitment to the plan was seen at all three sites. Administrators and teachers knew what to expect and worked implement the plan. This was communicated through emails to staff and parents, signage at each site about face masks, temperature checks, and social distancing, and evident as students and staff implemented the mitigation strategies.

Strong-group was evident in each building through the traditions and commitment to their students. The district implemented *The Leader in Me* ten years ago. Each school site had been awarded Lighthouse Status Certification, which is the highest award given to schools implementing the *Leader in Me* program. Rolling Hills School District is the only district in the world to achieve this recognition. The implementation of *The Leader in Me* was seen during faculty meetings, in PLC meetings, through posters and student work that hung in the hallways, through interactions with students, teachers, and

administrators, and in how they managed the mitigation strategies at their sites. Teachers were proud of what they had accomplished and proud of their district. Nikole commented, "We have done a really good job of making sure that everyone is staying safe and following the guidelines" (Nikole, interview, March 30, 2021). "We are doing great things and I am really proud to be here" (Elizabeth, interview, March 25, 2021).

Douglas (1982) emphasizes that grid and group is not deterministic (Harris, 2015). While grid was strong, there was still autonomy to make decisions at contextual levels. A few examples of those contexts are teacher grit, adaptation, motivation, and flexibility. Duckworth (2016) defines grit as the combination of passion and perseverance. The passion teachers displayed for their students was expressed through their diligence in implementing the mitigation strategies. Their diligence allowed students to be in school and in person providing opportunities for teachers to address their students' academic, social emotional, and physical needs. Teachers and administrators demonstrated perseverance as they were forced to manage their roles and responsibilities in a new way. Teachers were flexible in delivering instruction and recognized they could not move as fast through the curriculum as they had in previous years. They also recognized that each student's experience with COVID-19 would be different, therefore modifications were made to assignments and grading practices so students could catch up. Duckworth (2016) said, "We change when we *need* to. Necessity is the mother of adaption." Teachers and administrators adapted their practices, learned new instructional methods, and implemented new procedures out of necessity in order to teach students in person. While in-person instruction was the motivation at the beginning of the year, teachers maintained the same level of motivation throughout the year even though it

meant teaching students in the classroom and online at the same time. Teachers were proud of what they accomplished and were committed to finishing the year strong.

Conclusions

Rolling Hills School District had a strong strategic plan outlined in the *Panther Tenants* that established a strong foundation for their district. Teachers, students, and community members understood the mission, vision, and values of the district. They understood "why" they were doing the work, and "how" it would be done. The strong-grid and strong-group culture that existed prior to COVID-19 was essential to the success experienced in implementing the *Return to Learn Plan.* The values that were established prior to COVID-19 were the same values that guided decisions during the pandemic. Dr. Reynold said, "We go back to the core of what we do; we take care of our people, and we take care of our kids (Reynolds, interview, March 31, 2021).

Teachers and administrators adjusted to conducting their roles differently and embraced new responsibilities during the pandemic. The implementation of the mitigation strategies directly affected their instruction in the classroom and online. Teachers learned to deliver instruction using technology, creatively design group work, teach students at home and in person while managing masks, materials, and social distancing. The mitigation strategies had a direct effect on existing procedures and protocols that were in place for each site. Master schedules were redesigned, procedures for hallways, cafeteria, and drop off and pick up were revised. However, each principal and teacher had autonomy in how the mitigation strategies were carried out in their school or classroom. Due to the strong-grid and strong-group culture that was already established in the district, the mitigation strategies yielded positive results.

Grid and group explained how explicit rules, leadership control, centralized power, and strong group goals had a positive effect on how Rolling Hills High School, Middle School, and Franklin Elementary School successfully implemented the mitigation strategies in the *Return to Learn Plan* (2020). It showed how a strong strategic plan provided clear directions on how decisions were made during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also explained the importance school culture during a crisis. However, there were contexts that grid and group did not explain. The motivation to finish the year strong, the teachers' ability to adapt to new instructional practices, the willingness to be flexible, and the amount of grit that was demonstrated were not explained. These contexts were equally as important as the characteristics of a cooperate school cultures and were vital to the success of each school during COVID-19.

Implications

Implications for Theory

This study contributed to cultural theory (Douglas, 1982, 1986) by focusing on the characteristics of the cultural norms within three school contexts. Specifically, focusing on the roles and responsibilities of principals and teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic and how their roles inhibited or promoted the success of the educational practices implemented in the *Return to Learn Plan* (2020). In using Douglas's (1982, 1986) grid and group typology as a theoretical lens, characteristics of school culture were identified and placed in the appropriate quadrants. The results indicated how successful each school site was in implementing mitigation strategies, which allowed them to hold in-person learning for students during a global pandemic. The findings in this study are significant because they show the importance of school culture and the value of strong-

grid and strong-group characteristics during a pandemic. These findings also support the importance of a strong-grid and strong-group culture during other crisis such as natural disasters, school violence, or medical emergencies. Additional theories such as Self-Determination Theory and Symbolic Cultural Theory could be applied to this study. According to Ryan and Deci (2017), Self-Determination Theory describes a framework that is used to understand the factors that determine motivation. This might provide another explanation for the teachers' motivation in following the plan, and their response to implementing the mitigation strategies. The vision and values, rituals and ceremonies, history and stories, the cultural network, heroes and heroines, and architecture and artifacts defined in the Symbolic Cultural Theory (Richardson, 2014) could also be applied to this study as an extension of how specific components of school culture was affected due to the pandemic. Both theories provide additional lenses in which the research could be explained.

Implications for Research

A large body of research exists about school reform, teachers' roles in the classroom, and school culture. However, minimal research exists on teachers' roles and responsibilities during a global pandemic. This study provides insight into how a district created a *Return to Learn Plan* (2020) and implemented procedures across three school sites. It also outlies the challenges teachers faced in delivering curriculum in person and online, how technology impacted student learning at home, and how teachers implemented the mitigation strategies to keep students safe at school.

Using Douglas's (1982, 1986) Cultural Theory as the theoretical framework for this study expanded the research base to include the roles and responsibilities of teachers

and administrators during a global pandemic. The results for all three sites demonstrated that a strong-grid and strong-group organization yielded a successful plan during a pandemic. The same research could be applied to schools that are on improvement lists, have experienced a school crisis or catastrophic event, or are experiencing new leadership at the superintendent level.

Implications for Practice

The COVID-19 pandemic forced all educators to rethink instructional practices. Prior to the pandemic, Dr. Reynolds had led his district in developing a strong strategic plan that they called Panther Tenants. All decisions were made around the elements in the plan. Teachers, students, and parents supported the *Panther Tenants*. When the pandemic happened and a new plan for attending school in person had to be designed, he went back to what the strategic plan outlined "We go back to the core of what we do; we take care of our people, and we take care of our kids" (Reynolds, interview, March 31, 2021). For this district, a strong strategic plan was the foundation of who they were and what they believed. It was at the forefront of all decisions including decisions that had to be made during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The established strong grid, strong-group culture of the district provided stability for each site as they implemented mitigation strategies to return to school in person. Everyone understood the "why" behind the work, was moving in the same direction with the same purpose and had established a strong trust at all administrative levels. With the uncertainty of how public education will change due to the COVID-19 pandemic, an understanding of cultural theory can inform district administration, principals, and teachers how the roles and responsibilities of the teachers have changed, and how much it

has significantly impacted educational practices and instruction. Understanding the importance of a strong grid and group organization will inform administrators on decisions concerning teacher autonomy and how it was affected during the pandemic along with the "why" behind decisions that are made. While teachers in this study were willing to relinquish some of their autonomy in order to implement the *Return to Learn Plan (2020)*, it is not something that would be valued long term without a reason.

As districts reflect on each stage of the pandemic and how their administrators and teachers responded, the following questions should be considered:

1. Does the district have a strong strategic plan that all stakeholders understand?

2. Do the teachers understand the "why" behind the strategic plan?

3. Are decisions made in alignment with the strategic plan at the district and site levels?

4. Do school board members trust the superintendent to lead the district in the implementation of the strategic plan?

5. Do the emergency response plans align with the strategic plan and what the district values?

Recommendations For Future Research

School Contexts

The district selected for this study had a strong district leader who implemented a strategic plan that had buy-in from teachers, staff, administrators, students, and the community prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The *Return to Learn Plan* (2020) that the district implemented was designed with the same values as their strategic plan. This plan allowed students to remain in school and in person during the 2020-2021 school year.

Further research considerations would be to study schools that were either smaller or larger than this district, were in distance learning through most of the 2020-2021 school year, or districts with weak leadership at the superintendent level. The size of the district, whether the district was in person or distance learning most of the 2020-2021 school year, and the leadership capacity of the superintendent are all contributing factors to the success of schools during the pandemic and should be researched further. And finally, how does Douglas's (1982, 1986) Cultural Theory effect each of those scenarios.

Summary of Study

This study was organized into six chapters that explored, through the lens of cultural theory, how selected school contexts adapted roles and responsibilities in educational processes during three of the COVID-19 pandemic phases: (a) infection, (b) social distancing, and (c) management. Chapter I provided an introduction to the study with major components including the purpose of the study, the statement of the problem and the identification of three research questions. Chapter II presented literature that involved (a) the four phases of a pandemic and mitigation strategies for schools for each phase (b) the roles and responsibilities of teachers during each phase of a pandemic, and (c) Mary Douglas's (1982, 1986) cultural theory. Chapter III described the research methods that were used throughout the study. In addition, the researcher's bias is introduced and a plan for managing the bias is outlined throughout the trustworthiness section and data verification protocol was outlined to ensure the validity and credibility of the research being conducted. Finally, Mary Douglas's (1982) cultural theory is described throughout the chapter. Chapter IV presented all data, including interviews, observations and field notes in detail. Chapter V analyzed the data through the grid and

group typology of culture. Chapter VI explained how the mitigation strategies outlined in the *Return to Learn Plan* (2020) affected the roles and responsibilities of administrators and teachers and how Mary Douglas's Cultural Theory (1982, 1986) explained each. It was disclosed that the strong-grid and strong-group culture that was established before the COVID-19 pandemic was essential to the successful implementation of the district's *Return to Learn Plan* (2020). It explained how strong district leadership impacted the outcome of the implementation of the mitigation strategies outlined in the plan. This chapter also offered suggestions on how the findings were important to theory, research, and practice, and provided ideas for future research.

Researcher Comments

Conducting this study has been one of the most challenging yet rewarding experiences of my career in education. I am not sure why I thought writing a dissertation during a pandemic while also trying to figure out new roles and responsibilities as a district leader was a good idea, but I am glad I did it. I have always considered myself a lifelong learner and doing this research study provided me a new opportunity grow as an educator. I loved interviewing the teachers and administrators to learn about their experiences during the pandemic. I was fascinated that it was such a different experience than mine. My curiosity to determine why it was so different kept me engaged through the transcription and coding processes. The biggest take away from doing the research was how applicable grid and group was to my study. As a graduate student, theories and their importance to research were discussed in class but I did not truly understand how it worked until I actually applied theory to a study. I have also developed a new appreciation for researchers and the work that goes into writing a research paper.

As a practitioner, this study provided me the opportunity to experience a new leadership style and inner workings of a district. It showed me how important strong leadership at the district level is to teacher satisfaction and job performance, academic achievement and student experiences, and community partnerships. I look forward to applying what I have learned as I continue my work as a district level administrator.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Cultural Theory Assessment Tool

PRELIMINARY INFORMATION *Position (please check one)*

Teacher (specify position title) _____

Support Staff (specify position title) _____

Administrator (specify position title) _____

Other (please explain) _____

Total years of service at this school site or district: _____

Unit of Analysis

School district _____

School site_____

Grade level (specify level) _____

Department or unit (specify) _____

Committee or team (specify) _____

Other (please explain) _____

INSTRUCTIONS

While completing this instrument, keep in mind the unit of analysis marked above. That is, keep in mind one and only one unit of analysis for all items. For example, you may focus on a specific committee or work group, a class or grade level, an entire school site, or an entire district or school system.

Below are 24 pairs of statements. For each pair:

- Choose the statement that you think *best* represents the unit of analysis under study and

- On the continuum, mark the bubble that represents the degree to which the statement best applies to the unit of analysis under study.

The numbers on the continuum are numbered 1 through 8. Numbers 1 and 8 represent the extreme poles of the continuum. The intermediate numbers (2–7) provide a continuous scale between these extremes.

Circle only one number for each item. (Note: In the statements below, the term *administrator* refers to administration at any level, including principal, assistant principal, counselor, or anyone assigned with formal administrative responsibility and title.

Item	Grid Consideration	Score
1	Authority structures are: decentralized/nonhierarchical centralized/hierarchical 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	
2	Roles are: nonspecialized/no explicit specialized/explicit job job descriptions descriptions 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	
3	Individual teachers have: full autonomy in no autonomy in textbook selection textbook selection 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	

4	Individual teachers have: full autonomy in generating educational goals for their classrooms no autonomy in generating educational goals for their classrooms 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	
5	Individual teachers have: full autonomy in selecting instructional methods/strategies no autonomy in selecting instructional methods/ strategies 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	
6	Students are: encouraged to participate in and take ownership of their education discouraged from participating in and taking ownership of their education 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	

Figure B.3. Grid and Group Assessment Items for Instructional and Curricular Interest Grid

Item	Grid Consideration	Score
7	Teachers obtain instructional resources (i.e., technology, manipulatives, materials, and tools) through: individual competition/ negotiation administrative allotment allocation 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	

8	Instruction is: Individualized/personalized for each student Not individualized/personalized for each student 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	
9	Individual teachers are motivated by: intrinsic/self-defined interests extrinsic/institutional rewards 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	
10	Hiring decisions are: decentralized/controlled by teachers centralized/controlled by administrator(s) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	
11	Class schedules are determined through: individual/teacher negotiation institutional rules/routines 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	
12	Rules and procedures are: few/implicit numerous/explicit 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	
	Sum of grid scores:	
	Average of grid scores (sum/12):	

Figure B.3. Grid and Group Assessment Items for Instructional and Curricular Interests, Grid (*continued*)

Item	Group Consideration	Score
1	Instructional activities are initiated/planned by: individual teachers working alone all educators working collaboratively 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	
2	Educators' socialization and work are: separate/dichotomous activities incorporated/united activities 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	
3	Extrinsic rewards primarily benefit: the individual everyone at the school site 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	
4	Teaching and learning are planned/organized around: individual teacher goals/interests group goals/interests 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	

5	Teaching performance is evaluated according to:	
	individual teacher goals priorities, and criteria group goals, priorities and criteria 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	
6	Members work:	
	in isolation towards and objectives collaboratively towards goals and objectives 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	
7	Curricular goals are generated:	
	individually collaboratively 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	

Figure B.4. Grid and Group Assessment Items for Instructional and Curricular Interest Group

Item	Group Consideration	Score
8	Communication flows primarily through:	
	individual, informal networks corporate, formal networks 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	
9	Instructional resources are controlled/owned:	
	individually collaboratively 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	

10	Educators and students have: no allegiance/loyalty much allegiance/loyalty to the school loyalty to the school 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	
11	Responsibilities of teachers and administrators are: ambiguous/fragmented clear/communal with with accountability much accountability 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	
12	Most decisions are made: privately by factions corporately by consensus or independent verdict or group approval 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	
	Sum of group scores:	
	Average of group scores (sum/12):	

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol

Interview Questions for Teachers, Principals, and Superintendents

1. Why did you become an educator?

2. How has your role changed (as a teacher, principal, or superintendent) from prior

    COVID-19 to now?

3. How have instructional strategies at this school changed from prior COVID-19 to

    now?

4. What challenges have you experienced this school year that are different from the

    past?

5. What type of support was provided for teachers in preparation this school year?

6. How are decisions made at this school regarding COVID adjustments?

7. How was the instructional plan for this school year devised?

8. How has the plan met the goals set out by the district?

9. How have those plans affected your role?

10. What barriers exist that might keep it from being successful?

11. What do you wish I would have asked about your school?

APPENDIX C

Traditional and Contemporary Digital Artifacts

Traditional	Contemporary
(hardcopy and physical artifacts)	(digital artifacts produced and stored in electric or virtual environments)
- Documents in the public sphere (e.g., pictures, articles, documentaries, educational material, books) that may have been produced by or used by members of a culture or social setting - Files - Statistical records - Meeting minutes - Accreditation records - Documents used in daily work (e.g., internal manuals, written procedures, wall posters and other public postings in a workplace, chart flow sheets) - Memos	- Email - Websites - All Social Media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.) - Electronic Newsletters - Grant Proposals - Digital Flyers - Webinars - YouTube - Articles *about* School or *by* School Site Educators - Peachjar - Banners - LinkedIn - Videos - Online Discussion Groups - Chat Rooms - Testimonials - Online Conferences - Television Broadcasts (E.g., news broadcasts or televised board meetings) - OSDE Website - Minutes from Board Meeting - Chamber of Commerce Website - Podcasts and other audio files - Images - Photographs - Canvas Courses

APPENDIX D

Panther Tenets

Daily COVID-19 Checklist

APPENDIX F

Comparison of Symptoms

Appendix A – Comparison of Symptoms
Provides a comparison of symptoms to help inform and recognize signs of COVID-19

Symptoms	COVID – 19*	Cold	Flu	Allergies
Fever	Common (measured at 100°F or higher)	Rare	High (100-102°F) can last 3-4 days	No
Headache	Sometimes	Rare	Intense	Sometimes
General Aches and Pains	Sometimes	Slight	Common, often severe	No
Fatigue, weakness	Sometimes	Slight	Common, often severe	Sometimes
Extreme Exhaustion	Sometimes (progresses slowly)	Never	Common (starts early)	No
Stuffy Nose	Rare	Common	Sometimes	Common
Sneezing	Rare	Common	Sometimes	Common
Sore Throat	Rare	Common	Common	No
Cough	Common	Mild to Moderate	Common, can become severe	Sometimes
Shortness of breath	In more serious infections	Rare	Rare	Common
Runny Nose	Rare	Common	Sometimes	Common
Diarrhea	Sometimes	No	Sometimes**	No

*Information is still evolving
**Sometimes for children

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APPENDIX G

Mask Requirement Sign

APPENDIX H

Temperature Check Machine

APPENDIX I

Temperature Check Directions

APPENDIX J

Social Distancing Floor Signs

APPENDIX K

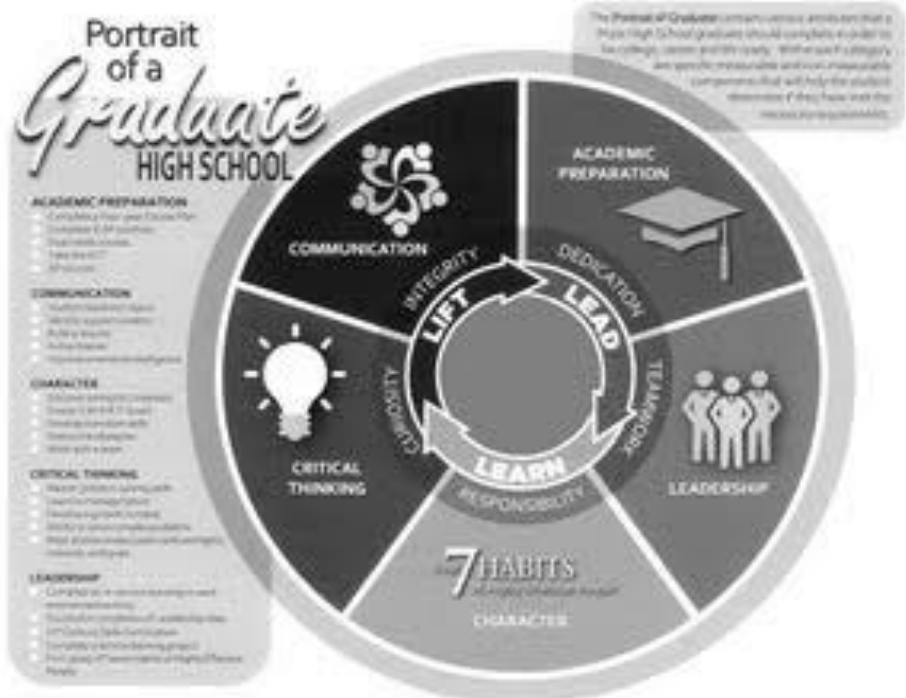Senior Recognitions

APPENDIX L

School Motto

APPENDIX M

Social Distancing Signs

APPENDIX N

Portrait of a Graduate

APPENDIX O

Leadership quote at the middle school

APPENDIX P

Steven Covey banner at the middle school

APPENDIX Q

Words that describe the middle school mission

APPENDIX R

Student recognition board at Franklin Elementary School

APPENDIX S

Display of student work at Franklin Elementary

APPENDIX T

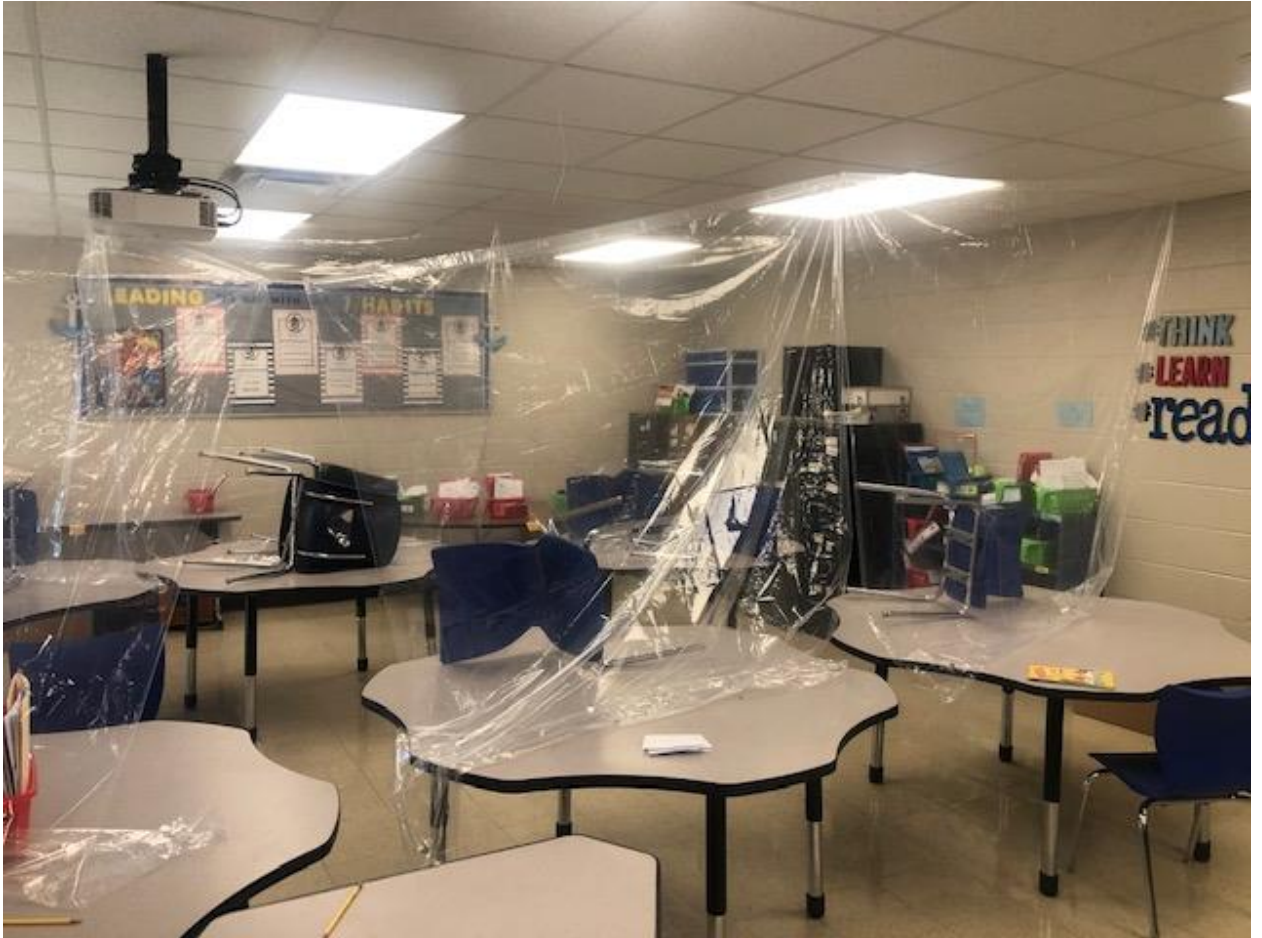Art Gallery at Franklin Elementary School

APPENDIX U

Steven Covey's *7 Habits*

APPENDIX V

Example of mitigation strategies

VITA

Catharine Elizabeth Walker

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Dissertation: A NATURALISTIC STUDY OF HOW SELECTED SCHOOL
CONTEXTS ADAPTED ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITES DURING
THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC PHASES: A CULTURAL THEORY
PERSPECTIVE

Major Field: SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

Biographical:

Education:
Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education in School
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Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Curriculum and
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Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Elementary
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Experience:
Stillwater Public Schools – 1993-present
- Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services
- Principal
- Assistant Principal
- Teacher
Mustang Public Schools – 1992-1993
- Teacher

Professional Memberships:
   Oklahoma Association of School Administrators
   National Association of School Administrators
   Cooperative Council for Oklahoma School Administrators