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NAVIGATING SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING IN THE POST-COVID ERA: A PRINCIPAL'S PERSPECTIVE IN SUSTAINING ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH WHILE BRIDGING THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT GAP

A Dissertation

by

ALMA ALICIA PÉREZ-CAMPOS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

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NAVIGATING SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING IN THE POST-COVID ERA: A PRINCIPAL'S PERSPECTIVE IN SUSTAINING ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH WHILE BRIDGING THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT GAP

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May 2024

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ABSTRACT

Pérez-Campos, Alma A., Navigating School Restructuring In The Post-Covid Era: A Principal's Perspective In Sustaining Organizational Health While Bridging The Academic Achievement Gap. Doctor of Education (Ed.D.), May 2024, 121 pp., 7 tables, 3 figures, 53 references.

In 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic led to nationwide school closures, followed by a mandate for schools to reopen in 2020, posing challenges for ensuring both educational continuity and student safety. This paper presents findings from a mixed-method study involving ten campus principals in District A, South Texas, post-pandemic. Qualitatively, the study explored the principals' perspectives on restructuring their campuses to address achievement gaps while maintaining organizational health. Quantitatively, it examined the relationship between achievement and organizational health scores and any differences in organizational health pre- and post-COVID-19. The study aimed to offer insights for future research and guidance for school administrators facing similar crises.

Keywords: academic achievement, COVID-19, educational gaps, restructuring, organizational health, principal perspectives, school safety

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, whose consistent support and encouragement have guided me throughout this journey. I am grateful to God for blessing me with the knowledge, dedication, and motivation to navigate academic challenges as I went through this process successfully.

A special acknowledgment goes to my husband, Santos, whose unwavering encouragement has strengthened me during challenging times. I extend my prayers to my cherished children, Abigail and Pedro, hoping you will always embrace your talents and strive to exceed your expectations.

I want to express heartfelt appreciation to my parents, Jose and Beatriz Perez, for their enduring love, steadfast support, faith, and prayers. I recognize that reaching this milestone would not have been possible without each one of you standing by my side throughout my whole life. Te amo Papi hasta el cielo.

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- Dr. Ralph Carlson
- Dr. Alejandro Garcia
- Dr. Federico Guerra

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

In the Spring of 2020, teachers, students, and school administrators were compelled to change how teaching and learning occurred in our school systems due to the COVID-19 pandemic at a global level. The pandemic presented challenging issues within the school systems as educators had to restructure teaching and learning during and after COVID-19. Restructuring was a significant component of schools as the organization will strive to function effectively and efficiently. According to Johnson (1997), restructuring "denotes the rebuilding of an educational system that provides quality teaching and learning for students of all races, sexes, economic backgrounds, and the varied other student characteristics" (p. 10).

The educational system encountered a significant disruption in teaching and learning during the pandemic's global shutdown, resulting in a transition from traditional in-person delivery of instruction to online learning. The COVID-19 pandemic was akin to a natural disaster at the state level a few years ago, where school systems were significantly impacted. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast of Louisiana and Texas, causing devastation in the geographical and educational systems. Outside experts got involved in school reforms during this crisis, specifically focusing on school restructuring. In an article, Berry (2020) emphasizes the importance of "focusing on the educational transformation from the inside, not disruption from the outside" (p.17). Comparable to Katrina, the COVID-19 pandemic presented novel challenges

to educational leaders worldwide as governments worked towards mitigating the spread of the virus through school closures and lockdowns (Chitin & Karoui, 2021).

A concurrent mixed-method research design was employed as part of this study. The qualitative phase aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges school leaders faced during the restructuring of schools post-COVID-19. Interviews were conducted to gather firsthand insights into the principals' experiences and the specific challenges encountered in the restructuring process. The objective was to uncover these leaders' main challenges and effective strategies.

Furthermore, the quantitative component involved analyzing organizational health data before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. This analysis aimed to explore whether there was a discernible relationship between attempts to close achievement gaps and the overall organizational health of a school campus.

Statement of the Problem

The United States education system was not built to deal with extended shutdowns like those imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers, administrators, and parents exhausted their efforts while working collaboratively to keep learning alive. However, Doren et al. (2020) suggested that these efforts will likely fail to provide quality education delivered in the classroom. In his article, Teaching, Learning, and Caring in the post-COVID era, Berry (2020) examines the importance of continuously meeting students' needs through the pandemic. Berry further states, “Since the pandemic's beginning, we have been racing to figure out how to continue best our designed work with local educators, community leaders, and our university

faculty and students" (p.15). District and campus personnel were forced to set up structures to have a continuum of instruction while maintaining staff and student safety. Across the United States, state educational agencies and school districts faced daunting challenges and difficult decisions in their efforts to restart schools as the COVID-19 pandemic persists (Schachner et al., 2020).

Closing the achievement gap while maintaining a healthy organization post-COVID created different stressors for all stakeholders in the school setting. Research shows that due to the pandemic, students, on average, will incur five to nine months of educational loss (Dorn et al., 2020). Hence, the COVID-19 crisis became a new hurdle for many educators, and innovative ways were developed to address leadership, staffing, teaching, and learning that had never been created before.

In the past three years, the Texas Education Agency has grappled with the task of identifying the appropriate statistical methodology to gauge the success of campuses and districts through the A-F accountability system. Despite this effort, there has been an ongoing recognition of the challenges that underlie educational gaps, intensifying the pressure on school leaders and educators. Unfortunately, the state appeared to overlook the complex realities students, teachers, and school leaders face. Texas Legislature members stated, "As a body, we pride ourselves in setting high standards for Texas schools. At the same time, our accountability system must also be fair with clear and transparent expectations set for educators and students so that they have a realistic opportunity to strive to meet these goals" (as cited in Kingsville ISD et al. v. Mike Morath, 2023). Research consistently has indicated that meaningful school change typically takes three to five years. Laufenberg (n.d.) states, "Depending on your district or school size, these changes can take up to 5 years to find the self-sustaining momentum that moves this from a

shift to the norm" (p.4). However, there seems to be a gap in acknowledging this temporal aspect within the state's current approach. This oversight raised concerns about aligning state policies with the established timelines for educational reforms, potentially contributing to an unrealistic expectation of immediate results within the educational system.

Need for the Study

In 2020, the United Nations Educational and Scientific and Culture Organization (UNESCO) released an article on education in the post-COVID world. In the article, the authors stressed the importance of restructuring our educational systems. UNESCO stated, "More and more people are becoming aware of the multiple roles that schools play in providing well-being of children and youth, and in ensuing health and nutrition, alongside academic learning. This increased awareness and appreciation can serve as the basis for a new revival of public education" (UNESCO, 2020, p.7)

Organizational health data and school academic performance were analyzed to highlight the effective and ineffective structures used to help close the achievement gaps due to COVID-19 school closures. Instructional time was lost during the transition from in-person instruction to virtual learning and back as school systems prepared to face the challenges of COVID-19 while restructuring the educational system. By identifying those structures, educators at the local and state levels can help be better prepared for a future crisis. According to the Center for Global Development (2023), the likelihood of another pandemic occurring is 22-28% within the next ten years and 47-57% within the next 25 years. Educators must use this opportunity to better prepare for future pandemics while prioritizing teaching, learning, and safety.

Purpose of the Study

In his article, Berry (2020) quotes an adage, “Never let a crisis go to waste,” and this is what this study intended to accomplish. This study aimed to gather principals’ perspectives on essential steps taken during the reopening of schools after the COVID-19 crisis. In addition, another goal of the study was to examine and identify the factors that contributed to the success or failure of schools in terms of academic success post-COVID. Gathering principals’ perspectives on factors contributing to such success or failure helped delineate which critical factors can be identified as future predictors of success/failure when faced with another pandemic. Further, this study intended to examine the organizational culture of schools as they attempted to restructure and close achievement gaps simultaneously.

The proposed study investigated adult-led behaviors within school organizations that contribute to effective practices, ultimately leading to an improved organizational culture and better outcomes in teaching and learning. The focus was on understanding how school personnel navigated the teaching and learning continuum, especially in the context of potential disruptions such as national emergencies.

The study employed an in-depth interview process with principals to gain insights into their responses and identify critical actions contributing to successful practices during challenging circumstances. The findings from these interviews can be valuable for shaping plans and strategies for similar events.

The study's implications will extend to regional and school district administrators who can utilize the conclusions to formulate additional action plans for potential future national emergencies. Understanding the identified effective practices can help administrators create

targeted support systems for all stakeholders, including principals, teachers, parents, and students.

The data collected through this study can provide valuable insights into the challenges and perceptions of principals, allowing districts to tailor support systems that address specific needs. Ultimately, the goal was to enhance the overall resilience of the educational system, ensuring that it can adapt and thrive even in the face of disruptions.

Significance of the Study

School districts, school leaders, parents, teachers, and students must all be prepared to engage with the predictable and unpredictable challenges resulting from more than two years of schooling during a pandemic (Crutchfield & Eugne, 2022, p. 123). This study intended to gather principals' perspectives on what factors (staffing, central office support, curriculum changes, schedule changes) contributed to academic success. Identifying these factors can help district and campus administrators understand the transition's implications to restructure the school's intellectual, physical, and organizational culture post-pandemic. Most importantly, the data collected could assist the central office administrator in supporting principals in restructuring the school while focusing on closing academic achievement gaps to meet federal and state accountability systems.

Further, identifying the effective and ineffective practices implemented post-pandemic can aid in preparing for another possible global pandemic that might impact our educational school systems. These findings can help gauge successes, failures, and adjustments to current and future protocols and practices.

Research Questions

The research questions that were used to conduct the qualitative portion of the study were as follows:

1) What strategies did principals use during the first one hundred days of post-COVID-19 school opening?

2) What are principals' perspectives on central office support and practices contributing to their campus goals of closing achievement gaps after COVID-19?

The research questions that were used to conduct the quantitative portion of the study were as follows:

3) Is there a relationship between academic performance, as measured by STAAR 2022 scores, and organizational health, as measured by the Organizational Health Inventory scores of elementary and middle schools in one southern school district.?

4) Is there a difference between pre-COVID and post-COVID-19 Organizational Health scores for elementary and middle schools? Based on the data, which organizational domains were affected mainly during the restructuring of schools post-COVID-19?

The Nature of the Study

A concurrent embedded mixed-method research design was utilized to answer the research questions in this study. Both qualitative and quantitative data were obtained and analyzed.

Mills and Gay (2016) state, "Qualitative research seeks to probe deeply into the research setting to obtain in-depth understandings about the way things are, why they are that way, and how the participants in the context perceive them" (p. 32). This study used a phenomenology study design for the qualitative portion. It consisted of a focus group of ten principals who led a

school during the pandemic and two years post-pandemic. An interview helped gather principals' perspectives on academic and operational structures used during the restructuring of the school. Data were analyzed using a thematic approach to determine the most prevalent concepts principals must consider while restructuring schools.

The quantitative portion of this mixed-method study employed a correlational data design. Quantitative data included the school's STAAR 2022 accountability and organizational health data. District A's twenty-four elementary and seven middle school campuses were selected for the quantitative sample. Organizational Health Inventory (OHI) reports for campuses were requested through the district's open record process. Since the OHI reports measured principals' perceptions of the organization, this helped gather data needed to identify which domains were most affected through the redesign phase. Data were then analyzed to determine if there was an impact between academic success and organizational health during the restructuring of schools.

Definitions of Terms

The terms listed below were defined for this study. Clarification of the definition of these terms is essential to the study.

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)-is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus (World Health Organization, n.d.).

Pandemic-A pandemic refers to a disease event in which more cases of a disease than expected spread over several countries or continents, usually involving person-to-person transmission and affecting many people (World Health Organization, n.d.).

Restructuring-As defined by Phil Schlechty, restructuring is "changing the system of rules, roles,

and relationships that govern the way time, people, space, knowledge, and technology are used" (Brandt, 1993, p.10).

Organizational Health-Organizational Health is an organization's ability to function effectively, cope adequately, change appropriately, and grow from within (Fairman et al., 2011).

Limitations

The limitations of this study included the sample size of the principals. The principal participants did not represent the whole principal population in the nation. Another limitation was that this research would focus on one district, which does not represent all districts, communities, or schools. Although it may be appealing to assume that student achievement data are trustworthy, other factors such as student attendance, teacher effectiveness, and diverse student population have impacted student performance. Another limitation was that research on COVID and its impact on the educational system is limited since this is a recent crisis. However, research on the restructuring of schools during the pandemic crisis was beginning to surface as this study was being conducted.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study represented the integration between leadership, staffing, resources, and culture as factors that will ensure student performance. The Sustained Systemic Success Model (Fairman & Mclean, 2003) was used as the theoretical framework to understand and align the participants' responses on sustaining organizational health through restructuring schools. The Systematic Success Model further explained and helped support the literature review in Chapter 2. Based on participants' responses and data, OHI dimensions were aligned to the Effective School Framework. The OHI model and The Effective School Framework follow a three-step process of diagnosing, developing a plan, and carrying out that

plan to improve campus-level structures to ensure a healthy organizational climate and improve student performance.

The Effective School Framework is a conceptual framework created by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The TEA Model is a research-based model based on the work of Paul Bambrick Santoyo, Doug Lemov, and Richard Dufour, which focuses on the effective practices of principals as instructional leaders.

The model highlights the commitments, as levers, that school districts and schools must engage in, along with a set of actions school staff must carry out to ensure the success of schools. The commitments include (1) strong school leadership and planning, (2) strategic staffing, (3) positive school culture, (4) high-quality materials and assessments, and (5) effective instruction (Texas Education Agency, 2021).

The first lever, strong school leadership, and planning, entails influential campus instructional leaders' roles and responsibilities in developing, implementing, and monitoring improvement plans to address causes of low performance. Through the second lever, strategic staffing, campus leadership retains practical, well-supported teachers to ensure all students have access to high-quality educators. The third lever, a positive school culture, requires an aligned vision, mission, and values of behavior expectations that provide proactive and responsive student services. The fourth lever, high-quality materials and assessments, compels educators to utilize instructional material aligned with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) at various rigorous levels. Lastly, campus leaders must ensure effective instruction at the campus level by providing teachers with professional development and time to plan based on data needed to reflect, adjust, and deliver instruction to all students (TEA, 2021).

The framework illustrates how integrating all five commitment levels could warrant the effectiveness of schools as organizations are restructuring and aim to maintain high-performance data.

Figure 1: Effective School Framework

Note. A conceptual framework for studying the effective schools' model. Adopted from "Effective School Framework (ESF)," 2021, the Texas Education Agency.

The focus of this study was to investigate the restructuring engaged during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis by school leaders to ensure a continuum of teaching and learning in a healthy school culture while ensuring student academic success.

Summary

Chapter one validates the need for a mixed-method study on principals' perspectives on essential steps in restructuring schools post-COVID-19 while ensuring a continuum of teaching and learning in a positive school culture and closing achievement gaps.

The Statement of the Problem section emphasized the importance of ensuring educators outline the essential steps to ensure students continue learning when a future crisis such as

COVID-19 occurs. Furthermore, it also points out the importance of decision-making and collaboration at all levels to ensure those structures directly impact student achievement.

The Need of the Study section cited studies from research that report students will have more than two years of learning gaps. Additionally, school systems needed to isolate what steps must be taken to have a continuum of instruction and student safety simultaneously. The Purpose of the Study sections provided the Research Questions for the study. The Significance of the Study elaborated on the need to examine the correlation between school academic success or failure and its impact on the organizational health of a campus. Administrators can benefit from understanding that managing organizational change during challenges can help prepare school leaders and staff for future predicaments.

The remaining content of the Introduction included defining terms and described the conceptual framework that were utilized in this study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter provides an overview of the literature that frames this study, which focuses on the impact and challenges of restructuring of schools by administrators due to the COVID-19 pandemic. An examination of the literature on restructuring schools throughout COVID-19, staffing patterns for teaching and learning, social-emotional wellness of principals, teachers, and students, organizational health of the campus, leadership styles, and the effect of learning loss on students' academic achievement is provided. Current research on the impact of post-COVID-19 on teaching and learning is currently being published since it is a recent occurrence, thus leading to a need for further investigation. While most literature has been written about teaching and learning during COVID-19, there is a lack of information on principals' action steps for restructuring schools post-COVID. Moreover, how have principals ensured the teaching and learning continuum and attempted to close students' academic achievement gaps while maintaining a healthy organization?

Restructuring Schools Post-COVID-19

Beginning in August 2021, schools across Texas were directed to reopen the facilities for students and staff to transition back to traditional schooling due to COVID-19 cases declining. The state of Texas Education Agency (TEA) recommended the reopening of schools with guidelines. Following health officials ' recommendations, school personnel faced the dilemma of restricting the facilities to ensure learning would occur as safely as possible. Although the Texas Education Agency provided suggestions, there has yet to be a crisis occurring in Texas that

would guide the necessary steps or structures for reopening schools after a pandemic. Previous research suggested that restructuring focused on specific areas such as leadership, environment, and organization (The Center for Comprehensive Reform and Improvement, 2009). Principals' decision-making processes were based on four needs: maintaining safety measures, maintaining the quality of education, ensuring equity within the schools, and efficient school capacity (Chiptin & Karoui, 2021).

Safety Measures

The state education agency, district, and campus leadership teams sought guidance from the state and county health officials as the Center for Disease Control updated the public with precautionary steps to follow. Therefore, school districts received recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control regarding what specific campus actions were to be implemented. One of the main precautions observed was to avoid close contact. Close contact was defined as being directly exposed to infectious secretion or being 6 feet from an infected person for 15 minutes within an hour without a mask (Center for Disease Control [CDC], 2021). Districts were required to excuse students and staff diagnosed with COVID-19 from attending school to minimize the exposure of others. Staff were allowed to be absent on paid sick leave. Another recommendation included ventilation, which would improve air quality to reduce the risk of germs and contamination. Students and staff were encouraged to practice hand hygiene, such as handwashing or using hand sanitizer several times throughout the day, especially after consumption or using the restroom. Another prevention measure included schools cleaning and disinfecting surfaces or commonly used areas (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022).

Schools and districts were also tasked with encouraging masking, screening, testing, managing, and limiting exposures; students and staff were required to mask before entering a school building and during the day to prevent spreading air droppings. Also, screening, which included temperature checks and checking for COVID-19 symptoms such as flu-like symptoms, fever, cough, congestion, headaches, and chills, was required at the beginning of the day before entering the building. If there were signs of symptoms during the school day, students would be isolated where further COVID-19 testing was conducted. When an outbreak occurred in a specific classroom or department, all students and staff had to isolate themselves at home for ten days. The school principals notified the parents of all students about the incident and the potential exposure to individual students.

Addressing Challenges Amidst COVID-19

The principal challenges were equity and quality in teaching and learning for all students. As schools transitioned to online learning, the quality of education diminished. The pandemic brought inequality and inequity to students with a limited internet connection or remote learning access (Chiptin & Karoui, 2021; Chatzipanagiotou & Katsarou, 2023). In many rural areas, students struggled to connect to online learning due to the lack of infrastructure and equipment. Delays to access transpired merely because the pandemic brought a national consumer demand from schools and businesses for products such as computers, laptops, tablets, hotspots, and other equipment. A study conducted by Chatzipanagiotou & Katsarou (2023) found that challenges that impacted school operations during the pandemic included sustainable lack of infrastructure and equipment at the school level, lack of adequate funding resources, and absence of a solid plan exposing school leaders' ill-preparedness, helplessness, and dismay to adjust promptly.

As students and staff transitioned to in-person instruction, organizational challenges surfaced as school principals began to structure the physical space of the building. Considering safety measures presented earlier, principals were challenged to meet health compliance and protocols while structuring the campus. The research attempts to prove that the educational process was affected by managing classes, breaks, and schedules and simply ensuring compliance with safety measures by all school members. Difficulties such as mask requirements and oversized classrooms proved to be obstacles to effectively implementing protocols.

Fostering Partnership and Communication with Parents During COVID-19

Building relationships and engaging parents as partners in education has always been a challenge for the school system. However, COVID-19 allowed schools and districts to formulate new ways of communicating with parents as school closures and reopening occurred. Some methods include text, email, social media, or web-based platforms (Shanchner et al., 2020; Chatzipanagioutu & Katsarou, 2023). “A multiyear study of a Chicago elementary school found that relational trust fostered open and honest conversations, built alignment toward a shared vision among staff and parents, and contributed to improvements taking hold more broadly across a school” (Schachner et al.,2022, p. 51). Furthermore, this study found that relational trust required active listening and power sharing as school leaders partnered with parents to promote parental engagement, all while cultivating student growth. On the contrary, other research indicated that the refusal of parents to comply with safety measures caused tension in these relationships.

Staffing Patterns for Teaching and Learning Post-COVID-19

Adaptive Learning Modes During COVID-19

As teachers and students transitioned back to in-person instruction, the Center for Disease Control recommended that schools use a cohort model in staffing classrooms to minimize exposure to the virus. Schachner et al. (2020) argued, “Safely reopening school buildings and resuming in-person learning requires a reduction in the number of people with whom school staff and students interact face-to-face” (p. 2). Cohorts allowed teachers to have the same students without students having to transition to other classrooms. This was not a problem in elementary schools since students usually have the same teacher. However, in middle and high school, principals must creatively group students. Cohorts allowed scheduling flexibility if students attended daily or in a hybrid model, allowing teachers to alternate as students followed the assigned cohort.

In an article by Bartlett (2021), the author presented three school hybrid models used during the pandemic in 2020. These three models included (1) the parallel hybrid, (2) alternating, and (3) the blended hybrid. The parallel hybrid model divided the school into one remote and one in-person group of students. Parents were given an option for their child to either come in person 100% of the time or stay 100% online. The alternating hybrid used an A/B schedule with students coming in and out of the building, whether by alternating days or weeks. The blended hybrid mixes in-person and remote students in the same class while the teacher teaches virtually. A survey conducted by Barlett indicated that students preferred a hybrid model during the fall of 2022. Data also showed that out of 36 teachers, 22 (61%) reported working in a “hybrid” model in the fall of 2020 (Barlett, 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, changes in working culture and environment impacted workers' personal health and family issues. It was imperative that

leaders recognized the moods and emotions of the workers and expressed empathy toward staff (Porkodi, 2002).

Social Emotional Wellness of Principals, Teachers, and Students Post COVID-19

Mental Health of Educators and Students

The COVID crisis has exacted a toll on personal well-being globally, causing anxiety among educators and students as soon as instruction shifted to remote learning. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2022) signaled that most states had 98 or 99 percent of public schools' fourth- and eighth-graders enrolled in remote learning in December- February of 2022. As students and staff transitioned to remote education, the risk of exposure decreased with the restructuring changes. However, such changes caused emotional and psychological vulnerability (Stasel, 2020; Ashfaquzzaman, 2020). A study on the effects of COVID-19 on early childhood education and care conducted by Jalongo (2021) acknowledged concerns that would have to be addressed post-COVID. Since children were forced to remain at home, children experienced reduced opportunities for social interaction. Another concern was that students built a negative perception of the value of learning. Due to school closures and overall governmental halt during COVID, there was limited access to social services, which threatened the health and safety of students, families, and educators. As a result, COVID-19 created an awareness amongst stakeholders of the need to integrate social-emotional support systems for all school community members (teachers, students, staff, and parents). Accordingly, school systems began to focus on the social and emotional well-being of teachers, students, staff, and parents.

Research suggested that the principal’s leadership style changed with the pandemic crisis to resemble adaptive leadership. As schools restructured from traditional to online and back to conventional learning, principals constantly changed instructional and operational procedures

(Chtipin & Karoui, 2021; Stasel, 2021). O'Driscoll (2021) explained adaptive leadership as a system, not a person, catalyzing creativity, nurturing relationships, cultivating response-ability, and generating energy. Arastaman and Cetinkaya's (2022) study on ways principals navigated the stresses and challenges brought about by the pandemic validates that a significant factor that impacted principals was the leadership style employed. In addition, ensuring that leaders focused on their own emotional and health well-being helped leaders manage their stress while also helping support the campus staff, students, and families. Nonetheless, as Arastaman and Cetinkaya stated, there remains a need for a more wide-ranging understanding of the effective leadership behaviors, approaches, and strategies that helped educators navigate the job-related stressors brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and safeguard their overall well-being. Research on school restructuring from The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (2009) specified that the critical success factors for school turnaround were governance, environment, leadership, and organization. In its study, The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement also found that school leaders are vital for effective school turnaround and success. Grissom, Egalite, and Linday's (2021) article synthesizes the results of six studies conducted in four states and two urban school districts examining the effectiveness of over 22,000 principals and their impact on student learning. The authors prove that effective principals significantly impact student performance more than effective teachers. Data from the study showed that principals impact an average of 483 students on campus with three months of gain in reading and math. Although the principal does not provide direct instruction to students, principals contribute to producing positive outcomes, beginning with the leader.

As indicated in a study by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2002), the impact of COVID-19 on educators was evident in the increase in teacher shortage. The NAEP found that 44% of public schools reported having at least one teaching vacancy at the beginning of 2022, and over 50% of those vacancies were due to resignations. The high number of resignations spawned a teacher shortage, thus triggering schools to seek alternative measures, such as seeking external staffing, including hiring teacher substitutes. In a study, teachers were surveyed about their experiences during the pandemic. Data indicated that uncertainty was a significant stressor for teachers. Other three stressors included workload, the negative perception of the profession, and worrying or caring for others (Kim et al., 2022). Examining teachers' responses to stressing over the uncertainty included the lack of guidance from the state and the constant change of expectations of what needed to be done. Research by Michalache & Michalche (2022) found that supervisor accessibility was another critical form of support during environmental disruptions because increased communication with the supervisor helped employees cope with the uncertainty of the situation (p. 309). Teachers faced criticism and negative perceptions of the profession developed during COVID-19, as many believed that teachers were unwilling to return to campuses. Some responses gathered in Kim et al. (2022) study included teachers feeling unvalued and not cared for due to stakeholders' perceptions of teachers. Teachers who worked from home were assumed to be working for free since teachers were not physically present in the classrooms. Teachers felt criticized by parents and the community without realizing teachers also struggled with transitioning to online learning and then back to traditional in-person instruction. Teachers feared for their health and their lives once the state started reopening schools. As educators began transitioning back to in-person instruction, they felt their lives were unvalued as they were placed in a position to be easily

exposed to COVID-19. Teachers were more unsettled about students' social-emotional learning than the academic needs of students.

In Chatzipanagiotou and Katsarou's 2023 research, the authors accentuated that school closures had detrimental effects on student's emotional health and well-being, affecting their engagement in remote learning. Analysis indicated that students were isolated and lacked the social interaction they commonly encountered in schools. Further, student engagement in remote education was influenced by family social capital, which included household material, technological resources, and parent networks (Huck & Zhang, 2021; Chatzipanagiotou & Katsarou, 2023). Nonetheless, many students did not have family support at home. Teaching and learning transitioned to a whole-child approach in education, making educators aware of the importance of integrated student support systems (that drew on academic, social, emotional, and physical health data to serve the whole child (Berry, 2020). Consequently, teachers were the support system students had access to during the school closures. In turn, campus leaders supported teachers during the school closures and post-COVID reopening of schools.

Supportive Teachers and Leaders

Abraham, Miller, and Morquecho (2021) suggested that the importance of administrators building great relationships with staff translates to staff building relationships with the students. Supporting teachers goes beyond the emotional aspect and includes the structures of scheduling and professional development. To enable teachers to serve as a valuable support system for students, it is also essential to support teachers, which includes granting teachers time for collaboration with other crucial learning communities (Berry, 2020). However, the opposite occurred in another study by Kim et al. (2022). Teachers felt the workload and stress of ensuring they kept a safe and orderly classroom while also trying to close academic gaps. School and

district leaders attempted to focus on capacity building and engage teachers in professional development that could equip teachers with the tools needed to deliver both online and in-person instruction.

In a publication by Abraham et al. (2021), the authors evoked the importance of administrators building solid relationships with staff members. As a result, when administrators create positive connections with staff, it sets a standard for the staff to do the same with the students. This creates inclusiveness and a supportive learning environment. Supporting teachers goes beyond the emotional aspect and includes the structures of scheduling and professional development. For teachers to be a support system for students, they also must be supported by allowing teachers time to collaborate with other vital learning communities (Berry, 2020). However, in another study by Kim et al. (2022), the contrary occurred: teachers felt the workload and stress of ensuring they kept a safe and orderly classroom while also trying to close academic gaps as they returned to in-person instruction. School and district leaders attempted to focus on capacity building and engage teachers in professional development that could equip teachers with the tools needed to deliver both online and in-person instruction.

Some lessons can be learned from studying any organization outside the educational realm that can assist districts and campuses in building a supportive environment. Michalache & Michalche (2022) agreed that organizations must be responsive and supportive to employees during a crisis and that how an organization responds significantly affects the employees. Michalache & Michalche's findings suggested that employees experienced negative consequences such as decreased job-related well-being during disruptions. Nonetheless, organizations can counter these effects by implementing employee support measures that could result in a compelling commitment to the organization. At the organizational level, support

included communication and a deep concern for the employee's physical and mental health. Another support includes flexibility in scheduling and offering conditions of employment to facilitate combining work and care.

The organizational conditions could help promote teacher retention and achievable working conditions. As previously mentioned, teacher shortage impacts the access to highly qualified teachers. Additionally, teacher shortage affects student achievement. Garcia et al. (2019) noted that "lack of sufficient, qualified teachers and staff instability threaten students' ability to learn and reduce teachers' effectiveness, and high teacher turnover consumes economic resources that could be better deployed elsewhere" (p.1). Sorensen et al. (2018) concluded, "We find suggestive evidence that turnover also leads to higher shares of teachers that are not certified in the specified subject and of teachers with lower average licensure test scores" (p. 8). After the pandemic, teacher shortages and interference with teaching and learning created academic gaps for students. Pearce's (2023) article analyzed the heavy weight of COVID-19 on school leadership and its importance in fostering a system of shared vision and communication. The author emphasizes, "Remaining empathetic yet informative and sincere was, and remains, essential throughout the pandemic" (Pearce, 2023, p. 30). Further, the article focuses on building trust, capacity, communication, coping, and mobilizing collective effort, all of which affect the organizational health of the school.

Organizational Health

Fairman and Mclean (2003) defined organizational health as an organization's ability to function effectively, cope adequately, change appropriately, and grow from within. Fairman & McLean's Sustained System Success Model is a conceptual framework emphasizing the essential components in organizational health that guide leadership effectiveness toward achieving student

success. The visual model is designed in a hierarchical structure of dimensions that coexist to ensure a healthy organization.

Figure 2: Sustained Systemic Success Model

Note. The Sustained Systemic Success Model is a conceptual framework that visualizes the foundation for student success -effective leadership. From Enhancing Leadership Effectiveness (3rd Ed.), Theory and Practices for Sustained Systemic Success (3rd Ed, p.19) by M. Fairman & L. McLean, 203, Paradigm Media Publishing.

Fairman & Mclean (2002) believed that all ten dimensions needed to be functional and sustained in an organization to produce student outcomes. Fairman & Mclean defined each of the dimensions as follows:

1. Goal Focus is defined as the ability of persons, groups, or organizations to have clarity, acceptance, support, internalization, and advocacy of goals and objectives.

2. Cohesiveness is the state in which persons, groups, or organizations have a clear sense of identity.
3. Adaptation is the ability to tolerate stress and maintain stability while coping with the demands of the environment.
4. Communication Adequacy exists when information is relatively distortion-free and travels vertically and horizontally across the boundaries of an organization.
5. Optimal Power Equalization maintains a relatively equitable influence distribution between leaders and team members.
6. Resource Utilization is coordinating and maintaining inputs, particularly personnel, effectively with minimal strain.
7. Morale is the state in which a person, group, or organization has feelings of well-being, satisfaction, and pleasure.
8. Innovativeness is the ability to be and allow others to be inventive, diverse, creative, and risk-taking.
9. Autonomy is the state in which a person, group, or organization has the freedom to fulfill their roles and responsibilities.
10. Problem-solving Adequacy is the organization's ability to perceive and solve problems with minimal energy (Fairman & McLean, 2002, pp. 94-95).

Fairman and McLean believe three fundamental dimensions are crucial for an organization: Goal Focus, Adaptation, and Cohesiveness. These dimensions are interrelated, and each one impacts the others. For example, when members of an organization experience a strong sense of belonging (Cohesiveness), the members are more likely to be committed to the organization's

goals (Goal Focus). As a result, members of an organization can better adapt to changes or challenges that may arise in pursuing those goals.

In Freeman and McLean's (2023) model, the next level in the hierarchy ensures that every instructional strategy is focused on the 3Rs: rigor, relevance, and relationships. The 3Rs are linked to students' essential learning criteria: core, stretch, engaged, and developed in the learning activities provided. Rigor entails designing core and stretch learning lessons that are at a high level aligned with a lens on goal focus. Relevance aligns with stretch and engages learning experiences that ensure students' application of learned skills. Those learning experiences must have some bearing on students to ensure engagement. Thus, individuals can adapt and warrant a willingness to change learning experiences as needed. The last R, relationships, is aligned to cohesiveness. In a healthy organization, adults are supportive and committed to building relations with students and each other. Consequently, this indicates a commitment to the organization. Fairman & McLean claim that the 3Rs and the essential learning criteria of core, stretch, engaged, and personal skill development require the foundational support of Goal Focus, Adaption, and Cohesiveness to gain the internal commitments necessary for the fundamental changes. As organizations observed themselves having to make changes post-COVID-19, school leaders engaged in the process of restructuring.

Managing Change: The Interplay of Restructuring and Organizational Health

Boleman and Deal (2017) explained that organizations typically restructure when compelled to respond to significant problems or opportunities. Changes, whether driven from inside or outside, eventually require some form of structural adaptation. District and staff personnel learned to adapt as they encountered the unspecified transitions from teaching and learning norms to innovative ones. School restructuring occurred in all the components of the

organization, such as staffing, curriculum, operations, and budget. In an article on school turnaround by Thompson et al. (2016), the authors argued that there is a relationship between transformation and restructuring. Whereas transformation involves improving organizational and structural practices on campus, restructuring refers to changes in school governance and personnel replacement. Furthermore, the article argues that the key to school turnaround is the process, which the authors call *scaffold craftsmanship*. Scaffold craftsmanship is the process and procedures during restructuring involved as decisions are made, such as scheduling, student placements, instructional practices, and staffing (Thompson et al., 2016).

Thompson et al. (2016) explained the steps leaders underwent during the transformation process. The transformation process does not follow a predetermined, linear sequence of steps. Instead, external facilitators, school leaders, and teachers engage in a dynamic process where the team works on one aspect, shifts the focus to another, acknowledges any missing connections between the two, addresses those gaps, revisits and refines the initial aspect to ensure a smoother integration with the intermediate one, and so forth. This iterative approach continues until the various components gradually unite and function as a cohesive whole. The transformation process takes a collaborative approach where teachers and leaders work together to set systematic and academic structures during the restructuring process. During the restructuring process, attention is also directed towards several other areas. These areas encompass coaching, professional development, personnel replacement, commitment, climate, culture, and the establishment of professional learning communities. (Thompson et al., 2016; Grissom et al., 2021). These are factors that are in locus control for campus leaders. A collaborative approach to decision-making, planning, and shared responsibility happens during professional learning committees.

What are Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)? Dufour et al. (2016) defined PLCs as an "ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students served" (p. 10). As educators engage in PLCs, job-embedded learning is occurring for educators. The three big ideas of PLCs are a focus on learning, a collaborative culture of collective responsibility, and remaining result orientation. The process requires a culture that is both loose and tight. The process allows educators to make decisions on instructional strategies. Although teachers have autonomy, there are nondiscretionary elements that the whole professional community must adhere to. In the study, De Four et al. also examined the implementation of PLCs between high-leverage and low-leverage districts in correlation to student achievement. After speaking to superintendents in highly successful districts, they determined that principals played a significant role in the process. Thus, leadership behaviors must align with the district's purpose and priorities. Evans (1996) argues that principals are considered indispensable to innovation. No reform effort, however worthy, survives a principal's indifference or opposition. When asked to lead projects, principals did not fully grasp or endorse new initiatives and are likely to be ambivalent (as cited in De Flour, p. 246). District leadership that positively impacts student achievement will intentionally provide ongoing training, support, and monitoring of campus principals. By doing so, district leaders ensure that every principal develops the knowledge, skills, and dispositions vital to leading the PLC process within schools (Defour, 2016). Thus, principals then turn around and support the campus instructional leaders. As a result, the role of the principals has shifted to principals as leaders of learning. Consequently, principals must match the leadership style to the organization's culture. Principals must avoid falling victim to the one-best system when deciding which leadership style to adopt. A one-size-fits-all approach

can be a route to disaster (Boleman & Deal, 2017). Therefore, the leadership style required for change is considered at different points of the restructuring process.

Post-COVID Leadership Styles

One of the fundamental concepts of organizational theory is the role of change and stability in the organization's environment in selecting a leadership strategy or style (Boleman & Deal, 2017). Leadership involves working with others on a shared vision, purpose, and goals and creating the conditions for success. Leithwood & Riehl (2003) state, "Leadership has significant effects on student learning, second only to the impact of the quality of curriculum and teachers' instruction" (p. 2). Leadership has two main functions: providing direction while working in a group and influencing the behavior of others (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Owens & Valesky, 2015).

During the pandemic, principals had to adapt their leadership styles to navigate the challenges that COVID-19 generated, consequently impacting the campus culture. The pandemic required principals to shift their traditional leadership styles to adapt to new ones that embedded multitasking, readiness, planning, technology skills, and immediate action. Studies indicated that school leaders needed more knowledge and preparedness to deal with the uncertain challenges during the shutdown, transitioning back to in-person instruction or what will follow in the next few years post-COVID (Chatzipanagiotou & Katsarou, 2023). Leadership styles during the COVID-19 era included situational, transformational, and relational leadership.

Situational Leadership. "Situational leadership is characterized by the relation between task behavior (giving instructions, directing, guiding, and valuing) and engagement's listening, supporting, and valuing aspects" (Aslam et al., 2022, p. 2). This type of leadership depends on the individual the leader is working with. Blanchard & Hershey's revised 2020 model consists of

four leadership styles that represent a mixture of the behavior intensity regarding task and relationship: (1) Telling – S1; (2) Selling – S2; (3) Participating – S3 and (4) Delegating – S4 (as cited in Mircetic & Vukotic, 2020). These leadership behaviors depend on the followers' maturity level, from self-directed to leader-directed. Individual readiness levels differ by the number of followers' performance readiness. The readiness levels include:

> Readiness Level 1 or R1 describes followers who are inefficient; they are unable and insecure or unmotivated to perform the assignment satisfactorily. Readiness Level 2 or R2 symbolizes the presence of followers' confidence and motivation to deliver the task at an acceptable level, but they are still unable to do it. Readiness Level 3 or R3 represents the readiness level of followers who can perform a specific task without confidence, commitment, or motivation. Readiness Level 4 or R4 is characteristic of competent, confident, and motivated followers to perform at an adequate level (Mircetic & Vukotic, 2020, p. 105).

For example, an individual at level 1 will require the leader to employ a telling approach. An individual with a level 2 will require the leader to take a selling approach. Each leadership style (S) correlates to readiness level (R). Research indicates that situational leadership can increase job satisfaction and employee motivation. In an article, Aslam et al. (2022) argue that the “new normal” after COVID-19 has been an uphill battle in which education and money are at stake in situations where people find it challenging to adjust. Consequently, leaders can ensure an organization’s work and satisfaction by supporting a situational leadership approach as adjustment happens (Aslam et al., 2022).

Transformational Leadership. As students and staff returned to in-person instruction, leaders had to ensure that staff and students adapted to the new norms after COVID-19. Owens & Valesky (2015) argue, "the transformational leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower" (p. 260). The structure of the transformational leadership framework in the Breakthrough Principles book by Desravines et al. (2016) focused on five categories of effective schools: learning and teaching, school culture, talent management, planning and operations, and personal leadership. Utilizing a transformational leadership approach and cultivating a shared culture will promote learning, growth, and collaboration, all of which are indispensable for organizational success. The innovative spirit encouraged by this approach drives continuous improvement and adaptation. Pannell (2023) states, "Through empowerment, leaders could inspire members of the institutions to take ownership and responsibility for members of the organization's growth and development within the organization. A study by Yang (2013) found the potential challenges principals faced as they employ transformational leadership to improve schools. One of the key findings was that principals had difficulty identifying the real problems in school because they were accustomed to the school system. Thus, they do not have an outside view or perspective when analyzing the current situation. Consequently, principals can be ignorant of the problem, puzzled by the problem, or have a misunderstanding of the problem. Moreover, another difficulty is understanding the relationship between the issues. In other words, how one problem is linked or affects another. In applying transformational leadership, Yang proposed a series of steps for principals: developing ideas, constructing a shared vision, earning trust, delegating authority, and achieving success. The direction of school development is shaped by the school's core concept, which reflects the school management's beliefs and awareness following the principal's

contemplation of the objective reality. “Vision is directional and oriented, making school members strive for clear goals and communication. School members could gain wisdom and grow together when they try to understand and achieve the organization’s vision” (Yang, 2013, p.80). Gaining confidence implies that members of the school gain trust and mutual respect from team members. In addition, Yang claims, “Sharing power means returning the power to the school members; what is more, it means the principal’s higher expectations of the members, and he believes everyone is an excellent leader” (p. 82). Ultimately, the organization will experience success as it keeps moving the school toward improvement. Yong explains that this occurred when leaders began to build relational relationships with the staff, which were encouraged, respected, and considered.

Relational Leadership. Research conducted by Virella (2022) on how principals conceptualized their new roles during the COVID-19 crisis indicated that most principals steered toward a relational leadership response. Further, Virella explains that using a relational leadership style, “Leaders describe the mutual respect of their team as well as the collaboration between the principal and the team” (p.6). Leaders entrust the team to bring personal experiences, perspectives, and resolutions. Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) researched relational leadership, identifying four fundamental conceptual elements within this framework. They suggest that relational leadership is not just a set of actions but a way of existing within the world. It involves collaboratively and dialogically determining meaning with others, recognizing that addressing differences is a moral responsibility, and applying practical wisdom to leadership endeavors. As leaders transformed the schools and established new systems in their campus post-COVID-19, they began to establish the culture and processes for school improvement (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Virella, 2022; Yang, 2023)

Assessing the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Student Achievement

Academic Gaps

Some studies have found that full-time online learning delivers different academic results than attending traditional in-person instruction (Berry, 2020; Huck & Zhang, 2021). Although during COVID-19, the school attempted to mimic the delivery of instruction in person, other factors influenced the learning at home. Factors that influenced students learning during school closure included access to remote education, the quality of remote instruction, home support, the degree of engagement, teacher creativity, and leadership (Dorn, 2020; Berry, 2020). Dorn et al. (2020) revealed that learning loss will probably be most significant among low-income, black, and Hispanic students. Indeed, some argued that the continuity of education was a priority for state educators, but it might have been different for educators. Rather than focusing solely on academic achievement, educators prioritized meeting student needs.

Closing the learning gaps was the most significant challenge that the effects of COVID-19 left for educators and students to work on. Researchers have been searching and evaluating different systems to close achievement gaps. Abraham et al. (2021) state, "The framework must focus on standards, objectives, and assessment and have self-pacing built into it, with a desire for students to build critical thought and reduce learning gaps" (p. 52). For disadvantaged children, the COVID-19 school closures have likely exacerbated the learning crisis and resulted in increased learning loss, further widening existing educational disparities (UNICEF, 2020)

Data-Driven Accountability

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) primarily produces a national report card detailing student achievement and learning information. NAEP (2022) states that the pandemic has erased more than 20 years of assessment progress. "Barring unforeseen

disruptions, if student performance improves at rates similar to historical trend, fourth-grade students will not catch up to 2019 math levels until 2036 and reading levels until 2044" (NAEP, p.3). However, eighth graders will not be able to get on level in math till 2050. Data in 2022 indicated a four-point decline from 2019 data, which translates to a 12-week learning loss or a third of a year (Bryant et al., 2023). Therefore, districts across the nation received Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on schools and students. However, research indicates that schools need to prepare to provide learning loss interventions that could close this much of a gap. On average, Texas invested $300 a week to give that learning loss intervention to students (Bryant et al.) in a study conducted by the Texas Education Agency on the Impacts of COVID-19 as measured by the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). The preliminary STAAR Data Analysis results showed decreased academic performance with a more significant decline in math than reading. There was a decrease in all academic performance levels. In a report published by TEA (2001), data showed that based on summative STAAR outcomes, economically disadvantaged students experienced much more substantial learning loss than non-economically underprivileged students. The learning loss was about three months. Furthermore, the data indicated that students who participated in remote learning performed lower in STAAR than those who attended in-person instruction (TEA, 2021). Over the past year, the Texas Education Agency has been working to develop an accountability system capable of effectively evaluating assessment data, given the ongoing impact of COVID-19 since 2019.

Summary

Chapter two provided the framework for the study portraying the impact that COVID-19 had on teaching and learning, including the areas that needed to be addressed as school personnel

transitioned back to in-person instruction. An analysis of literature was conducted on restructuring schools post-COVID-19, staffing patterns for teaching and learning post-COVID-19, social-emotional wellness of principals, teachers, and students Post COVID-19, leadership styles during COVID-19, and the effects on student achievement due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The literature review found that COVID-19 impacted the academic and organizational structures of the school setting. Additionally, all stakeholders' social, emotional, and health became a priority as school community members transitioned from remote learning to in-person instruction. The review of the literature accentuated the critical importance of school principals adapting their leadership styles during the school restructuring process. This adaptation was necessary to foster healthy organizations as educators began working together to close achievement gaps inflicted by COVID-19.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research designs for this mixed-method study, which focused on principals' perspectives on restructuring school systems post-COVID-19. This research intended to identify the steps necessary for principals to ensure a post-pandemic learning continuum during the restructuring. In addition, this study also attempted to determine the relationship between organizational health and student achievement. In this chapter, the research questions, research design, site and selection of participants, the instrumentation used in the study, as well as the process of data collection and data analysis process, are described.

Research Question(s) and Hypotheses

The research questions that were used to conduct the qualitative portion of the study are as follows:

1) What strategies did principals use during the first one hundred days of post-COVID-19 school opening?

2) What are principals' perspectives on central office support and practices contributing to their campus goals of closing achievement gaps after COVID-19?

The research questions were used to conduct the quantitative portion of the study are as follows:

3) Is there a relationship between academic performance, as measured by STAAR 2022 scores, and organizational health, as measured by the Organizational Health Inventory scores of elementary and middle schools in one southern school district.?
4) Is there a difference between pre-COVID and post-COVID-19 Organizational Health scores for elementary and middle schools? Based on the data, which organizational domains were affected mainly during the restructuring of schools post-COVID-19?

A set of null hypotheses derived from research questions three and four for the quantitative portion of the study are listed below:

Null Hypothesis

($H_0$3): There is no relationship between academic performance, as measured by STAAR 2022 scores, and organizational health, as measured by the Organizational Health Inventory scores of elementary and middle schools in one southern school district.

$H_0$4): There is no difference between pre-COVID and post-COVID campus Organizational health scores for elementary and middle schools.

Research Methodology

A concurrent mixed-method approach was utilized for this study and consisted of a phenomenology research method for the quantitative portion. Phenomenology studies describe the meaning of several individuals' lived experiences of a phenomenon or event. Further, it explains what all participants have in common as they lived that experience (Cresswell, 2007). This methodology was selected because the research attempts to gather principals' perspectives and perceptions on action steps needed to restructure schools post-COVID-19 and the central

office personnel support they received throughout the process. An interview data collection tool was utilized to gather their responses.

The quantitative design used a correlational method to answer research question three and a descriptive method to answer research question four. A bivariate correlation measured the relationship between the two dependent variables, organizational health and student achievement on campuses post-COVID. This research also intended to assess the difference in organizational climate and the success or failure of a campus post-COVID-19 2019 before COVID and 2022 post-COVID.

In this study, the independent variable was the organizational health inventory score measured by the Organizational Health Inventory (OHI) Survey completed by each campus staff response. The dependent variable in this study was the student achievement scores for District A's elementary and middle school campuses. The 2019 and 2022 STAAR overall component scores were achieved based on the STAAR calculating system, representing the student achievement scores. STAAR component scores are represented by numerical values translated into a letter grade: A=100 -90, B=89- 80, C=79- 70, D=69- 60, F=59, and below.

The organizational health inventory was designed to capture reliable data on the organizational culture created by Fairman et al. (1979). The survey comprised eighty- eight items for each of the ten dimensions randomly placed throughout the organizational health instrument. Reversal items are included. Respondents rated each item on a Likert scale continuum as (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Undecided, (4) Strongly Agree or (5) Strongly Agree (Johnstone, 1988, as cited in Hernandez & Zamora, 2018). Based on the overall responses, a percentage was given to each domain and then a cumulative percentage for the survey. The higher the percentage, the more significant indication of a healthy organization and vice versa.

The STAAR test scores were determined by a cumulative average of three principal component scores: Student Achievement, School Progress Domain, and Closing the Gap domain. It is important to note that both elementary and middle school composite scores are calculated using the same components.

The Student Achievement domain calculates an average of all tests taken at approaches, meets, or master's level and divides this by the total number of tests taken. The School Progress Domain has two parts: School Progress Part A and School Progress Part B. School Progress Part A assesses students' progress from one year to another and assigns points to campuses for each student who has made progress. School Progress Part B compares campuses to others with similar student demographics, using the economically disadvantaged percentage to group them with similar schools.

Student Achievement Domain and School Progress comprise 70% of the overall composite scores. Schools choose the better score between progress and student achievement and multiply it by 70% to calculate the weighted points. The remaining 30% is attributed to the Closing the Gap domain.

The Closing the Gap domain score is determined by evaluating students' groups and whether they meet specific indicators. These indicators are scored one to four if they meet targets. To calculate a score for each Closing the Gap component, the total points earned are summed up and then divided by the possible points that could be earned. The total points for each component are determined by multiplying the points earned by the corresponding weight.

For elementary and middle schools, there are four components with specific weights: Academic Achievement in reading and math at 30%, Academic Growth Status in reading and math at 50%, Progress in Achieving English Language Proficiency at 10%, and Student

Achievement Domain Score: STAAR Component Only at 10%. These four components are converted from a weighted score to points and then added to obtain an overall scale score.

The final weighted points for either Student Achievement or School Progress Domain, whichever is better between the two, are added to the Closing the Gap domain points. These combined points are then scaled using a TEA (Texas Education Agency) tool to produce an actual score that translates to an overall percentage grade.

Site, Subject & Sample Selection

Participants for this study were active principals. The sampling size for this research consisted of ten principals in District A, which led a school before and after COVID-19. Qualitative sampling is the process of selecting a small number of individuals for a study so that the individuals chosen will be able to help the researcher understand the phenomenon under investigation (Mills & Gay, 2016). In the qualitative portion of the study, criterion sampling was utilized. Mills & Gay (2016) define a criterion sample as "Select participants some set of criteria or have some characteristic which makes data collection and analysis simple (p. 169). This type of sampling allowed participants to be selected to give us perspectives on challenges faced in addressing the continuum of learning during and after COVID-19. Before gathering data, the required Institutional Review Board certification was obtained along with permission from the superintendent of schools from District A to conduct the study within its school district. The researcher collected all data for this study. The principal's participation was accepted voluntarily by signing a consent form outlining the purpose of the study and their rights as participants.

District A is situated in South Texas within the Region 1 Service Center. This district predominantly serves a student population of 99% Hispanic ethnicity, with 93.2% of students

facing economic disadvantages. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the district faced the unique challenge of serving many at-risk students, accentuating the student body's needs.

Moreover, District A proactively conducted yearly organizational health inventories during and after the COVID-19 crisis, facilitating data collection to understand the impact of the pandemic on the district's overall health. The selection of principals for participation in the study was done randomly, ensuring an unbiased representation based on their willingness to participate. This approach aimed to provide a fair and comprehensive perspective on the challenges and strategies employed by District A during the COVID-19 period.

Instrumentation

The instrument used to gather accurate participant responses was an interview. The interview consisted of semi-structured questions to examine the principals' perspectives on steps necessary to restructure schools. The discussion consisted of one session of no more than 60 minutes of semi-structured open-ended questions. Questions included demographic information (gender, year of experience, and age) and professional information. Participants were provided with a follow-up set of questions if they would like to share any other information not included during the interview.

For the quantitative portion of this study, the Organizational Health Inventory (Fairman, 2017) and the achievement performance of STAAR component scores were utilized. The organizational health inventory by Fairman is composed of a Form A and Form B questionnaire. These questionnaires are both composed of 80 questions in parallel form. These 80 questions are divided into eight questions per each of the ten dimensions. Respondents rated each item on a Likert scale continuum as (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Undecided, (4) Strongly Agree or (5) Strongly Agree, Johnstone (1988 as cited in Hernandez & Zamora, 2018). The responses

are calculated into raw scores, which then are translated into percentile scores for each of the ten domains. After five phases of running analysis for validity and reliability, test reliability results showed that in public school districts throughout the United States, the ten dimensions of organizational health consistently correlate with student achievement at the .001 level (Fairman, 2017). This inventory showed validity and reliability as an instrument to correlate organizational health to student achievement within organizations. The STAAR assessment scores represent how students can access the Texas Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) at their grade level. Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) reviewed the processes used to create STAAR test forms and the planned procedures for creating on-grade STAAR student scores. These scores are intended to compare students' knowledge and skill achievements within and across years for a given grade/subject (Human Resources Research Organization, 2017).

Data Collection

Following approval by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, the superintendent of schools granted the researcher authorization to conduct the study in District A. Once approval was granted, an email was sent to all principals with a comprehensive overview of the research to inform principals of the study's objectives.

Participants were initially assessed for their willingness to participate in the study. Upon confirmation, participants were provided with written informed consent for participation, available in both paper and electronic formats. They received instructions and information on the purpose of the study simultaneously as part of the informed consent process. Participants were notified of their rights and the potential risks associated with the research. They were assured, both before and during the study, that their participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any point. Additionally, participants were informed that their involvement would be kept

confidential, and their names would not be disclosed. Confidentiality was maintained by not requiring participants to provide their names, campus names, or identifiable information.

Participants were informed via email about the interview time and date. Data collection included semi-structured interview questions that form the basis of each interview with participants. All interviews were recorded during the process and transcribed after each completion. This allowed the researcher to analyze and interpret the data, identifying themes and meanings using NVivo software.

Data collected were stored in a Word file and maintained on a password-protected drive on the researcher's personal computer, which was also secured with a passcode and fingerprint recognition lock. Hard copies of transcripts, instruments, and signed consents were scanned into digital files, and any paper data were shredded after scanning. After five years, all files will be deleted.

Organizational Health Data were requested via open records with the district's online available records request form. Data collection consisted of data gathered by an organizational health inventory report indicating the overall score of the inventory and the scores for the ten dimensions of the list. STAAR scores were collected from the Texas Education Agency via their accountability platform since they are subject to public records.

Data Analysis

Once the participants' interviews were completed and responses were transcribed, they were analyzed using a thematic approach. A thematic coding data analysis approach took place to determine the most common responses. The researcher used NVivo; the software was used for coding. During the process of qualitative coding, the researcher was able to identify common themes in the principal's perception of the necessary steps taken during the restructuring process

after COVID-19 and the support systems present or not to ensure the continuum of teaching and learning. Further, the responses helped provide possible solutions and suggestions for maintaining a healthy organization while working to close students' achievement gaps.

Data analysis for the quantitative portion were done using a bivariate correlation of independent samples and pair sample t-tests. An independent t-test determined whether pre and post-test scores differ significantly (Mills & Gay, 2016, p. 267). Based on STAAR assessment data, this study utilized the data for elementary and middle school campuses. The Organizational Health Inventory data was analyzed for these specific campuses and used during the data analysis. This study compared the mean (percentage) of STAAR scores in overall student achievement to the mean (percentage) scores of the organizational health inventory.

A p-value reported from a t-test that was less than 0.05 at a confidence level of 95% was statistically significant, rejecting the null. If a p-value was greater than 0.05 at a confidence level of 95%, then there was no correlation evidence to suggest that the null is invalid, failing to reject the null hypothesis. This correlation helped answer our research questions if there was or was not a relationship between organizational health scores and student achievement scores of a campus.

Furthermore, to answer the second quantitative question to determine which of the ten organizational health domains most impacted by the restructuring of schools during post-COVID-19 in District A, pre and post organizational health data was utilized. A box and whisker plot analysis helped identify those outliers (domains) that could have been impacted. Those outliers, if any would be further analyzed using a Pair-T test to determine if there was a significant difference between the identified domains prior to and post-COVID-19.

A p-value reported from a t-test that was less than 0.05 at a confidence level of 95% would be statistically significant, rejecting the null. If a p-value is greater than 0.05 at a

confidence level of 95%, then there is no significant evidence to suggest that the null is invalid, failing to reject the null hypothesis. This significance helped answer our research questions if there was or was no relationship between organizational health scores and student achievement scores of a campus.

Furthermore, to answer the second quantitative question to determine which of the ten organizational health domains was most impacted by the restructuring of schools during post-COVID-19 in District A, a box and whisker plot test was utilized. The data utilized were the pre- and post-organizational Health data percentage of each of the ten domains. The box and whisker plot helped identify those outliers (domains) that could have been impacted. Further analysis using a Paired t-test was required to ascertain whether there was a significant difference between the identified domains before and after COVID-19, particularly focusing on the outliers.

A p-value reported from a t-test that is less than 0.05 at a confidence level of 95% would be statistically significant, rejecting the null. If a p-value was greater than 0.05 at a confidence level of 95%, then there was no significant evidence to suggest that the null was invalid, failing to reject the null hypothesis. This significance would help answer our research questions: Did the restructuring of schools during COVID-19 significantly affect one or more organizational dimensions of campuses?

Trustworthiness, Validity, and Reliability

Pseudo-names were utilized for the district, campus, and participants to ensure no identifiable information could be associated with the data. Participants were able to obtain clarification before, during, and after the study. The participants were provided with the researcher's contact information, such as email and phone number, to make contact as needed.

Participants were also informed that they could be granted access to review their data upon request. Data were kept in a secure location for three years following the completion of the study.

A triangulation process was utilized through data collection. Before the interview, a pilot study was carried out to ensure that questions had been crafted and aligned to answer the research questions of this study. Interview questions were adjusted if needed. Participants' permission to record all interviews would ensure accurate capturing of responses. All interviews were recorded and transcribed to check for the validity of responses. After all the information was transcribed, the transcript was shared with participants to verify that their responses were captured with accuracy and validity. Additionally, follow-up questions allowed participants to share any omitted or additional responses. As part of the research findings, actual words or excerpts of the interview were included in the findings as evidence of the interpretation of the data.

Although this study was conducted in one district, the research findings can be transferred to other communities across state or national levels. COVID-19 impacted various school settings from PK-16, and this research intends for the results to be applied across possibly.

Position Statement

As a former principal during the COVID-19 pandemic and post-COVID-19, the challenges and stress I experienced during this time fostered my interest in this research. At times, many decisions were made, but the impact of these decisions has yet to be explored to ensure that they were adequate to ensure success. As a researcher, I was aware that I had to assert a neutral viewpoint when interviewing and analyzing data. Using unbiased and factual language helped avoid personal biases or subjectivity as data were being investigated and reported.

Furthermore, the findings of this research were peer-reviewed by a colleague to ensure that the language was unbiased and that my perspectives were void. Again, as a former employee and colleague of potential participants, as a researcher, a clear consciousness of avoiding biases in ensuring that those selected for the interview were voluntary and not chosen intentionally was needed. At this point, conducting the study in District A foreshadowed no conflict of interest. However, to avoid a conflict of interest, full disclosure of this research's purpose, interest, and objective was shared with all stakeholders involved.

Summary of Chapter

This mixed-method study used phenomenology and correlational designs intended to examine the necessary steps principals implemented during the restructuring of schools post-COVID-19 while attempting to close achievement gaps. Further, it explored the effects of organizational health on student achievement. Additionally, it intended to identify which corporate domain during school restructuring was inclined to have a more significant impact. This chapter explained the research design, population and sample, instrumentation, and data collection and analysis procedures used in the study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS, DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Over recent years, the school leadership landscape has shifted from a business-oriented model to one emphasizing instructional coaching. Traditionally, districts adopted a top-down leadership approach; however, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic introduced unprecedented challenges, creating a climate of uncertainty in navigating normal operations. Principals found themselves at the forefront, grappling with the dual responsibility of ensuring the continuity of teaching and learning while prioritizing the health and safety of teachers, students, and staff.

As schools began to reopen post-COVID-19, the weight of responsibility on principals increased significantly. They emerged as the gatekeepers of their campuses, responsible for establishing new norms in collaboration with school leaders, district officials, parents, and students. The study aimed to examine adult-led behaviors within school organizations to identify effective practices that enhance organizational culture and improve teaching and learning outcomes. Specifically, it sought to understand how school personnel manage the teaching and learning process, particularly in challenging circumstances like national emergencies. This study explored school principals' perspectives during the restructuring process following the COVID-19 pandemic. The research holds significance as it extracts key action steps implemented by principals in this process and delves into insights regarding the organizational health of their campuses throughout the restructuring, focusing on closing achievement gaps.

This research addressed specific questions, including whether a relationship exists between achievement scores and organizational health scores during the initial year of in-person

instruction after the pandemic. Additionally, the study sought to investigate potential differences in school campuses' pre- and post-COVID organizational health inventory scores. By examining principals' perspectives and lived experiences, the research aims to contribute valuable insights into the strategies employed by principals, shedding light on their challenges and successes in reshaping their schools post-COVID-19. The proposed study aimed to examine adult-led behaviors within school organizations to identify effective practices that enhance organizational culture and improve teaching and learning outcomes. Specifically, it sought to understand how school personnel manage the teaching and learning process, particularly in challenging circumstances like national emergencies.

Research Questions

The first two research questions below provided a guiding framework to capture the principals' perspectives as they undertook to restructure the campus's organizational and instructional components. The aim was to address achievement gaps and uphold the organizational health of their respective campuses. The second pair of questions below sought to investigate student achievement scores during the first year following COVID-19. The aim was to determine any correlation between achievement scores and campus organizational health, and to assess whether the organizational health of the campus experienced improvement or decline after COVID-19.

RQ1: What strategies did principals use during the first one hundred days of post-COVID-19 school opening?

RQ2: What are principals' perspectives on central office support and practices contributing to their campus goals of closing achievement gaps after COVID-19?

RQ3: What is the relationship between campus academic achievement measured by STAAR 2022 performance and campus organizational health measured by the Organizational Health Inventory of elementary and middle schools post-COVID-19?

RQ4: Is there a difference between pre-COVID and post-COVID-19 Organizational Health scores for elementary and middle schools? Based on the data, which organizational domains were affected mainly during the restructuring of schools post-COVID-19?

Description of the Study

This study employed a concurrent embedded mixed-method research design, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative approaches to investigate adult-led behaviors within school organizations. Qualitative data gathered through a phenomenological study design involving focus groups and interviews with principals provided insights into restructuring efforts during and after the pandemic, while quantitative data from STAAR accountability and Organizational Health Inventory reports were used to correlate academic success with organizational health across selected elementary and middle school campuses in District A. The objective was to capture the perspectives of campus principals regarding the restructuring of schools and the continuity of learning through interviews. Research questions and protocols were developed to elicit valuable insights into the necessary action steps.

District A is an independent school district in South Texas. This district predominantly serves a student population of 99% Hispanic ethnicity, with 93.2% of students facing economic disadvantages. For the last ten years, District A has engaged in the Fairman and McLeans Organizational Health Inventory fulfilling the criteria to be able to evaluate the organizational health of a campus as restructuring processes occurred. Campus principals at District A were

invited to participate following approval from the Superintendent of Schools. This study included criterion sampling, which limited the study population to elementary and middle school due to the methodology used for STAAR. The STAAR composite scores for elementary and middle schools are calculated using the same formula, allowing an accurate comparison of student achievement data. The selection criteria included serving as a campus principal before and after the pandemic, being affiliated with District A, and holding the elementary or middle school principal position. Thirty possible participants serving this district's elementary and middle schools were identified. The population size for this study included ten participants who were identified by their willingness to participate. All thirty participants were emailed a description of the of the research, superintendent approval letter, consent form, and contact information of the researcher. If participants were willing to participate a response email acknowledging interest and consent form was returned by the participants. All participants provided consent and agreed to be recorded during the interviews.

The study involved ten campus principals from District A, with five leading elementary schools and five leading middle schools in the 2020-2021 school year, post-COVID-19. Elementary schools catered to prekindergarten to fifth-grade students, while middle schools served sixth to eighth-grade students. The participants' leadership experience ranged from four to twenty-eight years in campus leadership.

Interviews were conducted via Zoom, lasting approximately 45 minutes each. Subsequently, the researcher transcribed the data and initiated the analysis using NVIVO software. The data were systematically broken down based on research questions, leading to the identification of themes.

Table 1: Demographics for Interview Participants

Interview Participant	School Type	Gender	Years of Experience
PM1	Middle School	Female	7
PM2	Middle School	Female	4
PM3	Middle School	Female	5
PM4	Middle School	Female	28
PM5	Middle School	Female	5
PE6	Elementary	Female	13
PE7	Elementary	Female	4
PE8	Elementary	Female	4
PE9	Elementary	Female	7
PE10	Elementary	Female	5

Note. PM=middle school, PE= elementary school principal. The number of female participants (n=10). The average years of experiences for participants was from 4 years to 28 years.

Summary of the Results

The qualitative aspect of the research utilizes a phenomenological research design. Phenomenology studies are used to "ask about the meaning of this experience for these participants" (Mills & Gay, 2016). This study aimed to collect the viewpoints of principals as they navigate the restructuring of schools in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings in this phenomenology study were organized around two primary questions: What strategies did principals use during the first 100 days of opening school, and what factors

(staffing, central office support, curriculum changes, schedule changes), if any, contributed to the academic success of the campus? What factor contributed to the educational failure of the campus**?**

As part of the study, the participant's responses were transcribed and verified by the participants to ensure that their responses were captured with accuracy. The coding process was done using NVIVO software, where data were chunked and coded on common themes. Furthermore, the researchers manually coded the transcript to verify common themes. Thematic coding was applied to the analysis of participant responses in the study, revealing the emergence of five key themes: (1) safety, (2) staffing, (3) academic gaps and interventions, (4) principal leadership and planning, and (5) organizational health. Within each theme, participants provided insights into both challenges and successes. The following sections exemplify each theme, incorporating direct quotes from participants to enhance the depth of understanding for each concept.

Theme One: Safety

RQ1: What strategies did principals use during the first one hundred days of post-COVID-19 school opening?

Participants' first and most important task was to ensure that there were safety protocols to guarantee the safety of teachers and students as they transitioned back to in-person instruction. Safety protocols were developed at the district and campus levels. One participant shared that ensuring protocols were followed became everyone's priority. "We worked as a team, and everybody, including all administrators, was helping to disinfect and take care of things that we could and not just leave it to the custodian" (PE6). Furthermore, the goal was to ensure that "Parents, students, and teachers felt that they were safe" (PE6). Therefore, assuring students and

teachers were provided with personal protective equipment was part of the safety protocols as they planned and reopened the campus. Students and teachers were equipped with desk shields, face masks, disinfecting wipes, and hand sanitizers, and spacing was practiced avoiding exposure to each other. One participant shared,

> One key thing we did was ensure they had air purifiers in their classrooms. The district provided and required us to have dividers for each child at their desk. And so, we're ensuring the dividers are in place and set down, so they won't be moving around everywhere. We had to space the students to ensure they sat six feet apart. We ensured we had masks for teachers to use with their students if they came without them from home (PM3).

Every middle school and elementary principal participant conveyed practices such as temperature checks, mandatory mask usage, hand sanitation, and desk shields that were implemented based on protocols outlined by the district, and these resources were made accessible to all teachers and students. Another principal shared,

> We had protocols in place to monitor students' safety and to stop any spread of COVID, so when our students would get out of their vehicles, we would check their temperatures, and if they had a temperature, we would put them back in the car (PE10).

Further, the district provided touchless water fountain dispensers and, at certain times, COVID-19 testing for students and teachers. To prioritize the safety of teachers, the protocols established for students have been replicated. Principal participants shared that teachers must complete a self-check survey daily before reporting to work. Upon entering the building, an administrator

was assigned to conduct temperature checks and a symptoms questionnaire on teachers and staff to be cleared to be on campus for the day. Teachers were required to turn in a doctor's certification that they were removed to return to campus if they had contracted COVID-19 or were showing symptoms. To ensure teacher safety, staff meetings and any other meetings with teachers were conducted via Zoom to avoid teachers congregating in a confined space.

To ensure student safety, the ratio of teachers to students was decreased, guaranteeing that there was a distance of six feet between each student. On principal participant shared, "Students assigned per classroom were reduced, and "class sizes were trying to keep small because of the spacing, a 15 to 13 to one ratio" (PM5). Class sizes were kept to a minimum due to the overall classroom area. As students transitioned to virtual instruction, they were provided with a computer and some with mobile hotspots to log into Google Classroom for instruction. A typical response from all participants is that the district was proactive in providing each student with a one-to-one device for students and technology equipment in each classroom. "Everyone also had Apple TVs, like the big-screen TVs, and they already used Chromebook" (PM2).

Communication with Parents

During the restructuring of schools and establishing protocols, principals consistently emphasized the importance of communication with parents. All elementary and middle school principal participants in the study expressed that parents exhibited reluctance to allow their children to return to in-person instruction. An elementary principal shared,

> We were following what the district said. We wanted the safety of all our students, and just explaining helped parents understand that even though they weren't happy with the decision, they understood why we worked and were doing things a certain way (PE9).

Parents needed to be reassured that their children would be safe on campus. When asked to elaborate on how they reassured parents of the safety of their children on campus. One participant explained, “As principals, we found ourselves juggling our time more with parent conferences and parent phone calls or parent meetings, just on different topics, once again, to establish that trust and communication between us in the community” (PE6).

Some forms of communication with parents were through social media posts and phone calls. One middle school principal even described having to create videos of actual procedures in place, “Because parents did have concerns, I had to do a video for our parents, a YouTube video showing them the safety measures and how the day of the child would start” (PM5). As cases of COVID-19 presented themselves on campus, parents were notified to ensure they monitored their children at home. An elementary principal participant stated, “We would also send flyers home, ensuring parents were aware that even though they were a little bit sick or had some symptoms, they wouldn't send them to school to avoid anyone getting sick” (PE8).

Making parents knowledgeable of possible systems and closely monitoring their children was a preventive measure to ensure further contamination.

Theme Two: Staffing

Staffing Patterns

Staffing was the most common challenge when students were transitioning back to in-person instruction. The principals mentioned that teachers and staff would come in on rotation. The district allowed campuses to rotate their teachers in rotation schedules such as one week on and off campus. Not all students participated in in-person instruction simultaneously. An elementary principal described the process as gradual: "Our doors were opened in October 2020. We gradually welcomed students, prioritizing those facing challenges with home internet access

or encountering difficulties in logging in" (PE10). Parents were also allowed to send their children to in-person instruction, as many had to return to work. Only in the 2nd semester of the school year did the number of students begin to increase at almost total capacity. However, as the number of students attending in-person instruction increased, so did the required number of teachers and staff needed to ensure the daily operation of the instructional day. Nevertheless, not all campuses operated at total capacity, leading to a delayed start for specific teachers. Principals on the northern side of the district expressed that their teachers perceived this situation as unjust. One principal mentioned that teachers expressed the need to "get extra compensation for having to be on campus while other teachers were at home" (PM4). The northern section of the district includes schools with a higher proportion of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Consequently, students residing in the north part of the district face resource availability challenges, particularly in home internet service. While the district did supply mobile hotspots, the region lacked the necessary infrastructure to capture the bandwidth consistently and effectively for internet access. Since students lacked connectivity at home, from day one, many of the northern campuses needed to be on campus so that students could have access to the internet. Principals expressed that limited teacher shortages or teachers having to be out because of personal illness added to other teachers' roles and responsibilities. In response to teachers' absences or lack of teachers, principals were forced to place their support staff teachers in the classrooms. One principal shared, "We stopped servicing students in small group settings like the reading specialist. They went into the classroom sometimes you know it would have to be the coach covering some classes, or we had to team up" (PE9). Canceling services and electives for other students was a strategic response to address teacher shortages.

Overworked and Supported Teachers. As part of transitioning into virtual instruction and students working from their devices, teachers had to be creative in designing lesson instructional materials, such as PowerPoints, online assignments and assessments, discussion forums, etc., to keep students engaged. Many teachers would express the long hours they invested at home after fulfilling their daily instructional tasks. The district took the initiative to provide professional development to equip teachers and principals with the tools needed for the new learning designs and office hours for those requiring additional assistance. This was supported by a principal stating, "Our directors and curriculum writers were good about being available for any questions the staff had, but also good about being available for any questions we had" (PE7). Another principal's response validated the help teachers received from central office content area personnel. The principal participant expressed, "The bilingual department held many sessions that helped with math along with sessions on how to use technology in instruction. This helped elevate some stress on teachers" (PE6).

Not only did the teachers and staff experience professional stress, but they also dealt with emotional tension. Teachers and staff felt uneasy about returning to in-person instruction due to concerns about potential exposure to COVID-19. The added stress of developing new lessons specifically designed for virtual or technology-based teaching further compounded their worries. In addition to their professional obligations, teachers had personal responsibilities that contributed to their emotional stress. Many teachers and staff had their children and family to care for through the pandemic and post-pandemic. Three of the ten participants shared that the district supported teachers, staff, and principals by providing them ten days of leave if they or their family members were ill with COVID-19. One principal stated, "Everybody was going through losses and sicknesses. Everybody was still scared. I talked to the teachers and let them

know that we were literally in all of this together" (PM1). Principals shared that classroom teachers needed to be heard and supported throughout the process. The role of principals shifted to prioritize the social and emotional well-being of teachers, and they ensured that adequate social-emotional support was provided. One middle principal supported that claim stating, "We provide teachers social-emotional support by having our counselors provide wellness and mental health days where they provide teachers with strategies to cope with stress" (PM2). Some strategies included having breaks for teachers, allowing teachers to take a five-minute walk, and using a mindfulness website that offered reflections and meditation lessons. Another principal shared that they had to allow time for teachers to vent and share what they were experiencing personally.

Six out of ten principals' responses validated the need for teachers to be supported during the restructuring process after COVID-19. The six principals emphasized the importance of reassuring teachers and staff that their feelings, concerns, and fears were acknowledged and understood. One middle school principal expressed, "As principals, we had to be able to provide support for them to feel at ease and know that they weren't alone, and we were all, you know, in the same boat (PM2). Another principal shared that they needed to empathize with what teachers were facing. One principal expressed,

> I feel that's always been part of leadership, being empathetic and sympathetic, you know, not only our students or parents, our community, and our teachers, you know, it's imperative for them to know that their health came first. You know, and if they needed to be out, we would have to, we had to figure it out when it came to covering classes (PS).

An elementary principal expressed that fellow principals could empathize with the experiences of teachers and staff, as everyone, including principals, were encountering similar challenges, and sharing common concerns. In the interview, one principal recounted her journey of battling cancer amid the pandemic, while another revealed the loss of at least seventeen family members. These firsthand experiences enabled them to empathize with teachers and staff, understanding their fears and losses.

Teacher Shortage. All ten principals reported to have lost at least one teacher who, for medical reasons or fear of placing their lives in jeopardy, resigned from their teaching position. The teacher shortage limited the number of personnel to assist in different areas of the building. Returning to in-person instruction startled campus staff, teachers, and administration. However, educators and students were required to transition back to in-person instruction. One principal expressed, "We still have a job and a duty, and a responsibility to kids. And I have a moral obligation to make sure that kids are learning" (PM2).

Theme Three: Interventions Aimed to Address Academic Gaps and Challenges

RQ2: What are principals' perspectives on central office support and practices contributing to their campus goals of closing achievement gaps after COVID-19?

Adjusting Schedules and Delivery of Instruction

As campus leaders and teachers restructured their instructional setting, a focus on instructional time was simultaneously considered. From an academic lens, principals acknowledge that focusing on instruction would be prioritized along with student safety. All elementary and middle school principals shared that although students were participating in remote learning instruction, they did not benefit from such delivery of instruction. About half of the elementary and middle school principals said some students lacked parental monitoring.

In structuring the instructional time, principals prioritized allocating time for reading, math, and intervention blocks. Furthermore, being creative about doing so included adjusting how students were grouped for teachers to deliver the content area instruction. The core classes took priority for middle schools, and elementary schools focused on reading and math. Middle and elementary schools prioritized intervention time in the built-in adjusted schedules.

During the interview, all elementary and middle school principals expressed the view that closing academic gaps would be a gradual process, and some found the district's expectations of achieving an A rating in the Texas accountability system to be overly ambitious. One principal emphasized, "In my personal and professional opinion, fully closing achievement gaps won't be feasible until 2028 or 2029, allowing sufficient time for proper interventions for students" (PM3). Looking ahead, both elementary and middle school principals expressed concerns that, even three years after COVID, numerous students still require fundamental skills in reading and math.

Middle School Scheduling, Delivery of Instruction, and Challenges. Middle school principals shared that in a traditional period, students rotate classrooms. However, post-COVID-19 students were situated in one classroom, thus rotating teachers virtually through the Google Classroom platform, or teachers would rotate to different classrooms. One middle school principal stated, “Virtually students were rotating from one class to another but stayed in the classroom the entire day (PM4). Principals had to get creative with support staff schedules for effective and smooth transitions. One middle school principal shared, “We had to come up with new ways of starting lunch, covering our staff for their duty-free lunch, and making sure that stuff was spread out and no one felt like it would all fall on them " (PM3). According to another

principal, intervention time involved “spending an hour for each subject area where we're teaching those skills from previous years” (PM4).

A middle school principal noted that post-COVID-19, teachers found themselves teaching basic reading skills, letter names, and sounds because students lacked foundational skills. One principal expressed educators' concern before in-person instruction when students were required to participate in remote instruction. A middle school principal describes those instances when, “It was difficult to know if students were getting it, the aha moment, or the frustrating faces. There was a screen, and some students could turn on their cameras or not. How do you know whether they were there “(PM2)? As a result, instructional time was wasted, and academic gaps were created.

As the time came to get students to transition back to in-person instruction, the struggle to bring students back into the school became a challenge. However, the common reason shared by middle school principals was that parents and students no longer valued the importance of being at school. Principal M2 expressed, “We were trying to go ahead, and we're calling the parents that we need the child here.” Another principal stated, “I think it was because the parents didn't want them to come in. The kids don't want to come in. Our numbers, our attendance percentage, were low” (PM4).

Elementary School Scheduling, Delivery of Instruction, and Challenges. Addressing educational disparities posed a challenge for educators, extending beyond students who experienced interruptions in schooling due to COVID to include those embarking on their educational journey in the early childhood grades. As the principal mentioned, while at home, students had options to either fully engage or not through virtual instruction. Elementary principal participants interviewed alleged that attendance was and continued to be a challenge,

which impacted and continued to impact the academic gaps. One reason was due to safety protocols outlining that if a student tested positive for COVID-19, they would have to remain home for five to ten days. On the other hand, an elementary principal shared that as students return to in-person instruction students' perception of school began to shift positively. Principal E9 witnessed the happiness and relief of students as they returned to campus. The principal stated, "Students were happy to be back. I guess they were just at home; some didn't have siblings or just wanted to go back to the library, see the coach, and play sports" (PE9).

In contrast to middle school, where students switch classes, elementary students remain with the same teacher for the entire day. Elementary principals mentioned that it was the teachers who would rotate between classrooms. One principal expressed,

> They didn't want the kids to be coming in and out of the classroom, so the teachers were the ones who would switch because it was easier for them to do so and continue to follow the protocols that the district had in place (PE9).

If a teacher was absent, students would log in to Google Classroom to observe another teacher's instruction, ensuring students received the adequate instruction for the day. Each student had the resources needed to complete their classwork regarding school supplies and materials. An elementary principal shared, "We would have to make sure students had manipulatives to use. Teachers would either baggy the little manipulatives or keep them per child" (PE7). Throughout the COVID pandemic, many students struggled to develop essential literacy skills, impeding their academic progress, and potentially hindering their future success. As students transitioned back to in-person instruction there was an emphasis on addressing basic reading skills. One

principal disclosed, "In second grade, out of 84 students, 60 read below the second-grade level. Among them, 40 read below the first-grade level" (PE6).

Four of the five elementary principals interviewed recognized that the number of special education referrals increased post-COVID, finding a need for more special education teachers. The new State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) redesigned test added to the stress of closing academic gaps. At the district level, principals engaged in instructional rounds. Principals were taken through instructional rounds throughout various campuses that had been super successful regardless of COVID or not, so we mimic those instructional practices" (PE6). Additional interventions, such as tutoring, were necessary to address students' academic disparities. All five elementary principals indicated tutoring, including Saturday camps, occurred three to four times a week. A specific principal noted that every elementary school had the opportunity to participate in the early start year, allowing them to bring in students for instruction two weeks before the official school start. Furthermore, the district had an online academy designed for students who tested positive for COVID and could not attend in-person instruction. Principal E7 shared, "We also had online learning where if students did test positive, then they had the option of connecting to a virtual school and receiving credit for attendance with some instruction." The district aimed to take proactive measures to prevent widening educational gaps.

Funding

All elementary and middle school principals interviewed emphasized the advantageous impact of the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds during the initial three post-COVID years. These funds proved instrumental in covering salaries and bus expenses for early start initiatives, after-school tutoring, and Saturday camps. Additionally, ESSER funds were employed to procure technology and instructional materials, facilitating

practical instruction for students. All elementary and middle school principals shared that funding was not an obstacle to having the resources needed. Principal E7 stated, “When it came to finance, there was more than enough support. We didn't have to worry about allocating funds for transportation and tutoring like it was available for all students because we had the budget”. Two out of the ten principals noted that at the start of in-person instruction, funding posed a challenge as they had to buy protective equipment either from the campus budget or, occasionally, using their funds. However, the ESSER funds brought a welcome financial relief. A principal participant stated, “Once the district went ahead and released some funding to us, the district started to stock open in a warehouse. This helped alleviate that cost because the district will provide it way cheaper, making it more affordable to campuses” (PM5).

Theme Four: Principal Leadership and Planning

Of the ten principals, eight discovered the necessity to modify their leadership styles to effectively navigate the challenges and changes resulting from pre- and post-COVID-19 situations. All eight expressed the need to enhance their understanding of staff and show empathy toward the needs of parents, staff, and students. One principal reflected,

> I changed my leadership style in the respect that I was a lot more open to the emotions that were going on in the school community. I, myself, faced many challenges health-wise. I remember talking to the teachers, you know, being very empathetic to what everybody was going through at the time (PM1).

Furthermore, seven out of ten principal participants concurred that adapting to any situation arising during the restructuring of schools was crucial in the decision-making process. As restructuring occurred through the decision-making process, communication was vital. One

principal mentioned, “I can tell you that we've seen or experienced a change in leadership right from the very top. With that, I have learned and realized the importance of structure, organization, communication, and trust within the educational organization; it affects everybody tremendously” (PE6). Based on principal responses, principals constantly communicated with teachers and staff throughout the restructuring and reopening of the campus.

> PLCs have changed dramatically from COVID to post-COVID and have made another change. Pre-COVID, it was a lot of what the district wanted us to announce and what the district wanted us to turn around, and then, post-COVID, we restructured ourselves, and our conversations more focused on the curriculum itself (PM2).

PLCs were restructured to include all teachers, incorporating special programs teachers such as special education teachers, physical education teachers, and reading specialist teachers. Three principals mentioned that to meet with teachers to plan, they had to find pockets of time to meet, “giving them an extra day of planning or time to discuss data with teachers” (P9). As a result of data meetings, campuses found themselves having to “regroup students and build consistent processes for monitoring the academic progress of students” (P1). Having constant monitoring of student progress and PLC discussions, in turn, led to shared responsibility among educators.

Themes Five: Organizational Health

Organizational health is an organization's capacity to function effectively, cope adequately, change appropriately, and grow from within (Fairman et al., 2011). During the restructuring of schools, school leaders and district leaders needed to focus on maintaining a healthy organizational environment as they transitioned back to in-person instruction. As claimed by Fairman & McLean (2011), Goal Focus, Adaptation, and Cohesiveness were crucial to

gaining the internal commitments necessary for fundamental changes. Principals worked diligently with goals in mind while adapting to the required changes. Organizational health dimensions were intricately woven into the restructuring process, encompassing adaptation, equitable power distribution, efficient resource utilization, morale, innovativeness, autonomy, and problem-solving proficiency.

Cohesiveness

Cohesiveness is the state in which persons, groups, or organizations have a clear sense of identity. Principals expressed a sense of collectively navigating uncharted territories, with district leaders, campus leaders, teachers, and staff metaphorically "building the plane as they were flying it." (PE10). Amid the shift to in-person instruction, principals witnessed the solidarity among their staff and a readiness to assist one another in serving students. Furthermore, despite the challenges posed by a limited pool of substitutes, campus personnel united to support each other in covering classrooms. One principal noted that despite the difficulties in comprehending the necessity to extend help, challenges ultimately forged a sense of togetherness among the staff. She elaborated that “everybody knew that it was not a normal year and that we were all going to be pulled thin, but You know, we did what we had to do” (PE8). Another middle school principal added, “Going into the pandemic was hard, but coming out of it, everybody was stronger together (PM4).” Cohesiveness played a pivotal role in facilitating the adaptation of teachers and staff during the restructuring of campuses in the post-pandemic era.

Adaptation

Teachers worked and learned together as they shifted to a new way of teaching and learning. “The fact that the teachers were willing to learn and adapt positively impacted student achievement in a positive way at the end of the year” (PE). Teachers adapted to new ways of

teaching and learning, incorporating technology, virtual programs, and online resources. Another principal response confirmed the need for educators to adapt and rise to new challenges post-COVID. A principal participant stated, “We needed to change how we provided instruction and delivered instruction, and there was a learning curve, and many teachers resisted, but they had to either get on the, you know, get on it or move on” (PE6).

In the process of restructuring, even principals had to adapt to changes and acclimate their leadership style to one that served the needs of the campus staff. Five participants expressed the need to adjust to technology while restructuring teaching and learning. Staff meetings transition from whole group gatherings to virtual Zoom meetings. Change was inevitable, and every school community member had to evolve. One principal expressed, “Everyone did their best with the knowledge they had. In essence, everyone navigated their role as if it were their first year, regardless of their official title” (PE3).

Communication

Over the past few years, teachers have increasingly sought guidance from their campus leaders. Principal M5 emphasized the importance of leadership in providing essential answers, stating, "As the leader, they look towards you for more answers, which may seem simple to me but are crucial for them." Communication with staff was continuous to ensure everyone had answers to their questions and clear expectations. Moreover, communication was vital to understanding different teachers' and staff perspectives. “Because of trauma and the experiences that they went through, and those are things that we need just to understand and learn to cope with them and help them through it” (PM1). Communication was consistently a focus for administrators when working together in the continuity of teaching and learning. A middle school principal shared,

> We ensured we were always on the same page and kept each other updated, much like our teachers did with their team huddles. To maintain our rating, we had planned daily debriefs and weekly meetings. This helped avoid miscommunication, and everyone needed to be in the loop about what was going on. According to my colleague and me, everyone needed to know what happened. (PE7)

Another principal shared that What's App facilitated instant communication with staff and teachers. She stated,

> It was our WhatsApp that allowed us to communicate quickly. We had a couple of groups and an official campus group. If I need to get the message to everybody, it would be sent out through this platform, and everyone would receive it instantly (PE10).

Problem-Solving Adequacy

Through constant communication, principals took steps to involve teachers in the problem-solving process. Input from staff was obtained by surveying staff and teachers regarding optional rotation schedules. One middle school principal shared that surveys ensured the teachers' voices were amplified and created fairness to help morale. Principal participant stated,

> I did take a survey; what is the fairest way to go? The staff was okay; we'll do a randomizer depending on the number of kids coming in and the number of teachers that need to go in. We all agreed that then it would be the randomizer. That way, there was no room for favoritism or unfairness (PM2).

Another principal shared that decision-making included brainstorming with teachers and developing solutions or procedures. A middle school principal shared,

> Problem-solving included brainstorming that we would do together and problem-solving together. And I would always start the meeting. I remember saying, guys, I want the safest way. How would you feel the safest in doing this? So, they would brainstorm and come and say, no, this is how we want to do it. Okay, then we'll take care of it. We'll do it this way (PM1)

Two out of the ten principals shared that decisions were made by the campus leadership team and relayed to teachers.

Equitable Power Distribution

Establishing practices that allowed teachers' voices to be heard through the restructuring process ensured that teachers had a shared role and equal power in decision-making. Eight of the ten principal participants expressed that one of their goals was to provide relatively equitable influence distribution between leaders and team members. A participant expressed that the restructuring process was a novel experience for everyone, emphasizing that titles didn't matter; what counted was the contribution as campuses collaborated to reopen their doors to students. A principal participant stated, “In the situation we were facing, your role or title didn't matter. If the answer wasn't apparent, we had to work together to find a solution, and your position or title was irrelevant (PE8).

Resource Utilization

Resource utilization involves efficiently organizing and managing resources, especially staff, to minimize stress and strain. It was essential that teachers had the tools necessary to

effectively deliver instruction**.** Based on participants' responses, needed resources were provided to teachers, students, and leaders. Resources include laptops, Wi-Fi, hotspots, TV, curriculum, personal protective equipment, etc. One participant expressed, “All our staff had two devices, sometimes three. I think it's a major plus that everybody had access to a device, whether it was an iPad or notebook or a laptop that everybody had that access” (PM3).

As mentioned by one principal, a safe and seamless transition to in-person instruction required the collective efforts of every team member, especially when there was limited staff. One principal shared, “When needed, it would have to be the coach or coach assistant covering some classes, or we had to team up” (PE9). She further shared, “When the coach had breaks in his schedule, he would meet with fourth and fifth-grade teachers and inquire which kids he could talk to, which ones were not doing good academically?” (PE9).

Innovativeness

Innovativeness occurred in every step of the restructuring process as teachers and leaders transitioned back to in-person instruction and found new ways of structuring teaching and learning. Beginning with the new way of learning through technology, teachers began to innovate, engaging digital lessons through technology.

> The older teachers were set in their ways and not technology savvy but had to learn it. They were forced to learn during this pandemic because this was a new way of teaching. They're still using them because the kids are right before them and still using some of those strategies (PE10).

Even communicating events to parents took an innovative approach where flyers were no longer communicated through paper documents but posted through social media. One principal shared

that as far as flyers and anything like that, everything was shared through Class Dojo or Facebook" (PM4). An elementary principal further clarified that the companies responsible for curriculum adoption had to innovate in creating digital platforms that aligned with teachers' and students' teaching and learning methods. Principal E8 shared,

> The district spoke to Sharon Wells for them to go ahead and make the program available, not in hard copy, but in digital format. Teachers transitioned when we returned to HMH, which also had the digital component.

Innovation played a crucial role as students transitioned to in-person instruction, and the teaching and learning landscape transformed due to COVID-19.

Autonomy

To foster innovation, teachers were granted autonomy in crafting their digital lessons, organizing interventions, forming student groups for interventions, and determining when to provide tutoring to address learning gaps. Teachers were allowed to tutor as much as they felt students needed to close the achievement gaps caused by the interrupted learning during COVID-19. Principal E10 stated, "We were tutoring four days a week, Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, but were not doing Saturdays. I did not want to burn our teachers out." However, teachers and leaders didn't have autonomy regarding learning and using technology. Principal E10 stated, "We had no choice; we had to use and learn it. It was the wave of the future." Another campus principal shared that she gave her teachers the autonomy to choose whether they would join campus faculty meetings virtually on campus or drive home and join virtually from the comfort of their homes.

Morale

Principals shared that teacher morale was low when asked to return to in-person instruction. An elementary principal shared, “Teachers weren't happy about returning to in-person instruction because teachers felt that the district was still putting them in harm's way” (PE8). The principal addressed teachers' concerns by ensuring they had comprehensive safety protocols and procedures to enhance their sense of security. When principals were asked how they felt that teacher and staff morale was at the end of year one post-COVID-19, 8 out of 10 principals shared that morale was at its all-time high. Based on principals ' perceptions, teachers and staff felt a sense of accomplishment in District A.

Goal Focus

Goal Focus is the ability of persons, groups, or organizations to have clarity, acceptance, support, internalization, and advocacy of goals and objectives. One of the elementary principals stated that post-COVID-19, she was serving at a campus in a district nearby. In 2020, post-COVID-19, she began serving at a campus in District A. The experience at both campuses allowed her to conclude that when members of the campus have one goal in mind, there is unity and cohesiveness. She further emphasized that working towards that one goal drove her campus. Principal E9 stated, “I could see the difference from when a campus is very cohesive and has the same goal in mind to when the campus is just kind of like I'm here because I need to be here. It's my job”. She further elaborated that having a common goal allows members of the organization to understand why they do what they do.

Detailed Analysis

This phenomenological study delves into school principals' perspectives during the restructuring process following the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings shed light on the actions

and considerations deemed necessary by principals to maintain a healthy organizational environment, focusing on ensuring the continuity of teaching and learning despite the challenges posed. Through exploration of the research questions surrounding restructuring and continuity of teaching and learning, eight themes emerged, encompassing (1) safety, (2) staffing, (3) academic gaps and interventions, (4) principal leadership and planning, and (5) organizational health each serving the purpose of understanding what steps principals took as they restructured their campus in attempting to strive for students' academic success.

The ten campus principals in this study interpreted their experiences as they navigated the school restructuring during the transition to in-person instruction post-COVID-19. They emphasized the fundamental nature of the strategies and action steps employed to ensure the safety of students and staff while determined to return to a semblance of normalcy. Additionally, they shared their insights into the challenges and successes encountered as they addressed the academic gaps resulting from the disruptions caused by COVID-19. The principals also highlighted the support systems to help teachers cope with the stresses of restructuring teaching and learning post-COVID.

Participants prioritized the development of safety protocols for a smooth transition back to in-person instruction, emphasizing a collaborative effort in implementing measures at both district and campus levels. The focus was on ensuring the safety and well-being of staff, students, and parents. Personal protective equipment, desk shields, and spacing practices were implemented, emphasizing protocol adherence. Communication with parents was crucial, with participants addressing concerns and explaining safety decisions. Protocols for informing parents about COVID-19 cases on campus were established, emphasizing the importance of monitoring children at home to prevent further spread when they reported to school daily. The focus was on

a comprehensive and proactive approach to safety and communication during the transition period.

The transition to in-person instruction posed staffing challenges for schools, with teachers and staff rotating on and off campus. The district allowed rotation schedules, but as in-person attendance grew, so did teacher demand. The district provided professional development and support, alleviating some stress on principals and teachers. Teachers faced professional challenges and emotional tension due to personal and family concerns during the pandemic. Principals recognized the importance of supporting teachers' well-being, offering social-emotional support, mental wellness days, and opportunities for teachers to share their experiences with each other during PLCs or faculty meetings. These further strained resources and limited personnel available to support various aspects of school operations.

Principals observed academic gaps in reading and math as students returned to in-person instruction post-COVID. Despite remote learning, students struggled, prompting a focus on core subjects and intervention blocks. Creative adjustments, such as virtual teacher rotations and redesigned schedules, aimed to maximize instructional time while adhering to safety protocols. Addressing academic disparities, principals emphasized the need for remediation alongside accelerated instruction. The stress of a redesigned State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) test added to the challenges. Principals engaged in instructional rounds and implemented interventions like tutoring and Saturday camps to bridge gaps. Funding from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds played a vital role, covering salaries, transportation, technology, and instructional materials. Despite financial support, principals acknowledged the gradual closing of academic gaps and expressed concerns about achieving ambitious district expectations. Challenges post-COVID included students

needing more foundational skills, disrupted learning, attendance issues due to safety protocols, and changing perceptions of the importance of in-person schooling. Principals recognized the ongoing responsibility to support students' learning amidst these challenges.

The changes in leadership styles and communication strategies were deemed essential in successfully navigating the complexities of the educational landscape during and after the pandemic. Leadership styles were adjusted in response to challenges from both pre- and post-COVID situations. They highlighted the importance of cultivating understanding and empathy towards the needs of parents, staff, and students. Adapting to changes and navigating challenges during school restructuring was considered vital, with effective communication playing a crucial role. Principals acknowledged a shift in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), moving away from district-driven agendas to more focused discussions on curriculum. The restructured PLCs now included all teachers, fostering collaboration and shared responsibility among educators.

The study explored the importance of organizational health during the restructuring of schools in the post-COVID-19 era. Key dimensions such as Cohesiveness, Adaptation, Communication, Problem-Solving Adequacy, Equitable Power Distribution, Resource Utilization, Innovativeness, Autonomy, Morale, and Goal Focus were crucial in navigating the challenges and fostering a healthy organizational environment. Cohesiveness played a pivotal role as educators adapted to new teaching methods, with principals highlighting the unity among staff members. Adaptation was evident as teachers and leaders adjusted to technological changes, emphasizing the necessity to embrace new approaches. Effective Communication was continuous, ensuring clarity and addressing the diverse perspectives of teachers and staff. Problem-Solving Adequacy involves active collaboration, with principals seeking input in

decision-making. Equitable Power Distribution ensured shared influence, emphasizing contributions over job titles or position ranks. Resource Utilization was well-managed, providing necessary resources to support the transition to in-person instruction. Innovativeness permeated the restructuring process, from digital learning to communication strategies. Autonomy was granted to teachers, allowing flexibility in crafting lessons and interventions. Morale, initially low, improved as safety measures were implemented, and teachers felt a sense of accomplishment. Goal Focus emphasized the importance of a shared objective, fostering unity and cohesiveness within the school community. Overall, these dimensions were intricately woven into the restructuring process, contributing to the success of schools in the challenging post-pandemic landscape.

Results

The quantitative portion presents the research findings from data analyses evaluated in this study. Data were analyzed to determine if significant relationships existed between the dependent variable of student performance on STAAR and the independent variables of Organizational Health Inventory scores. Also, data were analyzed to determine if a difference existed between pre-COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 Organizational scores. The demographics of the thirty campuses in which data were examined are presented. Further, tables and charts detailing data collection and the results of data analyses from the correlational analyses, t-test, plot, and whisker box are also included.

Demographics

A total of 30 campus STAAR scores and Organizational Health scores were used in the study. STAAR scores were collected from the Texas Education Agency accountability platform for all thirty schools. Organizational Health Inventory data were requested via open records with

the public information office of district A. Table 1 summarizes campus STAAR average scores. Table 2 summarizes campus pre- and post-COVID-19 Organizational Health scores. Table 3 summarizes the average score per campus by domain.

Data Collection: Tables and Charts

Table 2: STAAR Achievement Scores Pre-COVID and Post-COVID

Campus	School Type	STAAR Achievement Score	Mean Pre-Covid OHI Scores	Mean Post-Covid OHI Scores
1	Middle School	91	43	35
2	Middle School	90	96	90
3	Middle School	86	54	24
4	Middle School	93	81	82
5	Middle School	96	97	81
6	Middle School	92	89	87
7	Middle School	85	64	96
8	Middle School	90	80	92
9	Elementary	92	40	10
10	Elementary	87	84	76
11	Elementary	80	55	82
12	Elementary	96	70	66
13	Elementary	96	69	61
14	Elementary	93	62	49
15	Elementary	84	78	82

Table 2 (Continued)

Campus	School Type	STAAR Achievement Scores	Mean Pre- Covid OHI Scores	Mean Post- Covid OHI Scores
16	Elementary	87	95	31
17	Elementary	94	68	20
18	Elementary	88	91	90
19	Elementary	91	46	69
20	Elementary	87	25	23
21	Elementary	97	68	38
22	Elementary	89	35	18
23	Elementary	87	34	48
24	Elementary	73	59	90
25	Elementary	93	92	93
26	Elementary	89	84	84
27	Elementary	86	98	62
28	Elementary	87	24	81
29	Elementary	83	16	86
30	Elementary	89	82	62

Note. This table demonstrates the average score of State of Texas Achievement of Academic Readiness (STAAR) and Organizational Health Inventory (OHI) data pre and post-COVID-19 for 30 (N=30) campuses in District A.

Table 3: Organizational Health Dimensions Pre-COVID Mean Values for Each of the Thirty Campuses

Campus	Pre GF	Pre OPE	Pre OPE	Pre RES	Pre COH	Pre MOR	Pre INN	Pre AUT	Pre ADA	Pre PSA
1	56	32	45	57	38	45	53	34	47	24
2	99	94	97	98	93	96	99	94	97	93
3	77	62	56	51	56	60	51	31	47	51
4	95	88	88	86	59	69	51	31	47	51
5	99	99	96	98	95	97	92	93	97	98
6	96	91	91	95	98	92	94	76	79	86
7	75	59	66	74	56	70	72	44	65	59
8	94	83	80	79	70	82	92	66	75	76
9	65	36	31	40	61	43	27	19	42	36
10	95	88	87	84	76	91	90	59	88	76
11	87	54	62	61	48	56	59	26	54	40
12	92	66	66	77	60	76	76	46	82	61
13	90	85	65	76	71	83	50	38	60	70
14	87	63	56	73	66	58	58	29	58	66

Table 3 (Continued)

Campus	Pre GF	Pre COM	Pre OPE	Pre RES	Pre COH	Pre MOR	Pre INN	Pre AUT	Pre ADA	Pre PSA
15	89	71	84	85	61	73	85	74	85	67
16	99	98	96	98	91	98	98	87	95	95
17	87	69	57	76	72	69	67	42	68	73
18	99	96	76	98	96	95	94	66	96	90
19	80	41	51	47	44	45	46	28	42	38
20	47	23	20	21	22	20	17	18	30	33
21	90	73	75	73	60	71	67	43	75	56
22	65	24	46	30	29	45	38	21	28	28
23	69	40	20	54	29	33	17	8	23	43
24	84	54	57	68	49	69	56	42	67	56
25	99	91	93	96	85	95	92	82	96	92
26	93	88	88	90	77	88	79	75	85	74
27	99	98	98	99	98	98	98	96	99	96
28	53	18	42	24	9	23	22	14	16	16

Table 3 (Continued)

Campus	Pre GF	Pre COM	Pre OPE	Pre RES	Pre COH	Pre MOR	Pre INN	Pre AUT	Pre ADA	Pre PSA
29	21	20	9	31	22	9	13	6	14	16
30	99	85	72	90	80	74	82	57	95	82

Note. This table demonstrates the average score of each of the 10 Organizational Health Inventory (OHI) domains pre-COVID-19 for 30 (N=30) campuses in District A. GF=Goal Focus, COM= Communication, OPE=Optimal Power Equalization, RES=Resources Utilization, COH=Cohesiveness, MOR=Morale, INN=Innovativeness, AUT=Autonomy, ADA=Adaptation, PSA=Problem Solving Adequacy.

Table 4: Organizational Health Dimensions Post-COVID Mean Values for Each of the Thirty Campuses

Campus	PostGF	Post COM	Post OPE	Post RES	Post COH	Post Mor	Post INN	Post AUT	Post ADA	Post PSA
1	64	37	26	34	28	34	33	24	39	37
2	98	92	91	95	96	90	95	81	78	86
3	22	28	24	28	31	18	31	12	18	25
4	99	98	95	98	95	98	98	90	98	95
5	95	91	83	87	60	80	69	81	88	88

Table 4 (Continued)

Campus	Post GF	Post COM	Post OPE	Post RES	Post COH	Post Mor	Post INN	Post AUT	Post ADA	Post PSA
6	99	96	91	91	90	96	96	81	91	88
7	92	78	79	90	80	90	89	57	83	75
8	95	88	89	92	85	89	90	76	83	84
9	13	10	4	7	28	6	4	3	14	14
10	94	77	69	76	83	76	77	46	83	76
11	83	86	89	88	78	83	90	66	87	70
12	88	76	47	66	76	64	58	41	68	78
13	80	73	50	65	64	57	61	30	59	75
14	53	59	39	62	50	58	52	22	49	47
15	86	80	70	89	78	85	94	78	79	84
16	38	58	11	38	48	30	19	6	19	42
17	24	17	13	9	43	20	24	8	16	21
18	94	89	92	93	92	95	91	77	90	85

Table 4 (Continued)

Campus	Post GF	Post COM	Post OPE	Post RES	Post COH	Post Mor	Post INN	Post AUT	Post ADA	Post PSA
19	93	66	70	77	55	67	81	56	73	53
20	32	33	19	19	16	33	23	10	18	25
21	42	38	36	35	37	49	48	23	41	34
22	26	20	20	19	10	21	13	10	13	28
23	71	68	27	62	54	35	32	18	46	70
24	98	94	92	94	89	94	90	76	89	84
25	96	94	78	90	76	87	88	61	87	86
26	99	93	92	94	91	95	94	83	92	94
27	80	50	68	67	49	60	67	51	78	50
28	94	87	84	81	66	88	84	67	74	81
29	88	92	88	94	86	91	90	62	88	82
30	37	41	37	29	27	30	36	19	26	22

Note. This table demonstrates the average score of each of the 10 Organizational Health Inventory (OHI) domains post-COVID-19 for 30 (N=30) campuses in District A. GF=Goal Focus, COM= Communication, OPE=Optimal Power Equalization, RES=Resources Utilization,

COH=Cohesiveness, MOR=Morale, INN=Innovativeness, AUT=Autonomy, ADA=Adaptation, PSA=Problem Solving Adequacy.

Data were gathered and analyzed for 30 campuses, eight of which were middle schools and twenty-two were elementary schools in District A. Table 1 illustrates the types of schools included in the data collection along with their STAAR achievement score for 2020 and the Organizational Health Scores for 2019 (pre-covid) and scores for 2020 (post-Covid). Table 2 illustrates the pre-COVID scores per dimension for each of the thirty campuses. Table 3 shows 2020 post-COVID-19 post scores per dimension for each of the thirty campuses. The data were utilized to run the data analysis to answer the research questions.

RQ #3: What is the relationship between campus academic achievement measured by STAAR 2022 performance and campus organizational health measured by the Organizational Health Inventory of elementary and middle schools post-COVID-19?

Ho3: There is no relationship between academic performance, as measured by STAAR 2022 scores, and organizational health, as measured by the Organizational Health Inventory scores of elementary and middle schools in one southern school district.

Bivariate Correlation of Independent Samples

A bivariate correlation examined the relationship between STAAR 2022 scores and 2022 Organizational Health Scores in the 30 independent samples. The null was tested with the *t* distribution at the .05 significance level. The obtained correlation coefficient was r =.24; the data failed to reject the null hypothesis. This indicates no relationship exists between STAAR achievement scores and campus organizational health scores.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics and Correlation between STAAR Scores and Organizational Scores

Variable	Mean	S	N	*df*	STAAR	OHI
STAAR	89.03	5.14	30	28	1.00	.24
OHI	63.63	27.01	30	28	.24	1.00

Note. ** Correlation is significant at the .05 level

RQ #4: Is there a difference between pre-Covid and post-COVID-19 Organizational Health scores mean for elementary and middle schools? Based on the data, which organizational domains were affected mainly during the restructuring of schools post-COVID-19?

$H_0$4): There is no difference between pre-COVID and post-COVID campus Organizational health scores for elementary and middle schools.

Paired Sample *t*-test Analysis

A paired sample t-test analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between 2019 and 2022 Organizational Health Scores for 30 independent samples. Paired sample t-test analysis shows an average mean of 65.97 for pre-OHI data, data collected in 2019 before COVID-19, and a 63.60 mean for post-OHI data collected after COVID-19 for 30 samples. For the Pre-Organizational Health Inventory (PREOHI) condition, the standard deviation is 24.16; for the Post- Organizational Health Inventory (POSTOHI) condition, the standard deviation is 27.01. PREOHI condition has a standard error of 4.41; for the POSTOHI condition, the standard error

of the mean is 4.93. The PREOHI condition has a slightly lower standard deviation (24.16) compared to the POSTOHI condition (27.01), suggesting that scores in the PREOHI condition are relatively less variable (see Table 5). The data rejected the null hypothesis ($p < .05$). In this case, the p-values are below the conventional significance level of 0.05. The 95% confidence interval includes zero, indicating that we cannot be confident that there is a true difference between the two groups.

Results of the Paired Sample *t*-test showed that the mean difference between PREOHI and POSOHI scores of elementary and middle schools after the restructuring of schools [*Mean* difference = 2.37, *SD*=28.3, 95% CI (-8.23-12.96)] was not statistically significant at the .05 level of significance (*t*=.46, *df*=29, *p*>.65). The data failed to reject the null he null hypothesis which suggested that there was no difference in the organizational health scores pre and post covid 19 means. (see Table 6).

Table 6: Paired Sample *t*-Test

		Difference							Significance
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean	Std. Dev	Std Error Mean	Lower	Upper	*t*	d*f*	*p*
Pair 1	PREOHI - POSTOHI	2.37	28.37	5.18	-8.23	12.96	.46	29	.651

Note: ** p<.05

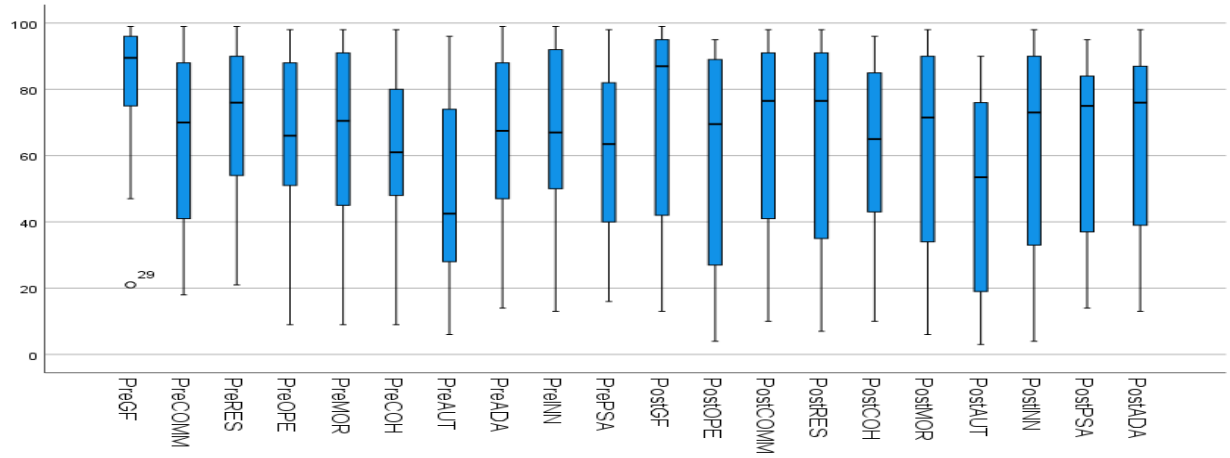

Figure 3: Pre-COVID-19 and Post-COVID-19 Organizational Health Data Score by Domain.

Note. Figure illustrates the pre-covid and post-covid comparison for each of the ten organizational health domains. GF=Goal Focus, COM= Communication, OPE=Optimal Power Equalization, RES=Resources Utilization, COH=Cohesiveness, MOR=Morale, INN=Innovativeness, AUT=Autonomy, ADA=Adaptation, PSA=Problem Solving Adequacy.

Figure 4 is a box and whiskers plot graph that shows if there are any outliers in the ten organizational domains pre- and post-COVID-19. The graph illustrates that most domains are within range except for Pre-Goal Focus (PreGF). This confirms the previous response to whether any domain was affected during the restructuring process.

Table 7: Summary of Research Questions, Null Hypotheses, and Decisions

Questions and Null Hypotheses	Decisions
Research Question 3: Is there a relationship between campus achievement measured by STAAR 2022 performance and campus Organizational Health Inventory of elementary and middle school post-COVID-19?	Failed to Reject $H_0 1$

Table 7 (Continued)

Questions and Null Hypotheses	Decisions
$H_0$3: There is no relationship between academic performance, as measured by STAAR 2022 scores and Organizational Health Inventory scores of elementary and middle schools In one southern school district.	Failed to Reject $H_0$1
Research Question 4: Is there a difference between pre-Covid and post-COVID-19 Organizational Health scores for elementary and middle schools? Based on data, which organizational domains were affected mainly during the restructuring of schools post-COVID-19?	Failed to Reject $H_0$2
$H_0$4: There is no difference between pre-COVID and post-COVID campus Organizational health scores for elementary and middle schools?	Failed to Reject $H_0$2

Therefore, results indicate that all the data failed to reject the null hypothesis. Thus, there is no relationship between academic performance as measured by STAAR 2022 scores and organizational health scores of elementary and middle schools in on southern school district. Further, there is no difference between pre-COVID and post-COVID organizational health scores for elementary and middle schools in District A.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSIONS

The last chapter highlights the researcher's contributions to the current knowledge being developed in the past three years after COVID-19, specifically regarding the restructuring of the school system post-COVID. The focus remains on closing achievement gaps and maintaining the organizational health of the campus. In this study, insights are provided into the principal's perspective on effective strategies exercised during the restructuring of the school in both operational and instructional realms. Moreover, efforts were made to gather principals' perspectives on addressing the challenge of closing academic gaps resulting from the interruption of schooling due to COVID-19. The study also aimed to understand how positive school culture is fostered among teachers, students, and staff.

Additionally, an analyses of student achievement scores were undertaken to determine if there was a relationship between student achievement and the organizational health of a campus. Furthermore, attempts were made to analyze pre- and post-COVID organizational health to ascertain if there was a difference across thirty campuses in District A. This chapter is organized to serve the purpose of the study, detailing the methodology and research design applied, providing a summary of the results, and engaging in a discussion of the literature. Finally, a summary with recommendations is presented.

The Effective Schools Framework developed by the Texas Education Agency and Sustained by Fairman and Mclean (year) served as the basis of this research project. School leadership faced uncertainty about how to ensure continuity of teaching and learning during and

after COVID-19; this study helped to examine the components of these frameworks to help gather the perceptions of campus principals on critical actions and strategies identified that have allowed principals to restructure campus while ensuring teaching and learning.

Purpose of the Study

This study explored principals' perspectives on crucial steps taken during the reopening of schools post-COVID-19, focusing on factors influencing academic success or failure. By examining the organizational culture of schools during restructuring and efforts to close achievement gaps, the research aimed to identify predictors of success/failure in future pandemics. The study investigated adult-led behaviors contributing to effective practices within school organizations, enhancing organizational culture, and improving teaching and learning outcomes, especially in the face of potential disruptions. Through in-depth interviews with principals, the research sought insights into critical actions fostering successful practices during challenging circumstances.

The study was guided by four research questions: (1) What strategies did principals use during the first one hundred days of post-COVID-19 school opening? (2) What are principals' perspectives on central office support and practices contributing to their campus goals of closing achievement gaps after COVID-19? (3) What is the relationship between campus academic achievement measured by STAAR 2022 performance and campus organizational health measured by the Organizational Health Inventory of elementary and middle schools post-COVID-19? (4) Is there a difference between pre-COVID and post-COVID-19 Organizational Health scores for elementary and middle schools? Based on the data, which organizational domains were affected mainly during the restructuring of schools post-COVID-19?

Specifically, the following protocol questions also guided the study: (1) Describe the process or steps you took in reopening your campus post-COVID; (2) What support did you have from central office administration?; (3) What support did you feel was lacking?; (4) What were the most challenging tasks about opening your campus?; (5) From your perspective, what would you say was the greatest factor that impacted academic success in your campus post-COVID?; (6) What was the least contributing factor that impacted academic success? Probes: Why would you say that was a major/least factor for success?; (7) What technical resources were available to faculty for improving teaching and learning?; (8) What instructional resources were available to faculty for enhancing teaching and learning? Probe: How would you say these resources allowed you to accelerate student learning post-COVID to close achievement gaps?; (9) What changed about teaching, learning, and assessment on this campus as a result of post-COVID, if anything?; (10) Are there any characteristics that you associate with faculty that allowed for a successful or unsuccessful transition post-COVID?; (11) What were some of the significant challenges, if any, you or your administration faced in attempting to change teaching and learning practices in closing post-COVID achievement gaps? What were the significant opportunities? Probes: How were barriers overcome? (12) How do you view your organization's culture/climate at this point at the end of year 1 post-COVID-19? (13) Is there anything you might have omitted and would like to share?

Principals' perspectives from this study stipulated the essential steps campus leaders took in restructuring schools post-COVID-19. Equally important were the necessary adjustments to the instructional components to ensure the continuity of learning aimed at closing the achievement gaps caused by school closures during the pandemic. Moreover, it provided a deep dive into leadership styles and behavior needed for effective leadership during a crisis.

Research Design/Methodology

This study exercised a mixed-method research approach, combining qualitative methods with a phenomenological design and quantitative methods with a correlational design. Furthermore, this study examined principals' perspectives on restructuring schools post-COVID-19 while trying to close student academic gaps and maintain a healthy organization. The researcher obtained perspectives from principals' personal experiences through participant interviews. The phenomenological approach was directed towards collecting principals' perspectives, with targeted research questions designed to gather data that served as a guide for identifying themes and findings related to the phenomenon. Furthermore, the study involved the analysis of students' achievement data and organizational health inventory data to determine if a relationship existed between achievement data and organizational health.

The study engaged to (1) identify the practical strategies that ensured student and teacher safety during the first 100 days of transitioning back to in-person instruction after COVID-19; (2) determine supports provided by central office administration as principals and teachers began the restructuring process that yield results in closing achievement gaps; (3) understanding the types and importance of leadership styles adopted and (4) understanding the impact of restructuring on the organizational health of their campuses. To accomplish this objective, I utilized a phenomenology approach to gather principals' perspectives in identifying the strategies, steps, and resources they believed helped them begin to restructure their schools post-COVID-19. I conducted a total of ten interviews using the Zoom virtual platform. The data were collected from ten principals, comprising five middle and five elementary school principals in District A in South Texas. All participants emailed their consent forms after being provided with the purpose of the study and eligibility to participate.

Interviews were utilized to gather data and analyze themes. First, the interviewers were transcribed from the recording. Additionally, I ensured that the transcription captured the principals' responses accurately by providing them with a copy of the transcription for participants to verify their responses. Next, I utilized INVIVO coding software to run the data and code into themes. I engaged myself in the data by manually analyzing the transcripts and identifying common themes to validate the data. The following themes included (1) safety, (2) staffing, (3) academic gaps and interventions, (4) principal leadership and planning, and (5) organizational health.

The five themes emerged from interviews conducted with school principals and the subsequent analysis of their transcripts. These sections will outline the results, their connection to existing literature, limitations, and the implications of the findings, along with recommendations for future research.

For the quantitative portion of the study, Organizational Health Data from thirty campuses in District A were obtained through the district's open records request system. Student achievement data were collected through the Texas Assessment Management System. Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Question three was tested using a bivariate correlation test to determine if there was a relationship between campus academic achievement measured by STAAR 2022 performance and campus organizational health measured by the Organizational Health Inventory of elementary and middle schools post-COVID-19. Question four was tested using an independent t-test analysis to determine if there was a difference between pre-COVID and post-COVID-19 Organizational Health scores for elementary and middle schools. Further, to validate the data, a whisker plot box was used to

determine if any outliers in the organizational domains were affected mainly during the restructuring of schools post-COVID-19.

Summary of the Findings

Five themes were generated from the data provided by principals in District A in South Texas. The outcomes underscore the crucial role of campus principals in (1) ensuring a safe and secure learning environment for students and staff, (2) ensuring that the school has a qualified and motivated team along with providing professional development opportunities for continuous improvement, (3) work closely with teachers to develop strategies that support struggling students to improve overall student achievement, (4) develop systems of effective communication and collaboration through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and (5) fostering a positive school culture that is conducive to teaching and learning. Principal responses were included in Chapter 4 to provide the readers with the context needed to understand the phenomenon.

The quantitative data analysis findings failed to reject the $H_0$3: There is no relationship between academic performance, as measured by STAAR 2022 scores and Organizational Health Inventory scores of elementary and middle schools in one southern school district. Therefore, based on the data, there is no relationship between academic performance, as measured by STAAR 2022 scores, and Organizational Health Inventory scores of elementary and middle schools in a specific southern school district. The statistical analysis that was conducted did not provide sufficient evidence to conclude that there is a significant relationship between academic performance and Organizational Health Inventory scores.

The second finding from the quantitative data analysis failed to reject the $H_0$4: There is no difference between pre-COVID and post-COVID campus Organizational health scores for

elementary and middle schools. Statistical analysis conducted did not provide sufficient evidence to conclude that there is a significant difference between pre-COVID and post-COVID campus Organizational Health scores for elementary and middle schools. Despite the absence of disparity in pre and post-COVID Organizational Health Index (OHI) scores, this reinforces the positive impact of utilizing Fairman and McLean's organizational health model in campuses and districts like those examined in the study. District A, which had been implementing the Sustained Systemic Success Model for a decade with a clear focus on its ten dimensions, demonstrated consistent implementation of these domains despite the crisis, enabling the organization to sustain its healthy organizational health.

Discussion of the Results of the Literature

The findings of this study were connected to literature related to the impact of COVID-19 on the school system and student achievement. The first research question allowed the principal participants to identify the strategies utilized during the first 100 days of school as they began to restructure the school's environment and instructional component. The study aligned with the findings of Chiptin & Karoui (2021) regarding principals' decision-making processes, which were observed to be grounded in four essential needs: maintaining safety measures, preserving the quality of education, fostering equity within schools, and ensuring efficient school capacity. In the study, participants agreed that every decision was driven by the necessity to prioritize safety and ensure uninterrupted learning during in-person instruction.

Schachner et al. (2020) asserted that for schools to reopen and resume in-person learning safely, it was essential to decrease the number of face-to-face interactions between school staff and students. To minimize interactions between students and staff, principals restricted access to open areas of the campus, focusing activities within classrooms. This adjustment was facilitated

through the adoption of hybrid learning models. The study identified the most utilized hybrid models, as Barlett (2021) suggested, as the parallel and blended hybrid models. In the parallel hybrid model, students were divided into remote groups for certain subjects, occasionally interacting with subject area teachers and classroom teachers. Additionally, teachers and students frequently engaged in parallel hybrid learning, where students attended classes in person while others participated remotely, requiring teachers to instruct both groups simultaneously. Regarding staffing, at the onset of 2020, both elementary and middle school teachers followed alternating schedules, alternating between teaching in person and teaching from home.

However, there were significant challenges for those students receiving instruction at home. Research on inequality and inequity among students concluded that there was a lack of internet access or resources during remote learning (Chiptin & Karoui, 2021; Chatzipanagiotou & Katsarou, 2023). My research findings highlighted the inequality and inequity among campuses within one district. It is telling that even with one district, due to the locations of campuses, students faced the challenges of connectivity infrastructures needed to continue learning during remote learning. However, other factors, such as unstable home environments or student's motivation, could have contributed to the possibility that students may have fallen behind. Therefore, from the principals' perspective, this inequality created more significant pockets of learning gaps in students who received education in the rural north side of the district.

In a previous research study by Chatzipanagiotou and Katsarou (2023), schools faced significant challenges such as insufficient infrastructure and equipment, inadequate funding resources, and a lack of solid planning, which left school leaders feeling unprepared, helpless, and dismayed as they struggled to adapt quickly. On the contrary, principals in District A found that all resources, from technology to personal protective equipment, were provided to students

and teachers. Furthermore, Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) grant funds provided by the federal government allowed districts to invest in students' safety and the continuity of learning.

Researchers Shanchner et al. (2020) and Chatzipanagioutu and Katsarou (2023) found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, schools had to develop new communication strategies with parents due to closures and subsequent reopening. Similarly, participants in our study recognized the pivotal role of parent-school communication. Principals emphasized the importance of ensuring parents were informed about safety protocols and the significance of their children returning to in-person instruction. A strategy to reassure parents of what procedures were in place was creating a YouTube video by one of the principals explaining the protocols to the parents. This communication strategy instilled trust in the school system by inviting parents to witness a typical school day for their children and ensuring the implementation of comprehensive safety measures. Another effective strategy for maintaining communication with parents involved utilizing social media platforms such as Facebook campus pages or the school's website in both English and Spanish. By leveraging social media, parents stay informed about significant events, important dates, and updates. With restrictions on campus visitors due to COVID-19, principals and teachers had to revert to traditional methods like making phone calls to communicate with individual parents in their native language. Communication with parents and stakeholders facilitated the transition back to in-person instruction and proper implementation of protocols. Effective communication in both English and Spanish enhances trust between parents and the school community.

The second research question aimed to understand the support received from central office leaders and the practices contributing to their campus goals of closing achievement gaps

after COVID-19 while maintaining a healthy organization during the restructuring process. Principals in this study shared a turnover rate of losing at least one teacher post-COVID when teachers were instructed to return to in-person instruction. This finding aligned with the research conducted by NAE (year), which found that 44% of public schools reported having at least one teaching vacancy at the beginning of 2022, and over 50% of those vacancies were due to resignations. In the study, all the vacancies were due to resignations. Although this study showed minimal vacancies, additional staff were needed at all campuses during the restructuring of campuses to ensure the safety protocols were implemented and the learning continued. Thus, central office staff was assigned to each campus to help with the staffing needs.

In this study, principals underscored the immense responsibility they experienced in their decision-making process on safety protocols and learning continuity due to the realization that individuals' lives were at stake. Moreover, the obligation to guarantee students' success in mastering the state assessment by the end of the school year introduced additional pressure for both principals and teachers as they concentrated on maintaining continuity in learning. Principal participants' responses aligned with Kim et al. (2022) research, which found that one of the primary stressors identified by participants was the workload associated with maintaining a safe classroom environment while also addressing the academic gaps that emerged during the pandemic. Like that research, this research identified that having this dual responsibility placed significant pressure on principals and teachers as they navigated the complexities of implementing new teaching and learning strategies amidst ongoing health concerns. Additionally, principals shared that every situation was different and, therefore, depending on the situation, their response was different. However, supporting teachers was an emotional burden, further compounding the challenges of returning to teaching in a post-COVID environment.

Furthermore, principals found challenges when district-directed situations or protocols were not campus-initiated.

Principals' perspectives highlighted the perceived unfairness of district policies regarding the return to campus, with some teachers being required to return earlier than others. This disparity in treatment contributed to the overall stress experienced by teachers as they grappled with the implications of these decisions on their workload and personal well-being. As indicated in the study conducted by Michalache and Michalche (2022), organizations should exhibit responsiveness and support towards their employees during crises, emphasizing the significant influence of organizational responses on employee well-being. Principal participants in this research confirmed the necessity of support systems. Principals were tasked with providing support systems for teachers while restructuring the academic setting, which proved vital for these campus administrators. The results suggest that principals needed to provide teachers with the tools, resources, and time to voice their concerns during the restructuring process. Taking a collaborative approach was crucial in developing learning communities. As Berry's (2020) research suggests, the research also found that granting teachers time for collaboration allowed the facilitation of training and support for teachers. Building Professional Learning Communities (PLC) became a focus for campuses as decision-making occurred, thus moving forward in addressing students' academic gaps.

Professional development during the redesign of digital instructional materials facilitated the professional growth of teachers in an era where technology integration was at the forefront of teaching and learning. Collaborative efforts from top content area curriculum and instruction coordinators to campus teachers help support teachers' understanding and redesign of the student-facing instructional materials. Thus, this validates Defour's (2016) research on the PLC

process in which principals' mindsets turned around and supported the campus as instructional leaders. As a result, the role of the principals post-COVID-19 has shifted to principals as leaders of learning; consequently, as leaders of learning, emphasis was placed on closing academic achievement gaps.

As explained by the participants in this study, the ESSER funds provided the money necessary for principals and teachers to support students and improve student achievement by creating interventions that allowed them to accelerate student learning. Strategic interventions included early start school, morning tutorials, Saturday camps, and after-school tutoring. Early start school provided students with additional school days of instruction that were designed to help students review the previous year's content area instruction before the beginning of the current school year. Morning tutorials included students working on a web-based program for thirty minutes that addressed the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) students lacked. Afterschool tutorials and Saturday camps were designed to accelerate students' learning and close the achievement gaps caused by interrupted schooling. After-school tutorials were held three to five days a week for about an hour and a half to two hours. Teachers conducted tutorials using supplemental resources targeting their tier two and three students. Tier two students needed interventions, and tier three students were identified as needing intense interventions. Saturday campus was mainly held in the second semester of the school year after the middle of the year benchmark assessment. Based on benchmark assessment data, students were identified for additional interventions on Saturdays. Saturday camps included four hours of instruction in a more engaging environment. Students were provided with breakfast and lunch meals along with transportation. Students were given ten-minute breaks between rotations to move around and stretch. Students' names were entered into weekly raffles for the chance to win prizes. Teachers

would rotate students and conducted more hands-on lessons to ensure students would attend to get the help they needed. During the rotation, activities address one skill at a time. Hands-on activities included students engaging in pair or group activities that included building models, conducting experiments, math centers, math games, using manipulatives, literature circles, vocabulary activities, literacy centers, and interactive digital summative assessment using quizzes or Kahoot.

Emphasis was placed on finding pockets of time during the regular school instructional schedule to provide targeted and individualized instruction to students by adjusting schedules and grouping. Middle school principals created an additional intervention period of 45 minutes during the day for interventions. Elementary school principals utilized more of a pull-out system with reading and math interventionists servicing the students from 30 to 45 minutes daily. Another avenue that elementary school principals identified finding pockets of instruction was to have a 30-minute time slot in their schedule where students were regrouped amongst the grade level team for intervention time. This strategy further created a shared ownership of student success amongst teachers.

Abraham et al. (2021) emphasized the significance of administrators fostering solid bonds with their teachers to uphold organizational well-being. Principal participants frequently highlighted the necessity of modifying their leadership approach to emphasize relational, adaptive, and servant leadership qualities. The personal and professional adversities posed by the pandemic forged a sense of unity within the school community. By empathizing with each other's circumstances, teachers and administrators could navigate challenges together, fostering a positive and healthy organizational culture focused on closing achievement gaps. These findings validated Pearce's (2023) article, which analyzed the heavy weight of COVID-19 on school

leadership, emphasizing the importance of remaining empathetic yet informative and sincere throughout the pandemic. Amidst the restructuring of schools' post-pandemic, campus principals found that cultivating a culture of shared vision and open communication while balancing empathy with clarity emerged as a pivotal strategy.

According to Thompson et al. (2016), scaffold craftsmanship involves the techniques and procedures utilized in reorganization, addressing decision-making aspects such as scheduling, student assignments, teaching methodologies, and personnel management. During the restructuring process, post-COVID-19, principals embarked on this process with open communication and clarity and gathering teacher input. Surveys were utilized to gather input from teachers, which was subsequently shared with them, guiding decision-making processes based on their feedback. Principals in this study prioritized the pursuit of equitable solutions to ensure that teachers felt acknowledged and listened to which authenticates Fairman and Mclean's research. Strategies to foster communication included a weekly newsletter allowing all campus members to receive updates and protocols. Staff meetings and grade-level meetings increased in frequency compared to pre-pandemic times. Principals opted for virtual platforms like Zoom and Google Meets to facilitate these meetings, ensuring continuity while avoiding in-person gatherings. While emphasizing effective instruction, principals discovered that teachers required emotional support. Teachers were given time to express their feelings or engage in mental well-being activities led by the school counselors. These findings aligned with Berry's (2020) study, which emphasizes the importance of focusing on the educational transformation from the inside, not disruption from the outside. Internal occurrences within the organization directly impact its members, and the principal's role changed from managerial to personal relations leader.

Implications for the Theory and Results of Practice

Chapter I explained two campus sustainability models, emphasizing enhancing and upholding student achievement. These models include Fairman and Mclean's (2003) Sustained Systemic Success Model and The Effective School Framework, a conceptual framework created by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The results of this study align with models such as The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (2009), which identified critical success factors for school turnaround: governance, environment, leadership, and organization. Both The Sustained Systemic Success Model and the Effective Schools Framework comprehensively address each of these critical success factors, as discussed in the following section.

The Sustained Systemic Success Model

The Sustained Systemic Success Model by Fairman and Mclean (2003) addressed the importance of school systems having constructs to ensure a healthy organization that produces appropriate student outcomes. Fairman and McLean's framework focuses on ten dimensions: adaptation, goal focus, cohesiveness, communication adequacy, optimal power equalization, resource utilization, morale, innovativeness, autonomy, and problem-solving adequacy (Fairman & McLean, 2002). Fairman & Mclean defined each of the dimensions for members of an organization as follows: 1) goal focus having clarity, acceptance, support, internalization, and advocacy of goals and objectives; 2) cohesiveness is having a clear sense of identity; 3) adaptation coping with the demands of the environment; 3) communication adequacy exists when information is relatively distortion-free; 4) optimal power equalization is a relatively equitable influence distribution between leaders and team members; 5) resource utilization is coordinating and maintaining inputs; 6) morale is a feeling of well-being, satisfaction, and

pleasure; 7) innovativeness allow others to be inventive, diverse, creative, and risk-taking 8) autonomy is the freedom to fulfill their roles and responsibilities; 9) problem-solving adequacy is ability to perceive and solve problems with minimal energy (Fairman & McLean, 2002, p. 94-95). Fairman and McLean believe three fundamental dimensions are crucial for an organization: goal focus, adaptation, and cohesiveness to improve student outcomes. These three dimensions are aligned with the first and most crucial leadership belief of Fairman & McLean's model. Leadership Belief 1 (LB1) states, "We believe all decisions should be consistent with our mission and goals, data-based, anchored in sound theory and practice, and focused on what is best for the short and long-term interests of all students" (Fairman & McLean, 2003,19).

The research indicates that navigating the challenges posed by COVID-19 in schools, alongside the uncertainty experienced by campus principals and teachers during the transition to in-person instruction, was crucial for the restructuring process. During this period, the primary drivers for campus leaders were maintaining safety, addressing academic disparities, and guiding their decision-making process. Through restructuring the instructional and operations aspects of the school system, communication adequacy through different venues ensured that school personnel were informed and were part of the decision-making process, indicating problem-solving adequacy. Furthermore, principals' responses supported the need to have adequate resources and allow teachers the autonomy to be innovative as they resigned their lessons to the new form of teaching and learning, allowing for a collaborative approach.

Collaboration through professional learning communities facilitated the process of ensuring teachers' voices were heard by school principals and fostered a collaborative approach to change. Furthermore, it allowed campus principals and staff to ensure that students' achievement was the focus that led their discussion, decisions, and actions as they restructured

their campuses. This study's principal perspectives findings suggest that central office content areas were vital in redesigning the curriculum and helping teachers internalize the implementation plans of newly adopted curriculum designs. The Sustained Systemic Success Model findings affirm that addressing each dimension in the restructuring process and, thus, how a campus operates can help maintain organizational health of the campus. As previously discussed, the quantitative data supports Fariman and McLean's theory that organizational health facilitates optimal campus functioning, which is rooted in each dimension. This is similar to the Effective Schools framework, which provides campus leaders with essential actions that need to be in place to ensure student outcomes.

The Effective School Framework

The Effective School Framework is a research-based model that focuses on the effective practices of principals as instructional leaders. School districts and schools must adhere to a series of commitments and accompanying actions to guarantee the success of their educational institutions. These commitments encompass: (1) fostering robust school leadership and strategic planning, (2) implementing strategic staffing practices, (3) cultivating a positive school culture, (4) providing high-quality materials and assessments, and (5) delivering effective instruction.

When aligning the findings to the Effective School Framework it was telling the importance of implementing safety protocols to maintain consistent practices regarding school leadership and planning. Furthermore, it stresses the significance of the cohesive functioning of administrative leadership teams to facilitate two-way communication and ensure the effective dissemination of directives and completion of tasks. Strategic staffing is vital for placing personnel in suitable roles to optimize the utilization of all school staff members. This approach aims to enable campus principals to effectively address academic gaps by leveraging the skills

and expertise of all staff members. Establishing a positive school culture for students and teachers, with clear protocols and expectations, supports a smooth transition to in-person instruction. Enforcing attendance expectations for parents and students marks a noticeable departure from the negative disengagement habits fostered by online learning, fostering a more positive attitude towards education. Lastly, this research suggests that customizing instruction to meet student's specific needs and adapting instructional materials empowers teachers to narrow achievement gaps effectively.

The study underscores the significance of individuals demonstrating empathy and understanding towards others as they navigate through a pandemic and the uncertainties associated with restructuring to ensure the continuity of teaching and learning. During such times, principals' responsibilities extended beyond mere managerial duties to ensure all stakeholders' mental well-being, necessitating a shift in their role towards one that prioritized emotional intelligence. While the central office administrators and state accountability department expected the achievement gaps to be closed within a year, it is crucial to recognize that school interruptions would require time to address. Consequently, campus principals prioritized both interventions and accelerated instruction. Of paramount importance is the examination of a campus's organizational health during the process of closing achievement gaps and navigating school restructuring. It became apparent that having protocols and processes in place to address each of the ten dimensions before the pandemic contributed to the sustained health of the campuses over the past few years. Thus, validating the importance of campus and district engaging and adopting an organizational health framework and a possible alignment to an Effective School framework. These processes and structures ensure that schools will continue to function effectively when faced with a predicament. Most important is building principals'

capacity to deal with emergencies and districts creating plans for all types of foreseen emergencies.

Based on the findings of the study, having an organizational health inventory tool to survey and address the culture of a campus can help ensure sustainability in the daily practices and in the continuity of organizational components in the event of new initiatives or restructuring. Adopting and implementing PLCs ensures that a focus on student achievement is a shared responsibility between all campus stakeholders. Ensuring constant communication with parents ensures that parents have a commitment to the campus initiatives, understanding the purpose and the impact it has on their child's well-being. Policymakers at the Texas Education Agency should consider that in challenging times such as the pre-COVID and post-COVID era, academics come second to the well-being of teachers, students, and staff. More training for principals on emotional intelligence and crisis management techniques could benefit principals in responding to the social, emotional well-being of teachers and students. Implementing social emotional programs at campus can help develop these skills prior to crisis. These policymakers need to understand that STAAR redesign expectations were unrealistic and that closing academic gaps at the foundational level took priority. If another crisis arises, policymakers need to consider the benefits that funding provides to the campus to ensure safety, continuity of teaching and learning, and student achievement. Furthermore, campus administrators and district personnel should work to have emergency plans available for possible crises that outline the most effective practices to utilize and protocols that will help them navigate these challenges. However, practitioners can never really be fully prepared for an event that might not have been faced before or unknown, such as COVID-19.

Recommendations for Future Research

Considering the insights gained from this study on school principals' responses to the COVID-19 crisis and its implications for academic outcomes, this section provides recommendations for future

research. The study's implications suggest avenues for further research to broaden the understanding of post-COVID-19 campus restructuring. Expanding the research to encompass different school districts' principal perspectives could provide a more comprehensive view of challenges faced by campus principals nationwide. Moreover, researchers may consider incorporating teachers' perspectives alongside those of principals, enabling a more thorough understanding of effective strategies for mitigating achievement gaps and fostering organizational health. A notable theme that emerged during interviews centered on the increased special education referrals for students, including four and five-year-olds entering the school system. While not directly aligned with the current study, this theme presents a valuable opportunity for future research exploration to determine the effects of COVID-19 on students' achievement levels. Further studies focusing on students' motivation or home support could provide insightful data to understand this phenomenology.

Another aspect worthy of further investigation is the potential influence of teacher burnout or diminished morale on student achievement. Since teachers play a significant role in shaping student outcomes, exploring the link between educator well-being and academic performance could provide valuable insights. While this study did not extensively delve into the relationship between teachers and student achievement, there remain opportunities for future research to delve deeper into this area.

The study focused on one year of post-COVID-19 data to analyze achievement and organizational health. A potential avenue for extended research involves examining data over a more extended period. This approach would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term effects, allowing for accumulating quantitative data with a larger sample size for more robust conclusions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has provided valuable insights into the multifaceted challenges faced by schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent restructuring processes. Several key themes have emerged by examining the strategies employed by campus principals and their teams and the support received from central office leaders. The study underlines the complex nature of campus principals' decision-making post-COVID, emphasizing the importance of addressing workload concerns, supporting teachers' emotional well-being, and ensuring equitable policies and practices within educational institutions.

Firstly, maintaining safety protocols and clear communication channels cannot be overstated. Principals played a crucial role in implementing safety measures and ensuring all stakeholders were informed and involved in decision-making. Additionally, the study highlighted the significance of adapting instructional practices to meet the evolving needs of students, particularly in addressing academic gaps exacerbated by the pandemic.

Furthermore, the findings underscored the critical role of support systems for teachers who faced heightened workloads and emotional stressors during the transition to in-person instruction. Collaborative approaches to professional development and the provision of resources were identified as essential components in supporting teachers and promoting their professional growth.

Although the quantitative data findings imply that the Organizational Health Inventory scores of schools in the district do not appear to have a meaningful impact on academic performance, as measured by STAAR scores based on principals' perspectives and findings, the organizational health of the campus creates the environment for continuous improvement. Moreover, the data indicates that the Organizational Health scores of schools within the district

did not exhibit significant changes from the pre-COVID to the post-COVID period, thus affirming that the structures and systems were already established to sustain the campus's organizational health, as observed prior to the onset of COVID.

Moreover, the study shed light on the disparities in access to resources and educational opportunities among students, particularly in rural areas. Efforts to bridge these gaps, such as strategic interventions funded by initiatives like the ESSER grants, were instrumental in accelerating student learning and narrowing achievement gaps.

Overall, the research highlights the resilience and adaptability of school communities in the face of unprecedented challenges. By fostering unity, open communication, and a shared commitment to student success, campus principals played a pivotal role in navigating the complexities of the pandemic and guiding their schools toward a brighter future. These findings contribute to the growing body of literature on effective school leadership and provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders seeking to support schools in times of crisis and beyond.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

NOTICE OF APPROVAL – INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS (IRB)

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
Institutional Review Board

December 13, 2023

Alma Perez-Campos, Principal Investigator
Department: College of Education
Via Electronic Routing System

Dear Principal Investigator:

RE: EXEMPT DETERMINATION FOR IRB-23-0411 "NAVIGATING SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING IN THE POST-COVID ERA: A PRINCIPAL'S PERSPECTIVE IN SUSTAINING ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH WHILE BRIDGING THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT GAP"

The study in reference has been determined 'Exempt' under the Basic HHS Policy for Protection of Human Research Subjects, 45 CFR 46.104(d). The determination is effective as of the date of this letter within the exempt category of:

> *"(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) and*
>
> *(i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;*
>
> *(ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; "*

Research that is determined to be 'Exempt' under the Basic HHS Policy for Protection of Human Research Subjects is not exempt from ensuring protection of human subjects. The Principal Investigator (PI) is responsible for the following through the conduct of the research study:

1. Assuring that all investigators and co-principal investigators are trained in the ethical principles, relevant federal regulations, and institutional policies governing human subjects' research.
2. Disclosing to the subjects that the activities involve research, and that participation is voluntary during the informed consent process.
3. Providing subjects with pertinent information (e.g., risks and benefits, contact information for investigators, and IRB/ORC) and ensuring that human subjects will voluntarily consent to participate in the research when appropriate (e.g., surveys, interviews).
4. Assuring the subjects will be selected equitably, so that the risks and benefits of the research are justly distributed.
5. Assuring that the privacy of subjects and confidentiality of the research data will be maintained appropriately to ensure minimal risk to subjects.

Exempt research is subject to the ethical principles articulated in The Belmont Report, found at the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) Website: www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/belmont.html

Unanticipated Problems: Any unanticipated problems or complaints must be reported to the IRB promptly. Further information concerning unanticipated problems can be found in the IRB procedures manual.

Post Approval Monitoring: Your study is subject to post-approval monitoring. This monitoring is conducted to ensure that research activities continue to align with the approved protocols, ethical guidelines, and regulatory requirements. Your cooperation in facilitating this monitoring process is essential in maintaining the highest compliance standards and ethical conduct in research.

Continuing Review: research deemed 'Exempt' is not subject to annual review by the IRB.

Modifications: Any change to your protocol requires a Modification Request (Amendment) for review and approval prior to implementation. The IRB may review the 'Exempt' status at that time and request an application for approval as non-Exempt research.

Closure: Please notify the IRB when your study is complete through submission of a final report. Upon notification, we will close our files pertaining to your study.

If you have any questions, please contact the Human Subjects Protection Program/IRB by phone at (956) 665-3598 or via email at irb@utrgv.edu.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research
Office of Research Compliance/cr

Research Compliance

MRIOB 4th Floor
701 E. Expressway 83
McAllen TX 78501
(956) 665-3494

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VITA

Alma Alicia Perez-Campos obtained her Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies degree with a minor in Bilingual/Bicultural Education from the University of Texas-Pan American, Edinburg, Texas, in May 2004. She began her education career in August 2004, passionately teaching 3rd, Kinder, & Pre-Kinder at Flores Elementary. Driven by her love for learning and teaching, she pursued a master's degree and proudly earned a Master of Education degree from the University of Texas-Pan American in May 2008.

Alma dedicated six years as an Assistant Principal and four as a Campus Principal. In July 2023, she became an Exceptional School Lead at Region One Education Service Center, aiming to impact educators globally. Her commitment to school leadership led her to seek a Region 1 Education Service Center position.

In May 2024, Alma achieved a significant milestone by earning a Doctor of Education from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Currently residing in Mission, Texas, she takes pride in being the mother of Abigail and Pedro Ortiz. If you need to contact the author, you may do so by email at almaaperez@yahoo.com.