

# **PUBLIC SCHOOL LEADERSHIP DURING A PANDEMIC: THREE CASE STUDIES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The reality of COVID-19 has required schools to become more aware of the financial and resource disparities among school districts and among students. The board of education for each school district operates to serve the different wants and needs of their constituents. This study examines different leadership styles exhibited during the COVID-19 pandemic through three case studies. Based on the interviews with the board members of these school districts in California, USA, the study anticipates that distinctive leadership styles lead to specific program development. The findings will contribute to the public administration literature and provide valuable resources for academic leaders.

**Keywords:** leadership, pandemic, school district, crisis

## **INTRODUCTION**

The reality of COVID-19 has required schools to be aware of the financial and resource disparities between school districts and individual students. Students from economically disadvantaged communities are especially challenged. As a result, the board of education, for each respective school, operates to serve the different wants and needs.

This study will examine distinct leadership styles for navigating unpredictable adaptive challenges. Leadership styles may be distinguished as the following: (1) Instructional Style, (2) Structuring Style, (3) Participative Style, (4) Entrepreneurial Style, and (5) Personnel Development Style (Pashiardis & Brauckmann, 2019). First, instructional style establishes a goal-oriented environment. By monitoring students and teachers, leaders who exhibit an instructional style stimulate instructional innovation, and achievement of instructional objectives. Leaders who see crises as strategic opportunities for innovation, and using new technologies and techniques are the ones that can gain a competitive advantage (Dumulescu & Mutiu, 2021). Second, the participative style focuses primarily on fostering staff cooperation through brokering and mediating as well as promoting commitment. This form of leadership can improve the quality and rapidity of decisions while increasing the sense of empowerment and motivation of each team (Kezar & Holcomebe, 2017). Third, the structuring style highlights the establishment of rules. With a clarity of the vision and mission, leaders who follow this style enable

restructuring and risk-taking behavior to achieve such goals. Fourth, entrepreneurial style focuses on parental involvement and external factors. The prime way to make an entrepreneurial style effective is by acquiring resources, coalition building, and marketing. Lastly, the personnel development style emphasizes acknowledgment which as a result leads to self-efficacy. This can be accomplished through assessment and training.

Specifically, the research questions are: (1) What types of leadership styles have exhibited at school district boards during COVID-19? (2) What factors have influenced the decisions of school district leaders? (3) How do different leadership styles of the district boards affect teacher engagement and student learning during COVID-19?

## **METHODS**

Data will be collected from interviews with school board members from three school districts in California, USA: Long Beach Unified School District (Los Angeles County), Santa Ana Unified School District (Orange County) and Oakland Unified School District (Alameda County). These school districts are selected based on their geographic locations, enrollment, student economic background, and ethnic diversity. All school board members in the school districts for whom email addresses are publicly available on the school districts' websites or obtained through email or phone contacts will be invited to the interviews. The study has been approved by the CSUDH Institutional Review Board (IRB).

We anticipate conducting 5-7 interviews from December 2021 to February 2022, at least one interview from each of the three school districts. Qualitative content analysis procedures will be applied to analyze the interview transcripts. Three researchers will complete the coding and check inter-coder reliability.

## **FINDINGS**

COVID-19 has created obstacles and opportunities for school boards to demonstrate diverse leadership styles. For example, academic leaders who apply the instructional style to their leadership may prioritize the usage of new technology and innovation, while leaders who choose to include the participative and/or entrepreneurial style in their leadership may focus on fostering staff cooperation and parental involvement. The findings of this study not only contribute to the literature but also provide valuable resources for academic leaders managing a public crisis.

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