

Leading in a Time of Crisis: Stories of Resilience from the Field

Presented by
Dr. Jami Berry and Dr. Karen Bryant
University of Georgia

*at the New Zealand Educational Administration and Leadership Society's
Bi-Annual Conference
University of Waikato
Hamilton, New Zealand
September 8, 2022*



UNIVERSITY OF
GEORGIA

Authored by

Jami Berry, Karen Bryant, Jermaine Blakley, Grelauris Calcano, Ellyce Cone, Rick Fowler, Tifane Johnson, Sean Schinella, Leilani Scott, Markita Spikes, and Carol Williams

The University of Georgia



UNIVERSITY OF
GEORGIA

Guiding Questions

What have YOU learned or taken away from leading during a crisis?

How do these learnings align with our findings?

What have YOU learned from your students?

What impact have YOUR learnings had on YOUR practice?



Overview

ISLDN Project

Entering Second Decade

Three Strands - Building on Existing ISLDN Research, Comparative Analysis of ISLDN Research Studies, and the Impact of COVID-19 on the Professional Practice of School Leaders

Interviews of Nine School and District Leaders

Preliminary Data



Literature Review

Flexibility

Relationship Building

Changing Responsibilities



Literature Review - Flexibility

Flexibility is a requisite skill for school leaders; however, it was stretched in new ways during the COVID-19 pandemic (Dunn, 2020; Haron et al., 2022).

Rajbhandari and colleagues (2014) explain leaders must be, “flexible and mobile to address the immediate issues existing in the contextual variations... particularly in educational settings” (p. 9).



Literature Review – Relationship Building

One principal recalled they had never, “spent so long talking to families” (Beauchamp et al., 2021, p. 385).

Another principal in the same study shared they were able to reach families on a more “human level”, citing the ability to slow down and “really check on people” during school closures (Beauchamp et al., 2021, p. 386).



Literature Review – Changing Responsibilities

Many school leaders emphasized they felt a duty to ensure that teachers and families were cared for during the pandemic.

Whether that was arranging meals, speaking with families on the phone, or comforting teachers, principals took charge (Hayes et al., 2022; Huck & Zhang, 2021).



Leader Stories

Context

Leaders in Georgia in the United States

2 Men, 7 Women

3 Principals

3 Assistant Principals – 2 in Specialty Schools

2 District Leaders

Urban, Suburban, and Charter Contexts

Leader Profiles

3 - 15+ or more in leadership positions

4 - 10+ years in leadership positions

2 - Less than 5 years in leadership positions

Experiences and Impacts

Increased Responsibilities

Relationship Building

Flexibility



Shared Themes

Increased Responsibilities

Relationship Building

Flexibility



Shared Theme – Increased Responsibilities

Across the board, interviewees mentioned increased responsibility in their job duties as a result of the pandemic.

For example, many had to revise scheduling structures, including aspects such as scheduling classes and meetings and creating structures for virtual and face-to-face classes to take place simultaneously as schools began to reopen.



Shared Theme – Relationship Building

Leaders elaborated that this meant being supportive and inclusive of all teachers.

Sean, for example, mentioned that he tries to get to know and serve each teacher on a personal level.

Rick shared that his main strategies were being upfront, honest, and clear, and directing people to look for information from trusted sources, while understanding his own limitations and circumstances.



Shared Theme - Flexibility

Sean met with teachers often, to evaluate, reassess, readjust, and help them learn from their mistakes. This was a constant process that he utilized more frequently during the pandemic than he had previously. He shared that he firmly believed this shift made him a better leader.

Carol mentioned that flexibility in job responsibilities was the key to navigating her day-to-day work. Her way of enabling flexibility was manifested through working to let people know they were appreciated and to showing empathy toward them.





Leader Advice

Compassion

The Importance of Leading as a Team

Flexibility



Leader Advice - Compassion

Several participants pointed out a human-centered perspective to leadership.

“...is to remember that teachers and staff are people, and that they all have a different story. That it is their collective work that brings a school together.”

Recognizing that we are all humans first, and humans should be set as a priority during the difficult times was a lesson that several interviewees said was reiterated during the pandemic.



Leader Advice – The Importance of Leading as a Team

Make sure that you call on the people around you.”
And in the words of another, “Always lead with grace.”

Not only should the school staff work as a team as they figure things out, school leaders and staff should also support each other as much as possible.



Leader Advice - Flexibility

Interviewees stressed that allowing flexibility does not mean lowering expectations, but rather, adjusting those expectations to meet the current context.

One participant termed it “leading with grace,” meaning that leaders should be understanding and cognizant of others’ circumstances and use that understanding as the starting point for decision making.



Questions and Audience Thoughts

What have YOU learned or taken away from leading during a crisis?

How do these learnings align with our findings?

What have YOU learned from your students?

What impact have YOUR learnings had on YOUR practice?



Contact Us!

Dr. Jami Berry

Clinical Associate Professor
Program Coordinator

Mary Frances Early College of Education

Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy
University of Georgia

jamiberry@uga.edu

Dr. Karen Bryant

Clinical Associate Professor
Department Chairperson

Mary Frances Early College of Education

Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy
University of Georgia

bryantkc@uga.edu



