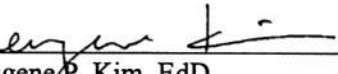


ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, SCHOOL LEADERSHIP DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE IN UNPRECEDENTED, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the School of Education, Concordia University Irvine.



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SCHOOL LEADERSHIP DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC:
IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE in UNPRECEDENTED TIMES

by

Silvia Veronica Lopez

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for the
Degree of
Doctor of Education
in
Educational Leadership
May 7, 2022

ABSTRACT

This explanatory-sequential mixed-methods design research aims to describe the steps of an organizational change model made to sustain organizational change during the COVID-19 crisis for school leaders in Local District East, one of the local districts of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). The overarching research question that guided this study was: What processes and actions did school leaders employ to promote positive, sustainable organizational change during COVID-19?

John Kotter's (2012) Eight Steps for Leading Change Model served as the primary conceptual framework for this study. Data analysis led to the following significant findings: (1) Kotter's steps were grouped into four primary categories to describe processes and actions: Preparation, Activation, Outcomes, and Culture Shift. Based on the data analysis, school principals who led their schools successfully during COVID-19 implemented processes and actions linked to Kotter's Eight Step Model. (2) Kotter's Step Six: Generating and Celebrating Short-Term Goals, and Step Seven: Sustaining Acceleration are the two steps in which school principals did not feel very successful. Some challenges arose, such as avoiding complacency when school personnel worked remotely. Most school principals expressed that emotional barrier were more difficult to overcome when implementing change. (3) The researcher found no significant correlation among all the variables except for ethnicity and communicating the vision for organizational change to all stakeholders during COVID-19.

Finally, data analysis derived from the focus group conducted during the qualitative phase of this research provided the research insight into developing a high-performing school principal profile linked to Kotter's Eight Steps for Leading Change Model. It includes specific characteristics for a successful implementation of organizational change and cultural shift.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Organizational change is a complex process that requires attention and involvement from management and people from all the levels in an organization. Juneja (2015) states that in the contemporary business environment, organizations fight the battle of competition by adapting to and preparing to cope with the pressure of change. The focus of this chapter is to focus on the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, and delimit the theoretical framework.

In the educational field, the process of change has recently become the focal activity of school administrators through which goals and objectives are accomplished. However, leading change is not an easy task. Often, school leaders may feel overwhelmed or unprepared to cope with the consequences of broken school systems and inherent or external forces that cause the change. As Ly (2009) asserts, change is a complex process that requires coordinating, directing, organizing, facilitating, implementing, strategizing, innovating, and leading. From this view, leading change in education requires administrators to engage in different behaviors, actions, skills, and abilities that are crucial to engage in and develop a shared vision for change and to implement new goals in the school system.

In the past years, school administrators have been expected to embrace change as part of the evolving educational systems and influence others to accept and implement new operating systems as beneficial and worthwhile. According to Ly (2009), "... administrators are expected to facilitate and implement change processes (and some simultaneously) including leadership practices, technological advances, and shifting educational priorities" (p.1). A clear example of how school administrators are expected to shift their leadership practices to focus on educational priorities, even if they do not feel prepared, is the recent school closure due to COVID-19. The

worldwide COVID-19 pandemic exposed our school systems' weaknesses and the lack of preparedness to manage external factors affecting education such as educational policies. As Kotter and Rathgeber (2017) affirm, organizations often do not see the need for change, as many times the demand is very subtle. Furthermore, when external forces impact the existing system, leaders may not correctly identify how to proceed or how to successfully lead change. External forces are not under the control of school principals. Often these forces are not directly related to the teaching context but they affect teacher performance and student learning (Izci, 2016; Jones, 2012). Examples of external forces are: broad social trends and norms, current and past educational policies, and official orders issued to meet a state of emergency such as an earthquake, fire, war, or COVID-19.

There is no doubt that COVID-19 as an external force caused school closure and challenged educational leaders to face pressures such as implementing new learning systems.

The 2019-2020 school year was undoubtedly the one that changed the researcher's leadership approach in many ways. As an assistant principal overseeing special education services and programs at three different schools in an urban area of Los Angeles, the researcher encountered many challenges created by an unexpected external force: COVID-19. The COVID-19 worldwide pandemic triggered a series of challenges that led many of our schools to implement changes for which they were not prepared. For many organizations, COVID-19 was a preamble to success or to failure. On January 21, 2020, the United States of America confirmed the novel coronavirus's first case. Two months later, on March 9, 2020, the Los Angeles Unified School District, one of the largest school districts in California, made an emergency declaration that did not require closing schools at first, as coronavirus cases were not detected in any of its schools. School administrators were aware to the possibility of closing schools. Some were

already working on a plan and preparing chrome books and paper packets; others waited for the school district to provide guidelines and steps to follow, while others continued as if nothing had happened.

As an itinerant administrator working at three different schools, the researcher experienced the effects of the distinct principals' approaches. On March 11, 2020, the school district cancelled all large student and staff gatherings, including off-campus visits and any activity that included public crowds. On Thursday, March 12, 2020, the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) president, urged the superintendent to close schools. Many school principals were still not convinced that schools needed to be closed because they were not ready for such an unbelievable and unprecedented action.

On March 13, 2020, the superintendent announced an immediate closure of schools for two weeks as a preventive measure. Simultaneously, school administrators and other stakeholders received an informational email with guidelines and next steps. However, this communication did not include additional information on what to expect or how to address school staff's and families' concerns and fears. Directions to staff included preparing home-school activity packets, distributing available technology such as IPADs and chrome books, distributing information to parents, and sanitizing school buildings for two weeks. That was the last day the students, the staff, and the parents were on campus for the school year 2019-2020 and the subsequent school year 2020-2021.

How did school principals and other school administrators experience that unique phenomenon? How well administrators prepare to educate students remotely? How did they communicate to staff, students, and families regarding the situation? Were school principals aware of the impending crisis in education? Did they consider school staff, students, and families

to be ready for such a significant change? Did they have a vision for change? Did they have a plan? Did they feel hopeless? Or did they see the crisis as a chance for new possibilities and opportunities?

As Kotter (2005) described, a crisis, such as the one caused by COVID-19 made the proverbial iceberg suddenly collapse into many pieces. It was an unthinkable event, and there was no plan for dealing with such a phenomenon. But there was an opportunity to develop a powerful sense of strategic urgency among large numbers of people and an opportunity to align people's feelings, thoughts, and actions.

School principals, school administrative assistants, and campus managers were required to work on Monday, March 16, 2020 to finish the packets' distribution, notify any parent who was not aware of school closures, and begin sanitizing all school building in the school district. Central and local district offices remained open, while all certified and classified employees had to work from home without a leadership role. These rapid movements and decisions to stop the iceberg from melting provided a heightened sense of urgency. The rapid decision-making process required a great deal of energized action driven by anxiety, frustration, and in many cases, anger.

Educational stakeholders at all levels of the educational system, including students and their families, demanded immediate results, a greater accountability to provide the required educational technology, and a greater accountability to implement change from the school principal.

Implementing a newly required distance-learning program from the school districts in order to provide education during school closures was an unprecedented challenge for all educational participants. However, the school administrators, in their role as school leaders, dealt

directly with the effects and ramifications of a system that was not fully developed nor prepared to deal with this urgent situation.

School leaders were required to meet all students' needs, including those in under-served populations, within a brief period. Even more, they were made accountable to manage operational resources with the same budget, provided teachers and school staff with quality professional development, supported and provided families with access to the internet and to distance-learning platforms. School leaders also had to deal with the social-emotional impact of COVID-19 and keep the school campus safe and secure during the closure.

For most school administrators, COVID-19 was an external factor that exposed the school district's weakness to envision, to prevent, and to implement sustainable systems that could resist unpredictable forces that impacted education in a fast-changing world. Further, the incapability of some school leaders to change leadership practices to implement changes was witnessed. Also noted was the potential of many others to quickly set a positive direction to the new reality. As Kotter and Rathgeber (2017) affirmed, they took the chance to turn crises and problems into opportunities to grow and thrive.

As an organization, the school district provided guidelines and policies for school principals to move forward, but it was the school principal who had the opportunity to lead greatly or poorly in a world in which the rules had changed. COVID-19 represented for many a threat to the perpetuated school system that was seen as impossible to change. For others, it was an opportunity to lead to significant outcomes in education and provide students with technology skills that were not yet known for the foreseeable future.

Statement of the Problem

Organizational change in education has gotten the attention of educational leaders in the past years because each year, the number of superintendents, school principals, and diverse educational administrators who seek organizational change theories and practices has increased in an effort to improve the current educational system.

As Kotter and Akhtar (2019) observe, inquiries about implementing organizational change at schools from those in K-12 and higher education have increased in the last two to three years. Educational stakeholders are interested in knowing how a change model used primarily in other business types and organizations might support their approach to change and enhance education. Most importantly, educational stakeholders are interested in finding specific actions and processes to attain robust, sustained change that allows them to prevent and prepare for uncertainty. In other words, they wanted to know how to lead change by anticipating and planning rather than reacting to external forces that might lead to a false sense of urgency. In the words of Kotter (2008), “using crises generated by external forces as potential opportunities for change requires a leader to be exceptionally proactive in assessing how people react, in developing specific plans for action, and in implementing the plans swiftly” (p. 141).

The approach that school leaders utilized to lead change during the implementation of distance learning programs was significantly different. It required different perspectives, behaviors, and skills that many in the educational field had to learn, unlearn, and re-learn.

Organizational change in education requires the establishment of a well-defined change management framework in order to implement strategic actions and processes to successfully handle and convert transition into opportunity. Some approaches to organizational change addressed by the researcher in the literature review that might be considered when looking for

opportunities to implement change in educational systems are: High-Reliability Organization Theory by Saetren and Laumann (2017), that focuses on safety during organizational change; the Organizational Change Model by Cummings and Worley (2015) that emphasizes five actionable steps to implement change successfully and the Model for Managing Organizational Readiness for change by Armenakis and Harris (2009), which offers five key components and seven strategies that lead to organizational change.

The problem examined in this study uses a specific organizational model that has helped to successfully lead organizational change in business, in non-profit organizations and in government departments. The model might be an ideal change model to be implemented in educational institutions to lead a change process in unprecedented times. Although every organization, including our education system, has its unique challenges, Kotter's Eight-Step Model that leads organizational change provides core elements that can apply everywhere. Implementing the core elements of the organizational change model proposed by Kotter (2014) redefines the leadership approach which school leaders can use to lead change during uncertainty or crises in education, such as the urgent situation generated by COVID-19.

There is no doubt that every school district continued to work to redefine its operational system and education programs during the COVID-19 school's closure. It became necessary to redefine all educational stakeholders' roles, especially those of school leaders, to face the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic challenges. COVID -19 precipitated the melting not only of the modern instructional iceberg, but that of other worldwide systems as well. COVID-19 is an "act of God" that schools cannot alter or prevent. People and organizations do not often anticipate a need for systemic Kotter (2017) affirmed, "They don't correctly identify what to do, or successfully make it happen, or make it stick. Businesses don't. School systems don't. Nations

don't" (p.1).

As noted on March 9, 2020, LAUSD, one of the largest school districts in Los Angeles CA, made an emergency declaration that did not require school closure, as coronavirus cases were not yet detected. However, the emergency declaration did authorize the school superintendent to take all actions necessary to ensure the continuation of public education. The Board of Education approved the superintendent to allow students and staff to work from home and to provide alternative educational program options as necessary. On March 11, 202, the school board approved off-campus visits by students and staff to public places where crowds might gather. Students' events and competitions continued, but inside schools and without spectators. On Thursday, March 12, the teachers' union president urged the superintendent to close schools as part of nationwide efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19. On the morning of March 13, 2020, the superintendent announced a school closure for two weeks as a preventive measure. Simultaneously, school administrators and other stakeholders received an informational email with guidelines and next steps. However, additional information on what to expect or how to address school staff and families' concerns and fears was not provided. Directions for school principals included preparing home-school activity packets, distributing available technology such as iPads and chrome books, distributing information to the parents, and sanitizing school buildings for the following two weeks. School principals, school administrative assistants, and campus managers were required to work on Monday, March 16, to finish the packet distribution, notify any parent who was not aware of school closures, and begin the building sanitization process. Central and local district offices remained open, while all certified and classified employees who did not have a leadership role were directed to work from home. These rapid movements to stop the iceberg from melting illustrate a false or misguided sense of urgency that

prevails in our current educational system in times of non-preparation for emergencies. As claimed by Kotter (2008), with a false sense of urgency, an organization does have a great deal of energized action but is instead driven by anxiety, anger, and frustration. However, this type of sense of urgency reflects people reacting rather than planning.

Some school districts were made aware of the pandemic but allowed schools to continue operating regularly. This is analogous to watching to the iceberg melt, but not creating a high enough sense of urgency. Kotter (2008), establishes the issue is not only the lack of urgency but it is overriding importance in a fast-moving, turbulent era. Consequently, when the urgent challenge is not handled well, even competent people and resource-rich organizations can suffer considerably, like our schools and all educational systems.

As illustrated by the events schools experienced during COVID-19, I can state that in the past, when the environment was much more stable and predictable, a systemic approach might have helped educational leaders to define specific leadership skills and behaviors to succeed and anticipate results. However, in today's ever-changing environment, school leaders face new challenges such as external forces or factors that demand immediate change without creating a false sense of urgency. Nowadays, educational leaders need to gain further insight and redefine their leadership skills and behaviors while strengthening the power to ignite transformational change and implement actions that help turn crisis into opportunity.

Purpose of the Study

Traditionally, the perception was that school leaders must embrace change and influence others to accept and implement new operating systems as beneficial and worthy of pursuit. In other words, they were expected to implement quick fixes for broken educational systems. Is it currently possible for a school leader to turn a fragmented situation into sustainable change?

According to Fullan (2010), real change is possible only by taking a genuinely systemic approach. However, an external force, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, exposes the weaknesses in current educational systems and leadership strategies. A crisis of this kind requires immediate action, a shift in the school leaders' role, behavior, and skills to perceive crises as an opportunity. Using crises as potential opportunities for change, leaders must be exceptionally proactive in observing how people react, develop specific plans for action, and swiftly implement the appropriate strategy. Additionally, a crisis might be used as an opportunity to anticipate, plan, and establish a defined framework for leading change (Kotter, 2008; Pasmore et al., 2020).

Once again, today's fast-paced environment requires our school leaders to implement a defined and structured change model that will survive resistance, conflicts, and ill feelings during a crisis. Therefore, the purpose of this explanatory-sequential mixed-methods design research is to describe the steps of a proven organizational change model to sustain change during the COVID-19 crises for school leaders in an urban area in L.A. At this stage of the research, the steps to leading change will be generally defined as processes and actions that help turn crises into opportunities that lead to sustainable leadership growth.

The researcher considered analyzing the essence of this phenomenon through a case study during the qualitative phase of the research. In this phase, the researcher focused on an in-depth analysis of the group of school leaders' lived experiences implementing change during COVID-19. In a phenomenological study, the researcher described what a group of school leaders in a given school district commonly experienced when implementing learning initiatives that required changes in management and leadership structures (Creswell & Poth, 2018; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Additionally, the researcher described the leaders' behavior, skills, processes, and actions required during the change process. The case study, as defined by Creswell & Poth

(2018), is "the qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system through detailed, in-depth data collection" (p.96), allowing the researcher to utilize multiple sources of information and data collection.

This study's focus was to understand and describe the essence of school leaders' experiences in implementing change during one of the major crises in educational history, the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, that required education leaders to engage in new processes and actions. Most school leaders had to redefine behaviors, rethink leadership skills, learn, and gain understanding of concepts and strategies that may turn crises into opportunities when facing uncertainty.

Research Questions

The overarching research question that guided this study was: What processes and actions did school leaders employ to promote positive, sustainable change during COVID-19?

The sub-questions for research included:

1. What specific processes and steps did the school leaders implement to create positive change?
2. What were the challenges and struggles that blocked the successful implementation of change during COVID-19?
3. What were school leaders' characteristics and character that positively impacted the change process?

Theoretical Framework

To provide readers with the conceptual framework for this study, the researcher focused on the Eight Steps for Leading Change Model developed by John Kotter (2012), which is a method to improve an organization's ability to change and increase its chances of success.

Kotter's eight-stage process for transformational change is a dynamic model comprising eight stages organized into three phases. The first phase involves (1) creating a sense of urgency, (2) building a guiding coalition, and (3) forming a strategic vision and initiatives.

The second phase involves engaging and enabling the organization by (4) enlisting a volunteer army (to communicate the vision), (5) enabling action by removing barriers and (6) generating short-term wins. The final stage is to implement and sustain the change that involves (7) sustaining acceleration, and (8) instituting change.

Kotter's Eight-Step Model may be a more practitioner-oriented and suitable framework for school organizations that face challenges to change, because the tests we now face are different from decades ago. According to Kotter (2012), a globalized economy creates more opportunities and more challenges for everyone, forcing organizations to make more dramatic improvements in order to compete and prosper, but most importantly, to survive. In education, globalization drives education by a broad and robust set of forces associated with technological change, global education standards, highly qualified professionals, educational access, and equity for all.

Kotter's eight-step plan of action that leads change focuses on providing organizational leaders and educators with recommendations that can inspire successful change. Kotter (2014) identifies the eight steps as accelerators of change for the leaders to expedite activities that are strategic and relevant.

The Eight-Step Model to Leading Change developed by Kotter in 2012 and redefined since, appears to be a rational choice for the conceptual frameworks used in this study, because of its multi-dimensional approach, useful applications, and the support of research.

Significance of the Study

It seems the significant issue developed in the last 20 years is the concern for an organizations' ability to respond to organizational change. In the educational field, school leaders share concerns about organizational change, as well. Today, more and more school administrators must deal with new government regulations, implementing school district initiatives, and professional development that focuses on leadership, technological resources, and the changing school climate and morale.

As Rowland (2017) emphasized, states and school districts focus on teachers, rather than on principals, when making policy and allocating funds and resources for professional development and support. However, to be considered useful in their roles, school principals are expected to master and implement all essential elements of the educational system to support students' academic achievement often without additional support. Engaging all school community members in developing, implementing, and maintaining well-developed continuous improvement requires understanding, preparation, and definition of actions, strategies, and practices by the school principal. Evidence suggests that principals can play an essential role in reaching national goals of high achievement for students (Northouse 2016; Rowland, 2017). Consequently, it has been demonstrated that school leaders can be powerful levers for change when they are prepared to implement the required educational systems. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2015), educational reforms need principals to do their work differently, allocate their time in new ways, and learn new skills. Furthermore, school leaders might feel overwhelmed by new expectations and limited school leadership capacity. From this perspective, the state can create successful conditions by making school leadership and school districts a priority developing the principals' ability by providing more training and professional

development that would lead to more success in this area.

This dissertation was undertaken to help school leaders better understand the dynamics of change in response to societal demands, rising expectations, and responses to an external force such as COVID-19. The more administrators recognize both the purpose and process of change, the more equipped they will be to identify the areas of strengths and challenges as school leaders. The hope is that school leaders will reinforce their ability to identify various ways people react to change. Most importantly, they will determine how they can positively influence individuals and groups during change. It is expected that this study will support school leaders' understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of their typical leadership behaviors and practices. By identifying their strengths and growth areas, school leaders will better share a vision for change, influencing school stakeholders, communicating the urgency for change, building relationships, and building sustainable systems.

Definition of Terms

External Forces: As defined by Izci (2016), external forces or factors are those elements that impact education, but are not under the control of school leaders and educators. External forces directly impact school cultures and classroom practices. Factors such as change in education administration, budget cuts, poverty, homelessness, or official orders issued that meet a state of emergency, such as an earthquake, fire, war, or COVID-19, have been overlooked as potential crises that can jeopardize education.

COVID 19: As defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021), COVID-19 is a new disease caused by a novel coronavirus that humans have not previously been exposed to. Most people who have COVID-19 have mild symptoms; however, COVID-19 can also cause severe illness and even death. Some groups, including older adults and people with

certain underlying medical conditions, are at increased risk of severe illness.

Distance learning: Distance learning is not a new concept or a new approach. Distance learning has been implemented in many school districts due to the Instructional Technology Initiative (ITI) that supports all schools that utilize 21st-century instructional practices. The ITI focuses on providing professional learning opportunities that leverage technology in purposeful, personalized ways. The National Education Administrators Organizations (2020) defined distance education as a form of education in which courses are delivered via the internet (or other forms of digital technologies that may evolve from the internet) without face-to-face classroom interaction between the student and the instructor.

Leadership behaviors: According to the American Psychological Association (2020), behavior is defined as an organism's activities in response to external or internal stimuli. These behaviors include objectively observable activities, introspectively observable activities, and non-conscious processes. Behavior is also defined as any action or function that can be objectively observed or measured in response to controlled stimuli. In leadership, the behavioral approach focuses on what a leader does rather than who they are. As defined by Northouse (2016), this approach suggests that leaders engage in two primary types of behaviors: task behaviors and relationship behaviors.

Leadership skills: On the other hand, leadership skills are accomplished on three fundamental personal skills: technical, human, and conceptual. Leadership skills can be acquired, and leaders can be trained to develop them. Technical skills include competencies in a specialized area, analytical ability, and the ability to use specific tools and techniques (e.g., programming languages, software proficiency, and data analysis).

Human skills relate to the ability to work with people; for example, communication,

empathy, a growth mindset, and emotional intelligence. Conceptual skills comprise the ability to work with concepts and ideas (e.g., decision-making). Although all three skills are essential for leaders, the importance of each skill varies among management levels. Leaders are more effective when their skills apply to their management levels (for example, lower: technical and human; middle: technical, human, and conceptual; upper: conceptual and human).

Organizational Change: Based on organizational change, authors and researchers have defined organizational change from different perspectives. For the purpose of this study the researchers is considering leadership as a transformational process that involves influence and requires a set of skills and behaviors that lead to change. In this context, leadership is seen as a process that can be learned and is available to everyone (Northouse, 2016).

Limitations to Kotter's Eight Steps Model

According to Warrilow (2019), Kotter's Eight Steps to Leading Organizational Change Model has some weaknesses that might prevent an organization from successfully implementing change. The model does not include essential aspects of change readiness, such as, a previous attempt within the organization to change, and the cultural impact of the proposed change. The model does not provide specifics of how to achieve clarity of vision and how to strategically deliver this vision to others. Kotter's steps are listed in sequence, but the model does not specifically address whether organizational leaders must follow them in the same order, or if there is a flexibility to shift between steps.

Since every organization has different values, culture, goals, and change objectives, not every change management model will fit all. New organizational models have emerged in the past years. The McKinsey 7-S Change Management Model was developed in 1980 by McKinsey consultants. Academics and practitioners of organizational change have used this model as a

strategic planning tool. The model focuses on an organization's alignment of seven elements to achieve effectiveness: structures, strategy, skills, staff, style, systems, and shared values.

According to Jurevicius (2013), the key point of this model is that all the seven areas are interconnected, and a change in one area requires a change in the rest.

The ADKAR Model was developed two decades ago by Jeff Hiatt and is based on the understanding that organizational change can only happen when individuals change. The word ADKAR is an acronym for the five outcomes and individual needs to achieve for a change to be successful: awareness, desire, knowledge, ability, and reinforcement (Jouany & Martic, 2020).

Lewin's Three Step Model is one of the most accepted change management models. The model consists of three main stages: unfreeze, change, and refreeze. In the unfreeze stage open communication with employees to help overcome resistance to change is necessary. In the change stage, good leadership and effective employee communication are crucial. In the refreeze stage, the change is accepted, and the change management objectives are achieved.

The need for successful organizational change has led to the development of a diversity of organizational change models. However, there is no unique way to embrace change and there is not a model that fits all. For the purpose of this study, Kotter's Eight Steps Model provides crucial steps to lead organizational change, even during a time of uncertainty. The original Eight Step Model presented in 1996 was updated in 2014 to make it relevant to today's environment (LeStage, 2015). Table 1. 1 illustrates four key revisions to the steps for change.

Table 1. 1*Kotter's Eight Step Model Revisions (1996; 2014)*

Leading Change: 8-Step Process (Kotter, 1996)	Accelerate: 8-Step Process (Kotter, 2014)
1. Respond to or affect episodic change in rigid, finite, and systematic ways	1. Run the steps concurrently and continuously
2. Drive change with a small, powerful core group	2. Form a large volunteer army from up, down and across the organization to serve as the change engine
3. Function within a traditional hierarchy	3. Function in a network flexibly and agilely in conjunction with a traditional hierarchy
4. Focus on doing one new thing very well in a linear fashion over time	4. Constantly seek for opportunities and identify initiatives completing them quickly and efficiently

Summary

In the past decades, the organizational change literature has, to a large degree, adopted a leader-centric focus on change processes. According to Sætren and Laumann (2017), “The focus is mainly on transformational leadership and inspiring visions in addition to an employee-centric focus representing how employees make their considerations regarding embracing or rejecting the change” (p. 4).

This study aims to help school leaders understand the dynamics of change in response to changing societal demands, rising expectations, and response to environmental crises. Kotter's Eight Steps Model to Leading Change and transformational leadership skills will support school leaders to enable actions by removing obstacles and barriers

In the following study, school leaders' practical leadership skills to implement change during COVID-19 will be discussed. Kotter's Eight Steps to Leading Change will be analyzed as

a model for school leaders to pursue organizational change at schools during a time of crises originated by external forces, such as COVID-19.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature regarding organizational change and school leaders' behavior has changed or evolved significantly over the past several decades. The focus of this chapter is to review the literature specific to organizational change that supports school leaders to act and influence change.

To provide some context, the researcher begins this chapter by reviewing in more detail the impact of COVID-19 as an external force affecting the implementation of learning programs during school closures. Additionally, the following will be included: (1) the discussion of the concept of organizational change, (2) the different approaches to studying organizational change, (3) the reasons why people resist change, and (4) the strategies for managing resistance in the school setting. It will be also important for the researcher to frame the eight errors that leaders make in an effort to transform organizations and lead successful change. Finally, an analysis of the behaviors and traits of a transformational leader and its connection to John Kotter's Eight Steps to Leading Change helps to define how school leaders perceive a crisis as an opportunity to drive sustainable change that led to this research undertaking. This chapter concludes by examining the behaviors and characteristics of a transformational leader, and the actions and processes future leaders in education need to implement in order to bring about valuable and positive change during a time of crisis.

COVID - 19 and the Impact on School Closure

It is crucial to illustrate the historical perspective and antecedents of the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic to understand the impact on our educational system. On December 31, 2019, health authorities in China confirmed that dozens of people in Wuhan, China, were being treated for pneumonia from an unknown source. Many of those who were sickened had visited a live

animal market in Wuhan, but authorities said there was no evidence of the virus spreading from person to person.

On January 11, 2020, China media announced the first death by a novel coronavirus. It was a 61-year-old person who had visited the live animal market in Wuhan. Japan, South Korea, and Thailand reported their first case on January 20, 2020. On January 21, 2020, the United States of America confirmed the first cases of a novel coronavirus, which was a 30-year-old man from Washington State who had traveled to Wuhan.

China imposed a strict lockdown in Wuhan on January 23, 2020. The World Health Organization declared the spread of the new virus a public health emergency of international concern. More than 3,600 passengers in the Diamond Princess Cruise were quarantined off the coast of Yokohama, Japan, on February 5, 2020. On February 11, 2020, the novel coronavirus was named COVID-19. First cases of local transmission in the U.S. were reported in Oregon, Washington, and New York. An early death of COVID-19 in the USA was reported in Washington on February 29, 2020. On March 3, 2020, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) lifted restrictions for virus testing. CDC prioritized testing all people with symptoms who traveled to outbreak areas (New York Times, 2021; ABC News, 2020).

For all educational stakeholders, March 13, 2020, was the beginning of a new and different approach to providing education. With school closures and the lack of preparedness, school districts had to act urgently to establish educational initiatives to reach all students to continue providing education for all. The largest school district in Los Angeles, the L.A. Unified School District (LAUSD) identified priorities to set a plan of action. The emphasis was to ensure all schools had enough technology devices such as chrome books, iPads, and a hot spot for each student enrolled. The second priority was to train all school district employees to use common learning platforms and systems such as Schoology, and to provide professional development on

the new distance learning modality. These two priorities required school leaders to invest additional hours in their work schedules to guarantee these priorities. By the end of the school year 2020-2021, all school districts were implementing the distance-learning program called the @Home Continuity of Learning Program. The school district continued to provide schools with the required technology to ensure all students had a functional technology device. In addition, all students were offered a summer distance-learning program to avoid any significant regression. With the implementation of distance learning, school leaders were required to implement new strategies that had not yet been carefully created or planned. They had to ensure that economic and social status barriers were neutralized for students' participation on an equitable basis. They also had to make sure teachers and school staff were adequately trained, and that fears of failing would not create resistance to change. School leaders were urged to lead in the middle of a crisis that required enough technology for all, a mindset to change educational practices, a distance learning framework, and instructional standards for students.

The third priority was health and safety. The coronavirus continued expanding, and day after day, the number of deaths increased alarmingly. Schools continued to close, and only a specialized team was allowed on campus to clean and disinfect buildings.

The beginning of the school year 2020-2021 brought along another priority: mental health. School leaders, school staff, students, and their families were experiencing an array of different feelings and emotions. Physical fatigue, occupational burnout, compassion fatigue, grievance, secondary traumatic stress, and vicarious traumatization were common emotional patterns observed. The school district immediately incorporated mental health services such as virtual counseling sessions for all, including employees and students, and their families. School principals had to make available a response and recovery program for the school community.

Before the 2020 year ended, the school district had implemented a new initiative based on the prevention and identification of COVID-19 cases in the district. By December 2020, many school leaders, students, and families suffered the coronavirus's impact on their lives. Some were victims of the disease and were hospitalized; others were able to recover at home but they lost their employment; others lost relatives, and some students lost their parents. The school district required all school principals and office employees to be tested for COVID-19 weekly at school district testing sites. The students and their families had the opportunity to be tested for the virus without cost. In March 2021, with the number of COVID-19 cases reduced and the vaccine's increased availability, the school district began to prepare for a new priority: making the vaccine available to all employees, students, and families.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced the closure of schools and forced all educational staff to learn, unlearn, and relearn new ways to lead in a time of crisis. It forced school principals to implement new initiatives for a safe school environment and to provide effective operational systems. It was a time of sacrifice and determination for many but also of hope and optimism for others. It was a time to reflect on the school leaders' approaches to facing external forces that might destabilize old and traditional leadership patterns, but that could lead to success and achievement if taken as an opportunity to change.

Organizational Change

There are many definitions of organizational change depending on the context; however, most of the definitions refer to a business context. According to Stobiersky (2020), organizational change is defined as the actions in which a company or business alters a major component of its organization, such as its culture; the underlying technologies or infrastructure it uses to operate; or its internal processes. From this perspective, organizational change management is considered a method of

leveraging change to implement a successful resolution that includes three major phases: preparation, implementation, and follow-through.

The preparation phase is fundamental to define what organizational change is, and to deliver an understanding of why it is important to make changes. It requires a roadmap that clearly articulates and measures success and explains to all participants how they will be affected. Preparation ensures that the change process aligns with the organization's goals and clearly outlines an implementation of a sustainability plan.

During the implementation phase, the organizational leader must ensure the plan is followed and continuously assess outcomes, measure data, train employees in new methodologies and business practices, and more importantly ensures goals are readjusted as necessary.

The follow-through phase requires adaptive changes to add, subtract, or refine processes. It also requires transformational changes that involve a simultaneous shift in mission and strategies, the team structure, staff, and organizational performance. Characterized by Kotter (2012), the two common themes that underlie organizational change are (1) change is a process that occurs over time, typically taking months or even years to be implemented and institutionalized, and (2) change does not take place in a vacuum, because it involves real people who bring emotions, passions, hopes, and expectations with them. Change requires developing a new system and defining leadership.

In this dissertation, change is viewed as an implementation strategy that requires specific actions and a planned process. As an implementation strategy, change is accomplished by using specific actions related to leadership behaviors, roles, competencies, and characteristics to produce desired organizational outcomes. As a planned process, it involves steps that require knowledge of management and operational systems. In his article *Management is (Still) Not Leadership*, Kotter (2012) established the difference between management and leadership and established why both are important to leading

change.

Management is a set of well-known processes that includes planning, budgeting, structuring, jobs, staffing jobs, measuring performance, and problem-solving, which helps an organization to predictably do what it is known to do well. In this context, knowledge of management and operational systems supports the school leader to manage a very complex organization that provides one of the most important public services: education for all. Additionally, as described by The Center for American Progress (2008), school principals are crucial in implementing reforms to human capital systems for teachers, such as rigorous selection and evaluation systems of teaching performance, and meaningful professional development. However, defining and evaluating the school principal's effectiveness in the area of management and operations may not be sufficient to ensure strong leadership and organizational management.

It is critical to create a coherent vision of effective school leadership and organizational management to make changes happen. In other words, it is essential to seize opportunities for a dual operating organizational system at our schools that, as explained by Kotter (2014), allows school principals to lead strategic initiatives to capitalize on big opportunities rather than purely managing operational systems.

Leadership is a process that involves having a vision and having people participating in it, empowering and motivating people, and producing useful change. Leadership is about the leader's attributes, but also about behavior. Leadership can also be described as a process of interactions between leaders and followers (Kotter, 2013; Kotter, 2014; Northouse, 2016).

Northouse (2016) affirmed, "Leadership can be observed in leader behaviors and can be learned" (p. 8). Similarly, Kotter (2014) observes that leadership is associated with change and affirms that leadership "is not about mobilizing a group to act the same way they have always acted" (p.61). It

requires new behaviors, processes, actions, and characteristics that are learned and implemented in the change process.

In the organizational change process, management complements leadership. Both good management and leadership are essential components for an organization to change and prosper (Kotter 2014; Northouse, 2016). Northouse (2016) acknowledged that, “to be effective, organizations need to nourish both competent management and skilled leadership” (p. 13). Kotter (2014) also sees management as an important component of leadership necessary in the organizational change process and affirms that management is not leadership. Management includes knowledge of planning, budgeting, structuring jobs, giving people time-tested policies, and measuring results. Leadership on the other hand is about setting direction, creating a vision, empowering, motivating, enabling, and mobilizing people to achieve desired results (Kotter, 2013; Kotter, 2014; Northouse, 2016).

Approaches to Studying Organizational Change

There are many approaches to the study of organizational change and each approach provides a different perspective of the change process. However, traditional organizational change literature does not focus on unexpected crises or external forces that can impact the current implemented systems such as the most recent COVID-19 international pandemic.

Sætren and Laumann (2017) developed a change management theory that focused on analyzing some of the traditional change management theories where safety was the focus. The main purpose of their research was to develop an organizational change theory to ensure safety. Their research work is important, because they are pioneers in analyzing traditional organizational change theories to develop a safety theory of high reliability organizations (HRO) and to establish a change model based on this theory. The HRO theory focuses more on hazardous situations that require immediate management for change, such as the Longford Esso Gas Plant explosion, although it includes examples of unwanted

incidents due to unexpected episodes in combination with changes that demanded a deeper investigation of how high performance could be ensured despite potentially dangerous interruptions and changes. The Theory of Reliability Organizations is more suitable to promote change in high-risk industries where safety is the main focus. The analysis Sætren and Laumann made of traditional change models in unexpected situations is fundamental for this study as an antecedent to define Kotter's Eight Step Change Model and its importance in the education field.

Another traditional organizational change model is the one developed by Cummings and Worley (2015, as cited in Sætren and Laumann, 2017). This model included five activity steps: (1) motivating change, (2) creating a vision, (3) developing political support, (4) managing the transition, and (5) sustaining momentum.

Motivating change includes creating readiness for change and addressing resistance to change. Creating a vision is considered a leadership task in which the leaders need to create the "why" and the "what" of the upcoming change so that employees can participate in the change. Developing political support refers to gaining employees' support so that individuals and groups will not or block the change. Managing transition requires creating a plan for change activities and for keeping the employees committed so that management can guide the organization through change. Sustaining momentum includes providing resources for change agents, developing new competencies and skills, and reinforcing new behaviors.

In their efforts to define organizational change, Armenakis and Harris (2009, as cited by Sætren and Laumann, 2017) presented a model to manage organizational readiness for change. This model consisted of five key components and seven strategies to create readiness for change. The five components are: (1) discrepancy between the current situation and the desired future situation, (2) efficacy, defined as the trust in one's capabilities to accomplish change, (3)

appropriateness related to the perception that the planned change is the best solution for the future, (4) principal support provided to the employees during the change process, and (5) personal valence that implies there will be a positive impact on the employees' desire for a better future situation.

The seven strategies fundamental for transmitting and reinforcing the five components in a process of creating readiness for change are (1) management of information, (2) persuasive communication, (3) formalization activities, (4) diffusion practices, (5) human resources, (6) rites and ceremonies, and (7) active participation.

The theories presented above have revealed different aspects of organizational change. However, the criticism of these traditional change models is that they promote change by persuading and helping the recipients to address resistance to change, rather than involving them in the process. According to Sætren and Laumann (2017), lack of trust can hinder employees from reporting errors that could prevent change processes. Another criticism given to traditional organizational change theories is that they promote conformity from the workers. This may allow individuals to block change rather than improving actual operations.

A different approach for understanding organizational change that is considered a cornerstone model was developed by Kurt Lewin in the 1940s. Lewin's organizational change model is a three-stage process that proposes that individuals and groups of individuals are influenced by restraining forces or obstacles that keep the status quo or positive forces for change that cause the change to happen. Lewin's Change Management Theory (1951) stages are described as follows:

1. Unfreeze: This stage develops problem awareness by preparing the organization to accept that change is necessary through a compelling message.

2. **Change:** In this stage, people start to believe in the change and look for new ways to act and do things to support the organization's new direction. It requires people to understand how the change will benefit them.
3. **Refreeze:** This stage integrates and stabilizes a new equilibrium into the system. People embraces the new ways of working while the organization institutionalizes the change and ensures changes are incorporated into everyday activities. Training, monitoring, and celebrating success are fundamental to sustaining the new culture.

According to Burnes (2004), criticisms of Lewin's change model are lack of accountability for the interaction among individuals and groups, organizations, and society. Additionally, failure to address the complex and iterative change process depicts this change model as a linear process.

The purpose of this study is not to criticize traditional change theories, but to describe how a proven organizational change model that includes processes and actions, can be applied to the educational field when school leaders are facing uncertainty and need to move the work forward. The COVID-19 international pandemic exposed weaknesses in current leadership and management strategies that needed immediate action. Such gaps included a need to rethink processes, actions, behaviors, and skills to provide a vision of a safe future for all in a time in which many were fearful and reluctant to change. When uncertainty and unsafe school environments exist due to external factors, resistance to change might not be the main reason why the change process goes awry. It might be, as Sætren and Laumann (2017) pointed out, that school organizations are not organized for change.

Resistance to Change

In reviewing organizational change and leadership, it is imperative to frame the concept

of resistance to change. Resistance to change is noted in organizational change theories as one of the main causes that prevents establishing changes in any given organization.

Oreg (2006, as cited in Sætren and Laumann, 2017) states that resistance to change comprises two factors: personality and context. Personality can include a person's resistances to change and their internal inclinations that define whether they adopt or resist the change.

Dispositional resistance to change is seen as a personality trait, while internal inclinations are classified into six variables: (1) power and prestige, (2) job security, (3) intrinsic rewards, (4) trust in management, (5) information, and (6) social influence.

Power and prestige, job security, and intrinsic rewards relate to the person's concern regarding the outcome of the change, and the way the change is implemented. These are considered predictors of how a person will adjust to change. Trust in management, information, and social influences relate to a person's concerns regarding change and define the person's perception of the change process. On a different perspective, Lyke-Ho-Gland (2015) stated that if there is no resistance, there is probably no change. She recognizes that change is difficult, people will push back, avoid it, or ignore it.

Kotter and Schlesinger (2008) considered resistance to change as an emotional response. For them, changes appear to be positive or rational involving loss and uncertainty due to previous emotionally charged experiences. For a number of different reasons, individuals or groups of individuals react to change in different ways: from passive resistance, to aggressively undermining the change, to embracing the change sincerely and proactively. People will likely resist change if the change and its implications are not clearly defined. The lack of clear expectations about change and its implications may lead to a belief that the change does not make sense to the organization's goals and purposes. This may result in a low tolerance or the

fear of losing something of value. The main four reasons people resist change are described as follows:

- 1) Parochial self-interest: People resist organizational change when they think they will lose something of value as a result. When people tend to focus on their own best interests and not on those of the total organization, resistance often results in “politics” or “political behavior.”
- 2) Misunderstanding and lack of trust: If people do not understand the change and perceive that it might cost a lot, they will resist change. This can occur when trust is lacking among the person initiating the change and the employees.
- 3) Different assessments: People resist organizational change when they assess the situation differently from their managers or others initiating the change. When people see more cost than benefit resulting from the change, not only for themselves but for their company as well, they may oppose the change.
- 4) Low tolerance for change: Resistance to change may occur if people fear they will not be able to develop the new skills and behavior that will be required of them. Organizational change can inadvertently require people to change too much, or too quickly (Kotter and Schlesinger, 2008).

Many times, organizational leaders underestimate people’s reaction to change and may not understand the positive or negative ways they influence individuals and groups during the change process. According to Kotter and Schlesinger (2008), there are six strategies for overcoming resistance to change.

1. Education and Communication: It is essential to educate and communicate with the team about the change before it begins. It helps team members to comprehend the logical need

for change. The situations in which education and communication are necessary occur when the team lacks inaccurate information or does not understand the need for change.

With education and communication people may be more willing to get involved with implementing the change. This strategy can be time-consuming, especially if it involves a large group of individuals.

2. **Participation and Involvement:** Allowing people to be part of defining the change may make them feel much more motivated. Team members resist change because they have not embraced it. To improve the quality of the change plan, is crucial to get the team involved to increased understanding.
3. **Facilitation and Support:** Providing training and emotional support will help the team manage fears and anxiety that may oppose change. Facilitation and support are the best approach to lower nervousness and anxiety, although this can be time-consuming and expensive.
4. **Negotiation and Agreement:** Reaching a written agreement that offers incentives and encouragement for change is a quick and inexpensive way to overcome resistance. However, it might be expensive if everyone wants to be compensated for their efforts to accept the change.
5. **Manipulation and Co-optation:** Selectively communicating the new changes encourages resistors to behave in expected ways. Giving individuals a role as part of the change management team (e.g., providing management opportunities to a group leader respected by the team) is the only option when other options fail or are too costly. It is a quick and inexpensive way to overcome resistance to change. If people feel they are being manipulated, resistance to change will intensify.

6. **Explicit and Implicit Coercion:** This strategy can threaten the team members and delays change. It can be useful when accelerating the change is essential. This method is quick and can overcome all types of resistance. However, team members may get upset because of the challenge of change and how they are being handled.

These strategies can be utilized individually or can be combined depending on the desired organizational outcome. Making strategic choices regarding the speed of effort, the amount of preplanning, the involvement of others, and the relative emphasis given to different approaches for a successful implementation. To overcome resistance successfully, leaders need to employ a complete repertoire of change tactics.

Resistance to change depends largely on the leadership style of a leader as a model of their sustainable behavior. The transformational leader overcomes resistance to change by paying attention to staff's personal needs and reactions to create trust and commitment. "It is about caring staff, what they want, and how you can help them" (Korejan et al., 2016, p. 457).

Common Errors to Implementing Organizational Change

Kotter is internationally regarded as the foremost authority on the topic of change leadership. His work has led organizations to achieving successful transformations by implementing critical strategies that lead to change in a complex, fast-moving business environment.

There is no doubt that Kotter's work is applicable in the educational field as well, and can assist its efforts to transform schools into organizations that create capacity for learning and equity.

For Hooper and Bernhardt (2016), creating this capacity requires specific, intentional, and deliberate actions and processes that describe leadership modes or models. They considered

that “creating personal and organizational capacity includes strengthening personal knowledge, skills, and dispositions to a specific leadership mode while simultaneously attending to organizational learning” (p.5).

In the last three to four years, there has been a significant increase in Kotter’s findings from those in K-12 and in higher education, from superintendents, principals, and other educational stakeholders. They are interested in highlighting the impact of Kotter’s findings and his organizational change model to change education, as stated by Akhtar and Kotter (2019).

In *Charting the Course – The Path to Transformation in Education*, Akhtar and Kotter (2019) stated that education has been using the same approach to leading change for over a century. This is a reason why education has not evolved as desired, and the challenges to implementing change continue to be overlooked. They identified three challenges for school leaders to leverage the implementation of the Kotter’s Eight-Step Change Model and to use leadership principles to think differently. The challenges are described as follows:

- 1) People are not brought into the vision: Most leaders create a vision and then communicate the need for change only through a crisis that needs to be resolved immediately. Effective leaders are highly adapted to real threats and crises and need to communicate the vision effectively to staff in order to lead organizational change.
- 2) We cannot experiment with kids: A compelling opportunity statement to help people understand the importance of communication is that it engages both the head and the heart. For example, teachers analyzing data and experience of students who did not make it to graduation helps to understand the impact that a changing educational system has on students every single day.

- 3) It is hard to change district/state wide: Leadership alignment and commitment is a critical element to district/statewide change. Leaders in administration, the teachers' union, department chairs, and the Board of Education agree about the need for change and commit to putting the work in together.

Additionally, Kotter (2012) identified common errors to implementing organizational change that impact not only global organizations but also educational systems whose job it is provide access and equity to all in a fast-changing world. The obstacles to implementing organizational change as described by Kotter (2012) are as follows:

1. Allowing too much complacency: Managers and leaders may fail to create a sense of urgency at the beginning of the change process. They may underestimate the need to drive people out of their comfort zone. Too much management complacency can bring a lack of understanding a crisis situation. Additionally, low performance standards and insufficient feedback may obstruct change. The lack of a sense of urgency can prevent people from providing an extra effort that is often essential to implement change.
2. Failing to create a powerful team: In successful transformation, people with a commitment to improved performance can compose a team. The team members must combine formal titles, information and expertise, reputations and relationships, and capacity for leadership in order to assist change.
3. Underestimating the power of vision: Vision is key in producing useful change by helping to direct, align, and inspire actions in people. Members of an organization must be able to describe the vision in five minutes or less and show understanding and interest.
4. Undercommunicating the vision: Credible and consistent communication of the vision is essential to lead the transformation process and the desired outcome.

5. Permitting obstacles to block the new vision: Confront obstacles during the change process to empower employees and effect change.
6. Failing to create short-term wins: Provide short-term goals to meet and celebrate wins to assist change or transformation. Commitments to produce short-term goals keep complacency down and encourage analytical thinking that clarifies or revises transformational visions.
7. Declaring victory too soon: Celebrating victory before the transformation job is done stops the momentum, lowers the sense of urgency, disengages the guiding coalition team, and overshadows the vision.
8. Neglecting to anchor changes firmly in the corporate culture: Anchoring changes and providing feedback shows people how specific behaviors and attitudes help improve performance and ensures the next generation of management personifies the new approach.

Making any of the described errors common to transformation efforts can have serious consequences, such as slowing down the new initiatives, creating unnecessary resistance, and frustrating employees endlessly. Kotter (2012) stated that although these errors are inevitable, with awareness and skills they can be avoided, or at least greatly mitigated.

Kotter's Eight Steps Process for Leading Change

There is not a doubt that our world has changed in the past decade. It continues to change at a fast pace, which makes it difficult to keep the same systems and structures that were used in the as in the past. The demands of the current human population and its diverse cultures are higher, and changes can be unpredictable; even more, there are changes for which we are not prepared, such as school closures and implementation of distance learning due to COVID-19.

All the changes we are currently facing in all areas such as business, politics, and education require leaders who are willing to rebuild systems and structures that offer a new direction.

Traditional change theories might offer change models applicable to most organizations; however, Kotter 's Eight Steps Model for Leading Change is the one the researcher found purposeful for this study, because many educational stakeholders now consider this model's core elements as a path to transforming education as emphasized by Akhtar and Kotter (2019).

Additionally, Kotter's Eight Steps Model offers strategies to handle changes quickly enough with agility and creativity. This model can take advantage of windows of opportunities that others see as a crisis and avoid the failure of existing systems, such as those seen in COVID-19. Additionally, Kotter (2014) has acknowledged leadership as fundamental to implementing change in our rapidly changing world as it was for organizations created in the last century. To better align the steps with today's complexity to make it advantageous for educational leaders, these steps are also identified as accelerators to change. The steps or accelerators described in Kotter's Eight-Steps Model to Organizational Change are constant, with some occurring concurrently or continuously. The steps in Kotter's model are:

Step 1: Creating a sense of urgency. This accelerator is key to gaining team cooperation and collaboration. In this step, identifying and discussing crises, potential crises, or major opportunities will help to avoid too much complacency during the change process.

Step 2: Building a guiding coalition. A leader knows that change is difficult to accomplish alone. It is crucial to form a group that has enough power to work together and influence the change. During the second step, the leader creates trust and guides the

coalition team to develop common goals.

Step 3: Forming strategic vision and initiatives. This step focuses on creating a vision to guide change processes and develops strategies to achieve the vision. A visionary leader develops a vision that clarifies the direction for change, motivates action, and helps to align individuals to work together with autonomy in an efficient way.

Step 4: Enlisting a volunteer army. This requires purposeful and consistent communication of the vision and strategies, as well as modeling expected behaviors.

Step 5: Enabling action by removing barriers. In this step, employees are empowered to change systems and structures that can undermine the change vision and can get rid of obstacles. In this step, the leader ensures the vision is communicated to all, provides training to develop the right skills and attitudes, and aligns information with people to enforce the vision.

Step 6: Creating short-term wins. This step is about recognizing and rewarding people for improvement in performance or goal achievement. Recognition of short-term performance improvement helps transformation by building moral and motivation, and provides data that shows improvement. This action can assist those who would resist change and can instead build momentum.

Step 7: Sustaining acceleration: This step focuses on consolidating gains and producing more change. In this step, the leader ensures that all new practices are firmly grounded in the organization's culture by hiring, developing, and promoting people who can implement the change vision.

Step 8: Instituting change: In this step, the leader must review the norms and values of the transformation process, communicate effectively with all stakeholders, change key

people as necessary, and make crucial decisions on the succession of leadership and management.

The eight steps of Kotter's Change Model (2021) show key elements that deal with the complexity of change in today's world. They are proven to develop trust and accelerate progress on key strategies and initiatives. In the educational field, this organizational change model might represent an opportunity for school leaders to experience significant outcomes, even when facing crises generated by external forces for which there is lack of preparation.

Transformational Leadership Approach: Behaviors and Traits

Leadership has been a universal topic that has captured the attention of practitioners and researchers who want to define and understand its complexity as a process, as a behavior, and as an agent of change. Throughout the years, the efforts to define and conceptualize leadership have led to the development of many different leadership styles and approaches.

In the educational field, leadership has become a fundamental pillar to create and sustain school communities. Leadership can provide the organizational capacity that leads to excellence and equity for students to achieve a high level of success. One of the most impactful leadership advances adopted by school districts and school leaders is the transformational leadership approach.

As Northouse (2016) pointed out, this approach has become popular for emphasizing both intrinsic motivation and development that fit the needs of today's people who want to be inspired and empowered to succeed in times of uncertainty. Transformational leadership is considered to be a process that changes and transforms individuals, groups of people, and any given organization. In the change process, transformational leaders become strong role models who empower and nurture followers to transcend their self-interest for the sake of others.

Another concept of transformational leadership, which shapes the role of the transformational leader in a school setting, is the one provided by Hooper and Berndhart (2016). They both agreed that a transformational leader is the one who inspires and motivates the school staff to focus on working collaboratively to build a school community and shape the organizational culture. Additionally, they considered a transformational leader as the one who cultivates an inclusive, learning-focused school culture that leverages the capacity of all participants in achieving a vision for learning.

As introduced by Burkus (2010), transformational leaders focus on inspiring others to support each other and the organization as a whole. Followers of a transformational leader respond by feeling trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect for the leader. As a result, they are more willing to work harder than expected. Bass (1990; as cited in Burkus, 2010) established four factors demonstrated by transformational leaders: (1) individual consideration, (2) intellectual stimulation, (3) inspirational motivation (charismatic leadership), and (4) idealized influence. Every factor includes behaviors, skills, and traits as characterized by Hoffmeister et al., (2012):

1. Individualized Consideration: The leader acts according to their subordinates' characteristics and capabilities. The leader pays personal attention to individuals, develops a healthy relationship with them, and provides new learning opportunities based on their interests and skills.
2. Intellectual Stimulation: The leader encourages the followers to develop motivation and creativity by using different approaches and opportunities. The leader's purpose is to offer an array of ideas and opportunities to foster imagination for their followers to try new techniques and approaches.

3. **Inspirational Motivation:** The leader creates a clear perspective to reach goals and move toward the future by increasing workplace efficiency and challenging followers to achieve goals.
4. **Idealized Influence:** The leader becomes a model by admiring, respecting, and trusting the followers. The leaders avoid using power for personal interests or gain.

In the words of Mirkamali et al., (2014), transformational leadership is represented by leaders who seek to create ideas and new perspectives to provide a new path of growth and prosperity in the organization. The transformational leader develops commitment, passion, and loyalty among managers and staff. This type of leader mobilizes team members to make fundamental changes to move in new directions and reaching higher ideal performance levels.

Arabiun et al., (2014) defined transformational leadership as the process of creating commitment to organizational goals and empowering people to fulfill those goals. A transformational leader encourages followers to develop their creativity and self-actualization to promote team, group, and organization interests. A transformational leader leads change in the organization and creates a perspective for both managers and staff.

The transformational leader is defined as the leader who has developed a set of ethical values and a sense of identity along among the organization members with a set of leadership skills such as confidence, competence, articulated speech, acceptance of different points of view, a spirit of collaboration, and listening to the opinions of others. A transformational leader is considered charismatic, visionary, and inspirational.

Among all the different conceptualizations, Northouse (2016) described the transformational leader as the one: (1) Clarifying the values and norms of the organization, (2) participating in the culture of the organization to shape its meaning, (3) establishing a clear

vision that guides the change process, and providing meaning to the organization's identity, (4) building trust and fostering collaboration, (5) encouraging others and celebrating accomplishments, (6) empowering people to feel better about themselves and their contributions to the organization.

Interestingly, in John Kotter's book *Accelerate: Building Strategic Agility for a Faster-Moving World*, similar to Northouse (2016), he (2014) recognized leadership as the central force for change for any given organization. He describes eight steps to implementing change, previously noted.

Through his recent work, Kotter wanted us to recognize the importance of leadership as a critical element for change. Kotter's (2014) definition of leadership fits within the transformational leadership approach, defining leadership as "setting a direction, creating a vision and inspiring people to achieve the vision, and enabling them to do so with energy and speed through an effective strategy" (p.59). In other words, he defined leadership as the ability to mobilize individuals and groups to achieve desired organizational changes for a better future.

Korejan and Shahbazi (2016) emphasized the need for transformational leaders to enable organizations to improve their performance in an unstable and unpredictable environment when combining the transformational leadership actions with other leadership processes and actions, such as the ones described in Kotter's Eight Steps to Leading Change, the results provides a competitive advantage for organizations. In the educational field, this combination might result in an opportunity to see crises as chances to succeed in implementing sustainable changes. These changes can provide equity and access at our schools.

Leading Organizational Change in the Education Field

For many leaders in the field of education, school districts often implement new

initiatives in their efforts to restructure or transform education to improve learning. Some of those initiatives might go as planned, while many others fail. In his efforts to lead change in education, Fullan (2010) declared the need for a whole-system reform. His approach has been taken seriously over the past decade. His main contribution is the belief that real change is possible if the appropriate actions and processes are implemented to sustain change beyond simply reacting to a crisis. The main ideas of the whole-system reform are as follow:

- 1) All children, except the severely disabled, can learn to a high level of critical reasoning and problem solving.
- 2) Every successful organization pursues a small number of core priorities (that have leverage power) and does them exceedingly well.
- 3) Successful schools, districts and larger systems have focused, resolute leadership especially during challenging periods, and these leaders can influence others around them to be resolute.
- 4) Collective capacity is a set of skills that involve disciplined collaboration and competition. It is a hidden resource that is little understood or cultivated.
- 5) Specificity and precision are required to accelerate the speed of change.
- 6) Intelligent accountability is basic to all reform efforts. Intelligent accountability is more than simply trying to do the right thing. It involves a set of policies and practices that increases individual, and a collective capacity to share responsibilities.
- 7) The best way to achieve whole-system reform is when the vast majority of people are working on it together (pp. 4-5 &21).

Similarly, Frontier (2015) explained education reform initiatives that failed to affect student performance. Identifying the proper ways to sustain transformation, is not an easy task,

as school leaders must answer four priority questions and align the change efforts to the answers. The first question asks why the change is necessary. This fundamental to understand the purpose for change, which can engage people to act for change, helping them to align their efforts toward achievement of common goals.

The second question, how much change needs to occur, asks how much effort people need to invest in implementing the desired change. This question requires the school leader to identify strategies for three different types of change: (1) maintaining status quo to carry existing beliefs and processes out, (2) transactional change to provide meaningful incentives and requirements to drive changes in the process, and (3) transformational change to develop new beliefs, insights, and skills that result in desired change outcomes.

The third question, where should the change occur, focuses on where to invest the efforts to raise student achievement. The five areas of leverage in education are: structures, grouping practices, standards, strategies, and conceptions of self. All educators can better prioritize their efforts if they understand the advantages and disadvantages associated with these areas.

The last question, who will participate in the change process, is about engaging all stakeholders in the change process, especially educators and students, to meaningfully establish sustained change.

As noted earlier, in one of his most recent articles about leading organizational change, Akhtar and Kotter (2019) charted the path to transformation in education using the eight-step model that leads to change. For them, it is fundamental that school leaders adopt a problem-driven approach to face real threats and crises, and address challenges such as teacher shortages, budget cuts, and views that prevent people from acting and sustaining change. Additionally, they believed that to drive change successfully, a school vision needs to be crafted, reviewed, and

communicated. The school staff needs to understand that change must occur to increase students' success and they must commit to working in new ways to support change.

Finally, Akhtar and Kotter conclude that a critical element to change in school systems is leadership alignment that includes a new development of district and statewide policies. It requires that all educational leaders share a vision for change and commit to work together.

The Role of School Administrators as Agents of Change

As per the literature review, we have seen that organizational change is a process that is vital to face the rapid changes occurring in our world. Even more, education as an organization must change for the better in all its systems and structures to meet the goals and outcomes to improving student academic achievement.

Change is integral to any contemporary educational setting as schools make great efforts to define, redefine, or reinforce their organizational and instructional efficiency to increase learning effectiveness, as the demand for excellence and innovation rises. In this context, any change initiative requires leaders who understand and guide the change process. As an agent of change, the effective school administrator needs to understand the significance of the change required, implement processes and actions to lead the change process, develop the skills and behaviors to be a change-driven and transformational school leader, and then communicate these to staff to benefit students.

Understanding the change required at the school organization reiterates the critical role of the school principal, who leads and manages change in schools by implementing the right processes and actions. In this regard, Calabrese (2002) recommended that the school principal is a change agent who should take into account five core principles: (1) prepare to lead change process, (2) design change strategies in order to meet pacing requirements, (3) identify the

particular nature of change, (4) understand and guide attitudes toward change, and (5) be attentive to the external and internal powers on change process.

On this subject, Fullan (2016) suggested the implementation of a coherence framework which contains four components described as the right drivers in action: (1) Focusing direction to include a moral imperative and directive vision, (2) cultivating collaborative cultures, (3) deepening learning that aligns pedagogy and technology, (4) securing accountability to develop the internal capacity to be effective, responsible, and to responsive to engage performance and priorities, and (5) leadership as the core of the framework that links the other four components.

In this sense, Akhtar and Kotter (2019) incorporated change leadership principles to lead transformation in education and leverage the implementation of the eight-step change model, including the role of the school leader who accelerates change successfully.

These four principles are described as follows: (1) see management and leadership as critical components to change that require very different behaviors, (2) take care of both head and heart by motivating people to change from both a rational and emotional perspective. This inspires people to invest in change and overcome resistance to change, (3) provide opportunities for “buy in” for people, and also challenge them to achieve change, (4) expand to more effective leadership and more creative solutions by identifying potential barriers to change.

For the purpose of this study, we are considering leadership as a transformational process that involves influence and requires a set of skills and behaviors to lead change. In this context, leadership is seen as a process that can be learned and is available to everyone. In defining the transformational leader, Northouse (2016) identified six main behaviors: (1) providing strong role models, (2) showing competence, (3) articulating goals, (4) communicating high expectations, (5) expressing confidence, and (6) arising motivation. Additionally, he identifies a

set of skills that are available to everyone but requires practice to initiate, develop, and carry out significant change in an organization. These skills are:

1. Model the way. The leader embodies values and personal philosophy that sets a personal example for others.
2. Inspire a shared vision. The leader creates a compelling vision and communicates it to guide people through change to achieve the desired outcome.
3. Challenge the process. It requires the leader the ability to innovate, grow, and improve. The leader also must take risks and learn from their own mistakes.
4. Enable others to act. The transformational leader is effective at working with people, building trust, promoting collaboration, listening closely to different perspectives, empowering others to make decisions, and creating safe and healthy work environments.
5. Encourage the heart. The leader must recognize and celebrate others' achievements.

Similarly, the LAUSD, one of the largest school districts in Los Angeles developed a leadership framework in which, leadership skills and behaviors can be developed overtime. The leadership framework developed by Los Angeles Unified School District (2019), describes the following transformational leadership behaviors:

1. Learning-centered leadership behaviors that demonstrates ethics, values, judgment, and integrity. An example is use of self-reflection and awareness that can inform future decisions and actions. This can alter situations of ambiguity and complexity and can address cultural and social-emotional learning.

Additionally, the following skills are identified in the LAUSD leadership framework: (1) leading and managing change, (2) developing and maintaining a shared vision, (3) creating and maintaining a culture of continued improvement, (4) providing support to improve instruction,

promoting quality teaching, learning, and leadership, (5) assessing performance of all school staff, engaging families and community partners, (6) managing people, time and resources, and (7) demonstrating legal and policy compliance.

In identifying skills and behaviors required by the school leader as an agent of change, Kotter (2012 & 2014) describes leadership behaviors as a set of mental habits that support lifelong learning. These mental habits are:

1. Risk taking, defined as the willingness to push oneself out of comfort zones.
2. Humble self-reflection that involves an honest assessment of successes and failures.
3. Solicitation of opinions that requires an aggressive collection of information and ideas from others.
4. Careful listening.
5. Openness to new ideas.

In his book, *Our Iceberg is Melting*, Kotter and Rathgeber (2017) additionally suggested the following leadership behaviors: Curiosity, vision, vulnerability, and the ability to observe.

They also identified a set of skills while defining leadership, which establish direction, align people, motivate, inspire, and mobilize people to see opportunities and leap quickly into a prosperous future. The most important contribution to implementing change in education from Kotter (2019) is that he has been able to integrate this set of skills and behaviors in actions embedded in his eight-step process that leads to change. The integration into actions is represented by the following words: create, build, form, enlist, enable, generate, sustain, and institute.

Summary

The literature review addressed the concept of organizational change from different perspectives that included principles and steps for change. It was also necessary to review the transformational leadership approach from different perspectives to describe the behavior, traits, and skills needed from a leader that help to delineate the steps to change. Leading organizational change in education requires more than an established system. It requires to having the ability to identify the common errors that hinder change and to be aware of why people resist change.

Additionally, the school leader must have the ability to lead in a time of uncertainty using transformational leadership behaviors and skills. With an effective organizational change model and effective transformational leadership skills and behaviors, the probability is that schools can face external forces and global economic challenges successfully. The reaction and attitude of the school community to organizational change depends to a great extent on the leader's actions, behaviors, and steps that effect sustainable change.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Rationale

This chapter discusses the research methodology inherent in this study. To examine what practical leadership skills are required from a school leader to implement change, the researcher adopted an explanatory-sequential mixed-methods design to generate a more comprehensive analysis allowing data triangulation.

According to Creswell and Piano Clark (2006), the explanatory-sequential mixed-method design helped obtain different but complementary data on the same topic to result in the best understanding of the research model. In the words of Chiong et al. (2017), this model improves outcomes and provides new perspectives.

The overall purpose of the two-phased mixed-methods design was to use qualitative data to explain or build upon initial quantitative results. Use of the follow-up explanation variant model (see Figure 1. 1) supported the researcher to form groups based on quantitative results and to follow up with the groups through subsequent qualitative research. As characterized by Creswell and Piano Clark (2006), in this model, “the researcher identified specific quantitative findings that need additional explanation, such as statistical differences among groups, individuals who score at extreme levels, or unexpected results” (p. 72). Then the researcher collected qualitative data from participants who could best help explain these findings.

Figure 1. 1

Explanatory Design: Follow-up Exploration Model (Creswell & Piano Clark, 2006)



In this mixed-method explanatory design, collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data were conducted in two consecutive phases. Phase One of this research focused on collecting and analyzing quantitative data using a researcher-constructed instrument called Processes and Actions to Leading Change at Schools (PALCS 1). The results obtained supported the identification of follow-up results. They provided the researcher with the elements to develop the structured questions for individual interviews and focus groups during Phase Two.

Phase Two of this study involved focus groups and personal interviews for the qualitative section of this research linked to the case study. For this study, the questionnaire data provided a large-scale snapshot of broad patterns and trends in implementing processes and actions for positive, sustainable change. The interview script design used as a follow-up allowed the exploration of areas covered in the questionnaire that aligned with Kotter's Eight Steps for Leading Organizational Change. It also helped to identify school leaders' specific behaviors that could significantly impact implementing positive, sustainable change.

The researcher opted for a Follow-Up Exploration Model because it describes the steps of a proven organizational change model for change during the COVID-19 crises that involved school leaders in an urban area in L.A. This model also supports the analysis of this phenomenon through a case study lenses during the research's qualitative phase. In the qualitative phase, the researcher focused on an in-depth analysis of the group of school leaders' lived experiences implementing change during COVID-19.

Another rationale for using a sequential explanatory mixed-method design lies in the overarching research question: What processes and actions did the school leaders employ to promote positive, sustainable change during COVID-19? This question involved two variables: dependent and independent. The dependent variable is related to the school leaders' processes

and actions, while the independent variable involves promoting positive, sustainable change.

Three questions were developed to add content validity and to include the right research items during the study's qualitative section:

1. What were the school leaders' characteristics that positively impacted the change process?
2. What specific processes and steps did the school leaders implement to create positive change?
3. What were the challenges and struggles in the successful implementation of change during COVID-19?

The content validity and reliability of the instrument are discussed later in this writing.

Setting and Participants

This study included school leaders from 150 schools located in an urban area of Los Angeles, CA. This urban area is divided into six regions each called Community of Schools (CoS). An administrator, a director, and a team of coaches for each academic area, including intervention and special education personnel, led each school community. The number of schools depends upon the size of the CoS. To avoid bias, the researcher used a fixed code to identify every CoS. The CoS list is as follows: Lincoln Heights and El Sereno (LHS), East Los Angeles (ELAS), Boyle Heights (BH), Huntington Park, Vernon, and Walnut Park (HPV), Bell, Cudahy, and Maywood (MCB), and South Gate (STHG).

The 150 schools are organized into three main categories:

1. One hundred and thirty-five school sites, including elementary, middle, high school, and span schools.
2. Four learning centers.

3. Six primary centers and fifteen early education centers. All shown in Figure 2. 1.

Figure 2. 1

Percentage of Schools per COS

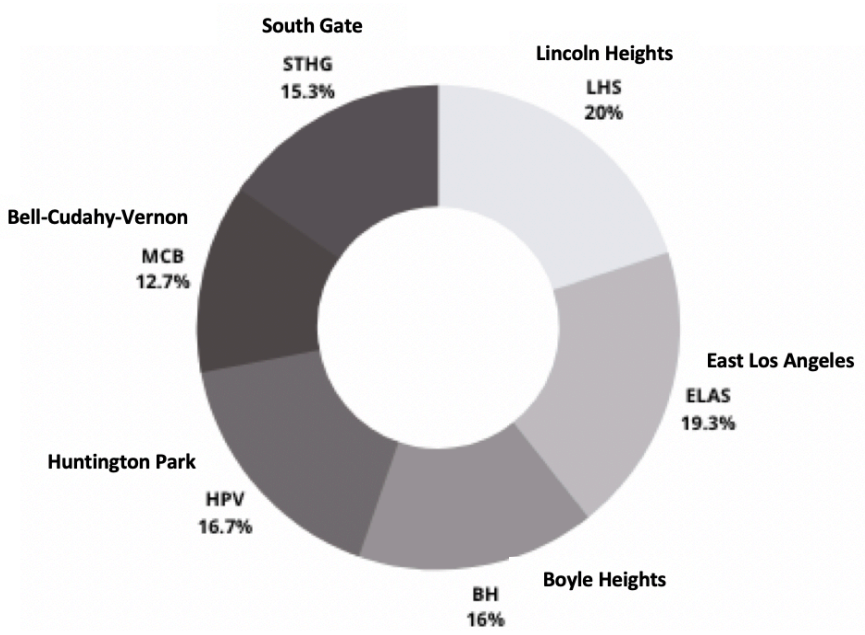


Figure 2. 1 shows the percentage of schools grouped in each community of schools. The total number of schools in the Local District East that encompasses the six community of schools are: 73 elementary schools, 16 middle schools, 32 high schools, 15 early education centers, six primary centers, four learning centers, three span schools, and one special education center.

All participants provided informed consent and were given specific information relating to this study. This information contained a statement that specified voluntary participation and

opportunities to ask questions and the chance to withdraw from the research at any time.

Sampling Procedures

The researcher used randomization to select the group of school leaders who represented the population. With the stratified sampling, the researcher divided the population into separate groups, called strata. Then a simple random sample was drawn from each group. Stratified sampling improved accuracy and representation by splitting the sample into sub-groups and randomly selecting respondents within each sub-group.

The sample size was 136 school leaders out of 150, with a margin of 5% error and a confidence level of 99%. Table 2. 1 shows the strata and the sample size:

Table 2. 1

Sample Size by Strata

School Type	Population Size	Sample Size
Elementary	73	62
Middle School	16	16
High School	32	30
Primary Center	6	6
Learning Center	4	4
Span	3	3
Early Education Center	15	15
TOTAL	150	136

Instrumentation and Measures

Phase One: Quantitative

Phase One of the study focused on collecting and analyzing quantitative data using a researcher-constructed instrument called Processes and Actions to Leading Change at Schools (PALCS I). The PALCS was constructed utilizing the Kotter's Eight Steps for Leading Organizational Change Model. It consisted of 21 closed-response research items aligned to the Eight Steps for Leading Organizational Change with a five-point Likert scale, 1= completely disagree to 5= completely agree to measure implementation and alignment of processes and actions. Table 3. 1 shows the representative sample items provided for each of the Kotter's eight rankings.

Table 3. 1

Survey Scales and Representative Items

Scale	Representative Item
Creating a Sense of Urgency	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The principal identified and highlighted potential threats. 2. The principal examined opportunities and effective interventions. 3. The principal invited honest dialogues and discussions to make people think about the prevalent issues and give them convincing reasons.
Building a Guiding Coalition	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. The principal identified effective changes the influential leaders and critical stakeholders in their school needed to implement. 5. The principal formed a powerful change coalition to work as a team. 6. The principal ensured that the change coalition team involved people across departments and levels.
Forming a Strategic Vision and Initiatives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. The principal collaboratively determined the core values, vision, and strategies for realizing a change in the school. 8. The principal ensured that the change leaders described the vision effectively in a manner that was easily understood and followed.
Enlisting a Volunteer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. The principal communicated the change in the vision often and

Army (Vision)	<p>connected the vision with all the performance reviews, and training.</p> <p>10. The principal handled the concerns and issues of people honestly and with involvement.</p> <p>11. The principal ensured that the organizational process and structure were in place and were aligned with the overall organizational vision.</p>
Enabling Actions by Removing Barriers	<p>12. The principal checked for barriers or people resisting change and implemented proactive actions to remove the obstacles.</p> <p>13. The principal rewarded people for endorsing change and supporting the process.</p>
Generating and Celebrate Short-term Wins	<p>14. The principal created short-term wins early in the change process.</p> <p>15. The principal created many short-term targets instead of one-long term goal to avoid failure.</p> <p>16. The principal rewarded the contributions of people who were involved in meeting the targets.</p>
Sustaining Acceleration	<p>17. The principal achieved continuous improvements by analyzing success stories individually and improving from those individual experiences.</p> <p>18. The principal discussed success stories related to change initiatives in every given opportunity.</p>
Instituting Change	<p>19. The principal ensured that change became an integral part of the organizational culture and was visible in every school organizational aspect.</p> <p>20. The principal ensured that the existing school leaders' support continued to extend their support towards the change.</p>

The researcher added structured open-ended questions to this survey to obtain qualitative data used in Phase Two. The open-ended questions are described in Table 4. 1.

Table 4. 1*Structured Open-Ended Questions for LAUSD Educators and School Staff*

Representative Item	Open-Ended Questions
Creating a Sense of Urgency	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe how the school principal defined the goals to be achieved or a purpose to be served during COVID-19. 2. Tell how the school principal did not allow complacency to get the job done during the implementation of the distance-learning program.
Building a Guiding Coalition	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Explain how well the school leader recognized your potential. 4. Were the members of the guiding coalition representatives, experts, influential and dedicated?
Forming a Strategic Vision and Initiatives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Who was involved in creating the strategic vision for change and learning strategies during COVID-19? 6. How was the vision created?
Enlisting a Volunteer Army	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. How was the vision communicated to the staff? 8. Was the vision consistent and stable? 9. Specify in which ways you trusted the school principal to lead change during COVID-19.
Enabling Actions by Removing Barriers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Express how well the school principal understood problems and needs to avoid obstacles. 11. Tell what type of support, training, and resources the principal implemented for the change.
Generating and Celebrate Short-term Wins	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Explain how the school leader celebrated the efforts to implement the distance learning program and student achievement during COVID-19. 13. Provide specific examples of how achievement of short-term wins (goals) was celebrated, rewarded, and announced.
Sustain Acceleration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 14. Describe how the school leader ensured full implementation of the distance-learning program during COVID-19. 15. How successful was the full implementation of the distance-learning program?
Instituting Change	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 16. In the future, how will the changes made during COVID-19 be part of the school's systems and operations? 17. How do changes happening now affect what you will be doing in the future?

Additionally, the researcher constructed one more Five-point Likert scale instrument based on Kotter's Eight Steps to Leading Change, called Observed School Leaders' Behaviors Promoting Change (OSLEB). This instrument collected quantitative data from the school staff and parents of the highest and lowest scored schools as per the quantitative data analysis. The OSLEB was a modified version of the PALCS that kept the same representative items for teachers and school staff to identify which of the eight steps of the change process principal implemented to promote change at the school sites during COVID-19.

Phase Two: Qualitative

In the second phase of the research, the researcher conducted structured interviews with two CoS Administrators to obtain an overall performance rating of the higher school performing schools. The researcher included an interview protocol and a predetermined set of questions based on PALCS data analysis to develop the data collection instrument called Observed Leaders' Behaviors Promoting Change (OSLEB).

School staff and parents of the two selected schools were invited to a focus group. The researcher conducted separate focus groups to avoid a feeling of intimidation when responding. It also helped to prevent fear caused by the perception of being evaluated. All the answers were audio-recorded for data analysis purposes.

The purpose of the interviews and focus groups was to address specific quantitative findings that need additional explanation, such as statistical differences among groups, individuals who scored at extreme levels (highest and lowest), and significant or meaningful results. The researcher formulated semi-structured, open-response interview questions to construct validity based on the PALCS constructed survey findings, as quantitative data was gathered and analyzed to warrant further probing. For interrater reliability, the researcher looked

for multiple judges and measures using Cronbach's correlations to assess the questionnaire's internal consistency, based on the PALCS multiple Likert-type scales and items recommended by UCLA, 2020.

These items in the questionnaire were not cause and effect questions. They allowed the focus group participants to discuss their perceptions and experiences of leading change implementation during COVID-19. The researcher interpreted the qualitative data as detailed, and the quantitative data findings substantiated the sequential explanatory design. Figure 3. 1 offers a visual representation of the instruments the researcher used in both phases of the research.

Figure 3. 1

Research Instruments

Quantitative	Qualitative
	COS District Administrators (n=2): Open-ended interview questions related to Kotter's Eight Steps to Leading Change included in PALCS related to school performance
School Administrators/Principals (n=150): Survey instrument (using 5-point Likert scales and open-ended questions) Processes and Actions to Leading Change at Schools (PALCS)	
School Staff and Parents (n=11) Survey instrument (using 5-point Likert scales) Observed School Leaders' Behaviors Promoting Change (OSLEB)	Structured Focus Group using open-ended questions based on the OSLEB

This figure shows an overview of the instruments the researcher used during both phases of the research, qualitative and quantitative, that provided information to respond to the questions leading this study.

Strategies for Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are essential aspects of all research to ensure the findings are credible and trustworthy. In any study, reliability and validity are imperative to avoid subjectivity in collecting and interpreting data. As defined by Brink (1993), reliability is concerned with the consistency, stability, and repeatability of the informant's accounts and the investigators' ability to collect and record information accurately. On the other hand, validity, according to Maxwell (2013), refers to the "correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or another sort of account" (p. 21).

In other words, reliability requires that a researcher obtain the same or comparable results every time the same method is used on the same comparable subjects. Validity is linked to the accuracy and truthfulness of scientific findings. More importantly, defining these two concepts for research identifies and deals with potential threats to reliability and validity. As Maxwell (2013) states, such threats are unavoidable, but we must acknowledge them in our study's proposal in order to create valid and reliable research.

Validity

For the two-phase mixed methods design in which the second phase is considered a phenomenological-case study approach, the researcher used the following validation strategies suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018) while acknowledging different potential threats as bias and reactivity: triangulation, respondent validation or seeking feedback, and peer review.

For triangulation, the researcher utilized a variety of data sources during the two phases of the study. In Phase One, the researcher used a researcher-constructed instruments called Processes and Actions to Leading Change in Schools (PALCS) to collect and analyze quantitative data. During the qualitative phase of the study, the researcher utilized an open-

response questionnaire during focus groups.

The researcher involved independent data analysis by other research colleagues or experts in the field to provide respondent validation and feedback. Similarly, during Phase Two of the study the researcher brought back to the focus group the preliminary analysis that described themes critical observations and interpretations suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018). The systematic and consistent feedback enabled the researcher to avoid misinterpretation and misunderstanding of data.

For peer review, the researcher sought support from two Community of Schools Directors, experts in the field of organizational change to debrief research methods, data findings, and interpretation.

Another area of validation was the use of a strong theoretical framework developed by Kotter (2008, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2017, and 2020) and the design of the survey questions from the sources of the literature review. Subsequently, the survey items were logically grouped into Kotter's eight different scales to ensure content validity. (1) creating a sense of urgency, (2) building a guiding coalition team, (3) forming a strategic vision and initiatives, (4) enlisting a volunteer army to communicate the vision, (5) enabling actions by removing barriers, (6) generating short-term wins, (7) sustaining acceleration, and (8) instituting change.

After piloting the PALCS for the reliability of the measurement instrument, the instrument was reviewed as necessary to formulate the open-response questions for criterion validity, allowing prediction and forecast to develop a qualitative questionnaire for Phase Two. The open-response questions invited participants to describe specific behaviors they perceived as having the most significant impact on implementing positive change for each of the eight steps of leading organizational change in order to control researcher bias.

Reliability

For reliability, besides piloting and refining the research-constructed instrument for collecting data, the researcher utilized an intercoder agreement to determine codes and themes. The initial proposal for coding and themes invited participants to describe specific behaviors they perceived as having the most significant impact on implementing positive change while coding categories related to each of the eight leading organizational change steps. To ensure the reliability of the constructed survey instrument (PALCS), the researcher looked for a clear conceptualization of processes and actions by incorporating critical words into the instrument, such as: a sense of urgency, vision, positive, sustainable change collaboration, and other concepts that define leadership. The researcher also standardized the item responses using a five-point Likert scale: 1= completely disagree to 5= completely agree. The constructed instrument was piloted with 15 school administrators and allowed participants to provide feedback on the survey items.

The researcher included demographics of the population in the instruments to increase both validity and reliability. The instrument also allowed a more detailed analysis, comparison across subgroups, and error control by reducing inconsistencies and managing unexpected variables.

The researcher was cautious about one strategy in the validation checklist provided by Maxwell (2013), which was intensive, long-term involvement. Although repeated observations, interviews, and the researcher's sustained presence in the study provided more complete data about specific situations of the phenomenon analyzed, it could potentially lead to potential threats such as bias. A long-term involvement might lead to subjectivity as the researcher's beliefs, values, and perceptions were inter-active with the focus group's beliefs, values, and

perceptions. Long-term involvement could also lead to reactivity, if the researcher did not know how to avoid use of leading questions to control responses.

Data Collection

For this study, the researcher collected data from more than one source. As Creswell and Poth suggest, it was imperative to develop protocols for recording the information and piloting the forms to record the data, such as interviews or observation protocols that guided data collection. There are four main elements the researcher considered when collecting data in the two phases of the research to gather valuable, accurate, and purposeful data were: (1) gaining access and developing rapport, (2) recording information, (3) minimizing field issues, and (4) storing data securely. These are explained below:

1. **Gaining Access and Developing Rapport:** The researcher gained permission to study the school sites from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the individuals participating at each research school site. Additionally, the study included the consent-to-participate forms and written permission from school principals to use school documents and websites.
2. **Recording Information:** The researcher used a Five Point Likert Scale to gather quantitative and qualitative data. During the qualitative phase, the researcher created an interview protocol to record information and also used an audio recorder.
3. **Minimizing Field Issues:** In the case study, the researcher opted to select the highest scored schools based on quantitative data. This step helped to gain organizational access, to get more availability from interviewers, and to decrease the time needed to collect data.

4. Storing Data Securely: The researcher-protected the anonymity of participants by masking their names in the data, storing the master lists separately including backup copies of computer files, and developing a data collection matrix as a visual to locate and identify information for the study.

Phase One: Quantitative

The collection of quantitative data began in the summer of 2021. The researcher-constructed an instrument called Processes and Actions to Leading Change at Schools (PALCS), which was the primary instrument to collect quantitative data. The PALCS questionnaire was sent to each school principal via an email invitation link and included specific directions on how to respond to the survey. Similarly, the Observed School Leader Behaviors (OSLEB) survey was emailed to all selected school staff and parents. All participants were provided with a due date to submit the responses.

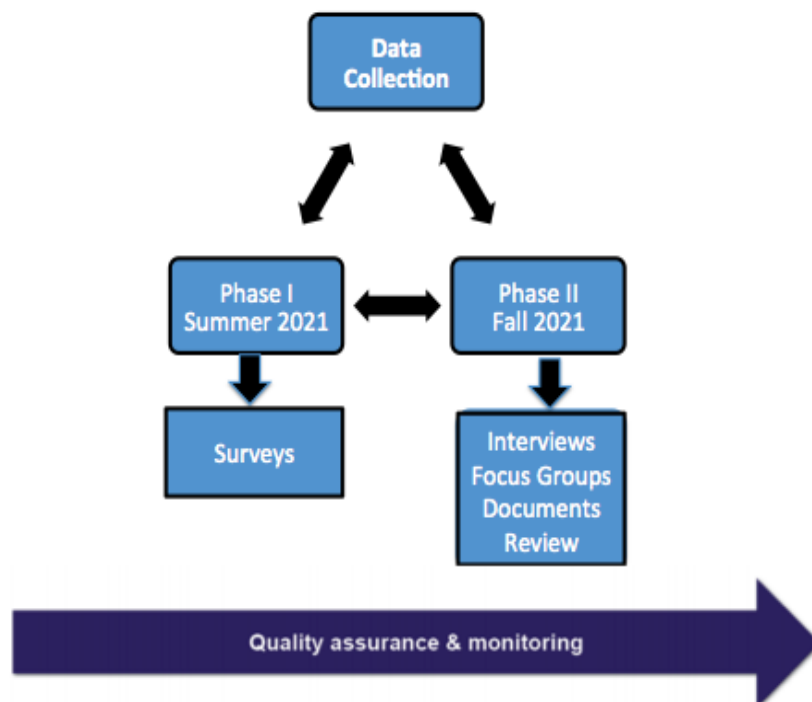
Phase Two: Qualitative

The second phase of the study took place in the fall of 2021. This phase involved interviews of Community of Schools, school staff, and parents' focus groups. In this phase of the research, the qualitative data was gathered only for the highest scored schools in the surveys. The survey utilized to collect quantitative data had open-response questions to amass qualitative data. The purpose of this phase of the research was to collect qualitative data to validate quantitative data findings. The researcher created semi-structured, open-response interview questions to ensure validity based on the PALCS constructed survey findings. Before the interviews, all participants were provided with a voluntary informed consent and were notified of their right to withdraw. The researcher assured the participants of a commitment to their anonymity. The participants also used pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

The data collection process involved a series of activities, as described in Figure 4. 1.

Figure 4. 1

Data Collection Activities



Data collection in Phase One involved recruiting participants who had previously been identified using randomization strategies, distributing surveys via email, and follow-up emails.

It also included scheduling and conducting individual interviews with the school principals of the highest and lowest scored schools as per data analysis in Phase One. Access and collection of school documents was necessary to collect additional qualitative data.

The OSLEB survey was sent to school staff and parents who were randomly selected via email, along with an invitation to participate, a summary of the purpose of the research, and a due date to submit their answers. During the process, the researcher assured all participants regarding confidentiality of the data collection. To conduct the staff and parents' focus groups,

the researcher invited the participants via email and through a Blackboard message generated by the school administrative secretary or by the school communication representative.

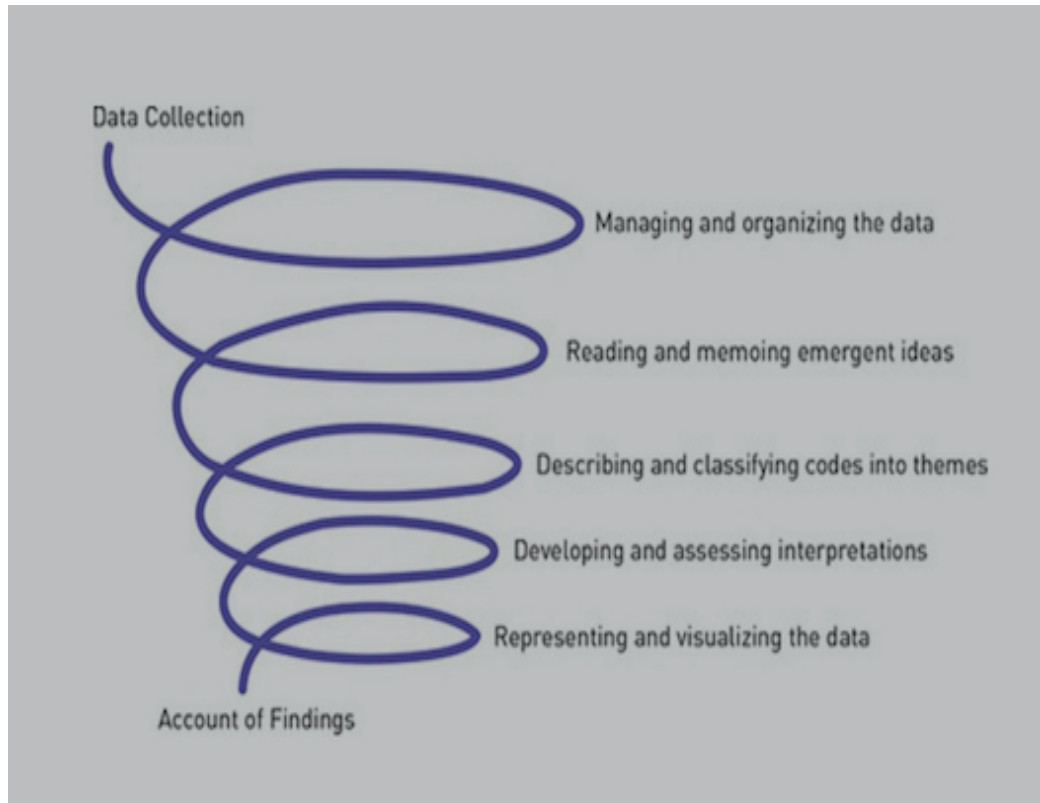
Data Analysis

Data analysis in both phases of this mixed-method research design, quantitative and qualitative study required applying statistical or logical strategies and techniques to describe, illustrate, evaluate, and understand data. In qualitative research, data analysis became ever more challenging, as it required analyzing texts and multiple forms of data such as interviews, documents, observations, images, and transcripts, among others.

As Creswell and Poth (2018) explain, "The process of analysis is much more. It also involves organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding, organizing themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation of them" (p. 181). Managing and organizing data for the analysis required moving in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach, as Creswell and Poth (2018) have described. During the analysis process, the researcher used analytical strategies to manage and organize the data, read and record emergent ideas, describe and classify codes into themes, develop and assess interpretations, and represent and visualize the data. Creswell and Poth referred to this process as the data analysis spiral, illustrated in Figure 5. 1.

Figure 5. 1

The Data Analysis Spiral (Creswell & Poth, 2018)



Within the data analysis spiral, the researcher conducted the following activities:

1. Managed and organized data: Prepared files and units using a file naming system and securing secure storage of files.
2. Read and recorded emerging ideas: Collected and summarized field notes that led to code development.
3. Described and classified codes into themes: Identified, listed, applied, and reduced codes into themes to create a codebook.

4. Developed and assessed interpretations: Understood, related, and applied findings to the literature framework.
5. Represented and visualized the data: Created a point of view and gathered feedback on the preliminary summaries of data.

During the quantitative phase, the first step was to classify the available data into different variables' level (categorical and interval) and identify the independent and dependent variables to determine the statistical analysis type. Classification allowed the researcher to focus on group item properties rather than individual ones, making the analysis of large amounts of information much easier. The researcher analyzed data using a variance multivariate (ANOVA) to compare means between two or more groups. During the qualitative phase, statistical coding to turn qualitative data into quantitative or numerical data was required to reduce codes into themes and create a codebook.

Ethical Issues

The researcher addressed the three fundamental principles relevant to the ethics of research involving human subjects so that unexpected ethical issues did not arise during the research.

The three basic principles mentioned in the *Belmont Report* issued by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (1979) are:

1. Respect for persons
2. Beneficence
3. Justice

Addressing the three principles required the researcher to provide the participants with informed consent, to make them aware of a voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw

from the research at any time. The researcher provided a detailed overview of the study's purposes, the description of what participants were expected to do, and any foreseeable risks of harm.

Additionally, the researcher used fair procedures and outcomes in selecting research subjects, such as randomization, to choose the research participants. As introduced by Creswell and Poth (2018), the participants' protection is essential, and the researcher must avoid the inclusion of identifiable information in the analysis files and reporting documents. To secure participants' protection from harm, the researcher masked participants' names and used pseudonyms for the focus group participants. The researcher created composite files to avoid disclosure of information. Another ethical issue the researcher overcame was limited access to analysis procedures and the presentation of findings. The researcher embedded checking strategies and opportunities for sharing procedures and results in the research process to minimize or avoid this ethical issue.

Summary

This chapter offered an overview of the research design and rationale and provided a succinct explanation of why an explanatory-sequential mixed-methods design helped to generate a more comprehensive analysis. Addressing the three fundamental principles relevant to the ethics of research involving human subjects eliminated unexpected ethical issues. The data collection and data analysis provided insightful information to sustain the findings that will be addressed in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Quantitative Data Analysis

To analyze the quantitative data collected for this research, the researcher examined the primary question to discover the school leaders' processes and actions to promote positive, sustainable change during COVID-19.

The focus was on school principals from all levels: early education, elementary, and secondary. The Processes and Actions to Leading Change at Schools (PALCS) had four categorical variables (COS, Gender, Ethnicity, Degree), two rational variables (success rate, years of service), and twenty interval variables (Likert scale questions).

Additionally, the PALCS had 17 open-ended questions for qualitative analysis purposes. The researcher looked for variables with similar and different traits to construct validity. The researcher also accessed independent data analysis by other research colleagues or experts in the field. This was done for respondent validation to seek feedback in order to avoid bias based on a long-term involvement. A long-term involvement could lead to subjectivity, as the researcher's beliefs, values, and perceptions were similar to the principals' beliefs, values, and perceptions.

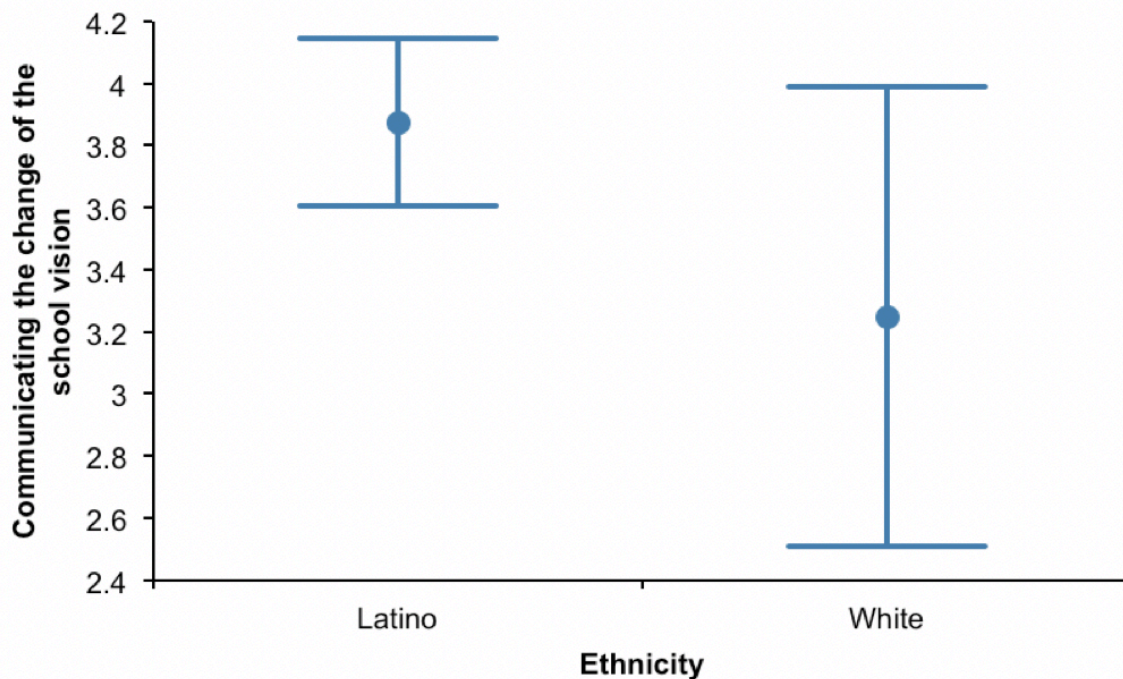
For peer review of the research methodology and analytic frameworks, the researcher sought support from two Community of Schools Directors, who were experts in the field of organizational change, in order to debrief research methods, data findings, and interpretation. This systematic and consistent feedback enabled the researcher to avoid misinterpretation and misunderstanding of data. Additionally, the researcher reviewed McMillan and Schumacher's (2010) chapters related to quantitative data collection, analysis, and mixed-methods designs to solidify understanding of interpreting quantitative analysis.

Linear Correlations and ANOVAs

The researcher used Pairwise Rank Correlations and one-way analysis of variances (ANOVA). Correlations were tested to help the researcher identify the school leaders' characteristics that positively impacted the change process. Such characteristics were gender, ethnicity, highest degree of education, and years of service. Based on five different rank correlations and 64 one-way ANOVA, the researcher found no significant correlation among all the variables, except for ethnicity and ability to communicate the change in the school vision during COVID-19, as seen in Figure 6. 1.

Figure 6. 1

Analysis of Variance Between Ethnicity and Communicating the Change in the School Vision During COVID-19 (N=47).



As seen in Figure 6. 1, there is a significant correlation between the Latino school principals and how successfully the change in the school vision was communicated and connected with all performance reviews and training, $r(45) = .098, p < .0482$. Latino principals ($M=3.875$) rated higher on the communication of change process to all stakeholders, including teachers and parents, compared to non-Latino principals ($M = 3.25$). This may be a function of use of common language.

Descriptive Statistics

A descriptive analysis selecting Kotter's Model of Change (KMOC) allowed the researcher to determine the frequencies and central tendency of the processes and steps successfully implemented during COVID-19. As seen in Figure 2. 1, the means of each of the KMOC steps were calculated and plotted on a column graph that revealed groupings. These groupings were influenced by other applications of KMOC, which offered a variety of grouping strategies. For example, Expert Program Management Company uses three groups: (1) Create Climate for Change (KMOC 1-3); (2) Engage and Enable the Organization (KMOC 4-6); and (3) Implement and Sustain (KMOC 7-8) (epm.com, 2022). According to the Expert Program Management Company (2022), grouping Kotter's Eight Steps of Change (KMOCs) maximizes opportunities for success when implementing changes, and describes the three main groups or stages as follows:

1. Create a climate for change: In this stage, the leader must create a shared understanding of the change and the importance of its implementation.
2. Engage and enable the organization: In this stage, the leader engages and empowers the team to implement the change.

3. Implement and sustain: The leader celebrates successes to build momentum and embed the change with the organization.

Another example is from Echometer (echometerapp.com), which uses three groupings: (1) Unfreezing the Status Quo (KMOC 1-4); (2) New Behavior Patterns (KMOC 5-6); and (3) Anchor Change (KMOC 7-8). According to Echometer, the first group is the basis of the change. The second group comprises an introduction to the change, and the third group solidifies the change.

One more example is from Consuunt (2022) that groups KMOC as follows: (1) Definition (KMOC 1-2); (2) Implementation (KMOC 4-6); and (3) Secure (KMOC 7-8). Consuunt uses Kotter's Change Model as a tool to help professionals manage change situations when change happens on purpose (consuunt.com).

Based on the descriptive statistics of each of the KMOC steps, the researcher established four groupings: (1) Preparation (KMOC Step 1-3); (2) Activation (KMOC 4-5); (3) Outcomes (KMOC 6-7); (4) Permanence (KMOC 8). To better understand the change process that school principals implemented during COVID-19, the researcher grouped the eight KMOC steps into four stages (Figure 7. 1):

1. The Preparatory Stage includes Kotter's Steps of: a) Creating a sense of urgency, b) Building a guiding coalition, and c) Form a strategic vision and initiatives. It helped the school principal define the new challenges, communicate the need for change, and develop a shared vision for change.
2. The Activation Stage groups KMOC Steps: 4) Enlist a volunteer army (communicating the vision) and 5) Enable actions by removing barriers. In this stage, the school principal formed the team for change, which helped frame the vision and implement the desired

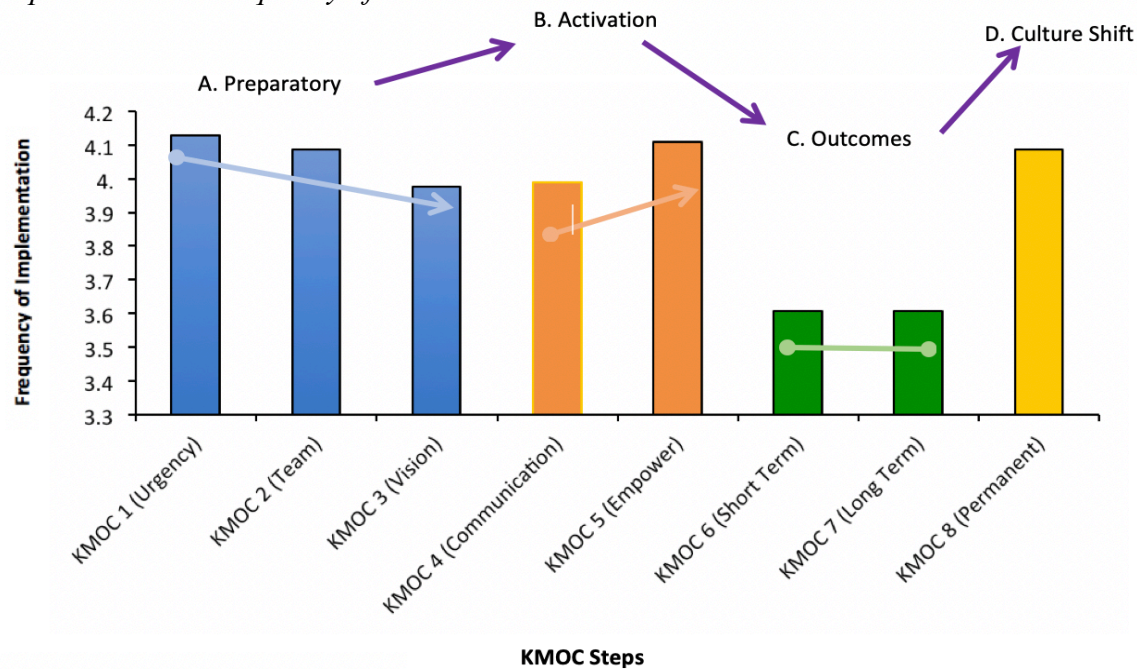
change (for example, assistant principal, coordinator, parent leader, teacher leader, etc.).

The school principal also took the time to identify and overcome the barriers to change (e.g., need for training, monitoring virtual classes, and so on). Communicating the vision in the primary language spoken by the community affects efficacy of using a common language in which the school is immersed allowed the school principal to connect with the cultural values of culturally and linguistically diverse families.

3. The Outcomes Stage includes KMOC steps 6) Generate and celebrate short-term goals and 7) Sustain acceleration (long-term goals). In this stage, the school principal celebrated accomplishments and monitored any achievement of short and long-term goals.
4. The Permanence Stage's final stage consists of only KMOC Step 8, instituting change. In this last group, the school principal determined if change occurred and how the change might affect what the school would do in the future.

Figure 7. 1

Implementation Frequency of KMOCS



When we observe the trend within the stages, there is significant variance in the types of movement among KMOCS Steps, with groups of steps trending down, trending up, and remaining the same. In the Preparation Stage, the means of KMOCS Steps 1-3 showed a general downward trend, with Urgency ($M = 4.1304$) being the highest-rated step, followed by Team ($M = 4.087$) and then followed by the lowest-rated step, Vision ($M = 3.9783$). In the Activation Stage, we see that the trend is upward, with Communication ($M = 3.9891$) followed by Empower rated the highest ($M = 4.1087$). In the Outcomes Stage, Short-Term Wins ($M = 3.6087$) and Long-Term Outcomes ($M = 3.6087$) are identical in their average score. The Culture Shift showed an upward trend, with Culture Shift rated high ($M = 4.087$).

When we observe the trend among the stages, we also see variability. There is an upward trend between the Preparation Stage ($M = 4.0484$) and the Activation Stage ($M = 4.0489$). There

is a downward trend between the Activation Stage ($M = 4.0489$) and the Outcomes Stage ($M = 3.6087$). Finally, there is again an upward trend between the Outcomes Stage ($M = 3.6087$) and the Culture Shift ($M = 4.087$).

Kotter's (2012) core value states vision, communication, and empowerment are at the heart of transformation. For our sample, the principals had high empowerment ($M = 4.1087$), but they had a lower vision ($M = 3.9783$) and communication ($M = 3.9891$). Strangely, the principals' rate is low on both short-term ($M = 3.6087$) and long-term outcomes ($M = 3.6087$). Still, they have incredibly high permanence ($M = 4.087$), cementing those untested practices as part of their organizational cultures.

Findings of Qualitative Research

Initially, the researcher obtained and analyzed qualitative data from the open-ended question in the PALCS instrument and the focus groups. Originally, the analysis provided code systems of 760 different codes based on the 782 imported texts from the Excel sheet generated by the Google answer form (survey). The researcher read each answer from the 17 open-ended questions (782 texts) and applied thematic coding for these three purposes:

1. To find themes of school leaders' responses.
2. To align the principal's responses to Kotter's Eight Steps to Implement Change,
3. To construct profiles of principals who successfully and unsuccessfully navigated their change process.

Kotter's Model of Change and Thematic Analysis

The researcher grouped the 782 texts into 72 main codes. The process required a line-by-line coding within the same Excel file by grouping the KMOCs responses into eight categories: internal, external, self-efficacy, success, individual, collective, school, and community.

The researcher reread each transcript (text) and kept track of repeated codes. For example, the researcher was able to track the number of times the school principal linked "creating a sense of urgency" with each like category. If an open code "creating a sense of urgency" appeared 11 times in a transcript, the researcher noted the number eleven in the Excel cell next to it. As expected, the researcher found repeated open codes through each transcript (text) and across all 72 texts (as seen in Table 5. 1).

Table 5. 1

Frequencies of Categories

KMOCs \ Categories	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
Internal	11	6	12	8	38	4	4	26	109
External	9	8	2	2	36	4	4	6	72
Self-Efficacy	12	21	3	3	12	1	1	10	63
Opportunity	10	9	3	20	8	4	3	27	84
Success	9	15	5	32	5	2	2	42	112
Individual	4	4	3	3	6	1	1	3	25
Collective	15	10	26	40	8	4	4	33	140
School	6	5	3	28	28	8	8	8	95
Community	16	8	10	16	5	9	8	9	82
Total	82	86	64	104	173	44	44	185	782

Table 5. 1 shows the frequencies of categories grouped by the researcher, accordingly to the quality data analysis and the connection to each of Kotter's Steps to Leading Change.

Description of Categories

1. Internal: This category refers to the processes and actions the school leader implemented internally.
2. External: This category refers to the external factors that influenced the implementation of the KMOCs by the school principal (e.g., District guidelines and policies, support from the Community of Schools Administrators, and others).
3. Self-efficacy: In this category, the researcher looked for the school principal's ability to lead the change without any support, but with the belief, that they would implement the change by themselves.
4. Opportunity: This category refers to the principal's mindset of turning crises into opportunities linked to success.
5. Success: This category illustrates how successful the school principals felt implementing change, according to Kotter's Model of Change Steps.
6. Individual: In this category, the researcher looked for individual work patterns. In this category, the school principal worked individually or demonstrated a higher ability to work individually.
7. Collective: This category reflects the ability of the principal to work collectively with all stakeholders to achieve desired results.
8. School: This category shows the steps that helped the implementation of change school-wide.

9. Community: In this category, the researcher looked at the level of family and community engagement during the implementation of change.

Staging Kotter's Model of Organizational Change

To find the specific processes and steps the school leaders implemented to create positive change during COVID-19, the researcher reanalyzed the 72 like categories and narrowed them into four stages. The stages helped the researcher look for patterns and select those quotes or information to present and illustrate examples. The researcher purposefully and attentively highlighted the data as essential quotes or sources of information to illustrate specific findings.

The Preparatory Stage includes Kotter's steps (1) Create a sense of urgency, (2) Build a guiding coalition, and (3) Form a strategic vision and initiatives. The findings are as follows:

KMOC Step 1, Creating a Sense of Urgency

The school leaders established a sense of urgency by defining and identifying the goals to be achieved during the school closure. They set priorities for students and school staff by surveying all involved. The school leaders utilized the district-mandated initiatives to implement distance learning and ensured that all students had access to the required technology.

The approach of most of the school leaders was more about being proactive than reactive. They tried a more gradual release of responsibility to all in addressing the new technological tools and methods by identifying teacher leaders and mentors. To avoid too much complacency, the school leaders held morning check-ins for virtual classroom visits, provided feedback, and held conversations to refocus school staff on the main goals and priorities of the school. When observed themes across KMOC Step 1, Community (17) and Collective (16) were the highest categories, while Individual (4) and School (6) were the least in frequency. Self-Efficacy (12), Internal (11), and Opportunity (10) were also higher in frequency.

Examples of Community and Collective themes included the following quotes from the PALCS open-ended questions: “I gave voice to all. Validation of all was key for me as a leader.” (Participant 16, personal communication, October 1, 2021). “Our team visited the zoom classrooms diligently and provided continued feedback to teachers and support staff.” (Participant 17, personal communication, October 1, 2021). “I met with the leadership team regularly to keep focused on the goals.” (Participant 29, personal communication, October 8, 2021).

1. Strengths: Among the strengths identified in this section are, describing areas of priority, planning and organizing, use and monitoring of distance learning platforms, use of technology devices, identification of staff needs, focus on students, and forming teams (for example, instructional, leadership, safety).

- a. Examples/Cases: The principal at School X regularly consulted with the Community of Schools (CoS) director and the instructional district team to seek guidance. Initially, the urgency was to focus on operations related to COVID-19 compliance. Over time, the school team spent more time participating in professional instructional development in order to be more proactive.
- b. Quotations from the PALCS Open-Ended Questions: “Complacency was avoided with bringing the conversations back to what is best for students and what we can do to support our families.” (Participant 25, personal communication, October 8, 2021).

“I provided clear expectations, and I communicated all the initiatives and changes in the school district changes timely. The staff knew what was expected from them during distance learning.” (Participant 26, personal communication,

October 8, 2021).

2. Growth Area: Some principals were unsure about how to avoid complacency when the school staff was working remotely. There was not too much opportunity for all school stakeholders to work to their potential because of the implementation of the distance learning program.

- a. Examples/Cases: In School XX, non-public agencies did not know how to provide behavior support to students virtually. The school principal visited the virtual classes to ensure everyone was present, but there was no opportunity to see every school employee working to the best of their abilities.
- b. Quotations from the PALCS Open-Ended Questions: “I am not sure I did this... won't know this answer for a few years when we have reliable achievement data.” (Participant 39, personal communication, October 8, 2021). “It was difficult to recognize my potential as a leader to instill a sense of urgency, as there were days where I questioned how effective I was. Rough days.” (Participant 6, personal communication, October 11, 2021)

KMOC Step 2, Building a Guiding Coalition

The school leaders looked for teacher leaders who had mastered the new teaching techniques and how to implement distance learning, and included them in the leadership team. Additionally, they looked for colleagues and school district administrators to get the support needed. The guiding coalition members were influential and dedicated; they were given a voice to express concerns and possible solutions to communicate the new vision for change.

Although some guiding coalition members were skeptical and frightened at first, they grew as leaders and supported others in their areas of expertise (e.g., technology and digital

learning). When we looked at themes across KMOC Step 2, Self-Efficacy (21) and Success (15) were the highest categories, while Individual (4) and School (5) were the least in frequency. Collective (10), and Opportunity (9) were also higher in frequency.

Examples of Self-Efficacy and Success themes included: “I feel I was effective in keeping my team positive and moving forward supporting students.” (Participant 6, personal communication, October 11, 2021). “I found the potential in grade level chairs, TAs and others who supported instruction.” (Participant 16, personal communication, October 1, 2021). “My potential was well recognized.” (Participant 23, personal communication, October 10, 2021).

1. Strengths: Representation from all stakeholders. They had regular meetings, kept a list of meeting agendas, and identified student needs. Team members were part of the decision-making process.
 - a. Examples/Cases: The school principal and the leadership team at School XXX met virtually after school to discuss potential challenges and to develop strategies to implement the distance-learning program.
 - b. Quotations from the PALCS Open-Ended Questions: "Committee members were dedicated by attending meetings, offering ideas, and following through with commitments." (Participant 3, personal communication, October 8, 2021).

“During the closure, the Instructional Leadership Team continued to meet through zoom. We dedicated countless hours beyond the regular school day to support teachers, students, and parents through professional development, one-on-one support, phone calls, zooms, and providing appointed times for staff and students to pick up materials. We spent hours scheduling technology pickups and supporting families as they navigated new platforms, often putting ourselves at

risk especially when community spread was high.” (Participant 31, personal communication, October 8, 2021).

2. Growth Area: Uncertainty was one of the biggest challenges to overcome by all school stakeholders.

- a. Examples/Cases: At School V, the school principal noticed that most guiding coalition team members were uneasy and sought answers. She took the opportunity to inspire them to lead in small steps, identify their strengths, and encourage them. Many team leaders could grow and become leaders in their support area. For example, the campus aide became the Technology or IT Support, when she had barely an email account in the past.
- b. Quotations from the PALCS Open-Ended Questions: “They wanted safety but did not want to be the one responsible. It was very difficult.” (Participant 19, personal communication, October 1, 2021).

“Most members of the guiding coalition were scared and looking for answers, so it was difficult for them to lead.” (Participant 25, personal communication, October 8, 2021).

KMOC Step 3, Forming a Strategic Vision and Initiatives

During the closure/reopening, the school vision was developed as a collaborative effort among the instructional leadership team and local school leadership comprised of administrators, certificated and classified staff and parents. Using a community and staff needs assessment, school leaders evaluated and identified the needs to implement the distance learning program and developed a plan to ensure students stayed connected and accelerated learning with additional support from the school principal and the school district. The school leaders met regularly with

the leadership team to reevaluate staff, students, and community towards progress. The leaders adjusted the vision and instructional initiatives based on performance data.

Themes across KMOC Step 3 showed, Collective (26) was the highest category while Self-Efficacy (3), Opportunity (3) Individual (3) and School (3) were the least in frequency. Internal (10), and Community (10) were also higher in frequency. Examples of Collective, Internal, and Community are: “Collective agreement on our purpose.” (Participant 7, personal communication, October 1, 2021).

“In agreement with our values and goals.” (Participant 27, personal communication, October 8, 2021).

“The school vision was created collaboratively with staff, parents, and students at different meetings.” (Participant 25, personal communication, October 8, 2021).

1. Strengths: All stakeholders were included: The principal, the school administrative assistant, teachers, parents, students, a task force team, instructional and leadership teams, the Unified Teacher of Los Angeles representative, and school custodian, among others. They used different manner of communication: Zoom, data, conversations, Google documents, values, goals, needs assessment plan, and school site, with student's success in mind. Meeting frequently was another strength.

a. Examples/Cases: At School VI, the school vision was developed as a collaborative effort among the instructional leadership team and local school leadership comprised of administrators, certificated and classified staff, and parents. Using a community and staff needs assessment, the school principal evaluated and identified the needs and developed a plan to ensure that students stayed connected. The instructional and leadership teams met regularly to ensure

the plan's implementation and discuss the next steps.

b. Quotations from the PALCS Open-Ended Questions: “The school vision was created collaboratively with staff, parents, and students at different meetings and discussion opportunities.” (Participant 25, personal communication, October 8, 2021).

“We held multiple meetings to consider all aspects of Instruction, safety, and resources available, and how those fell within contractual limits.” (Participant 42, personal communication, October 11, 2021).

2. Growth Area: Schools that did not develop a shared vision to implement the change during COVID-19 followed the school district guidelines and initiatives. Those schools struggled the most as the information from the school district was not as expected.
 - a. Examples/Cases: At School VII, no wording changes were made to the school vision statement. The school principal and the team planned to update the school vision in 2022-2023 school year. This school focused on sending verbal messages that included the words safety and well-being for all.
 - b. Quotations from the PALCS Open-Ended Questions: "The vision for implementing distance learning during COVID-19 came from the school district. We supported implementation by communicating with school staff, parents, and students." (Participant 26, October 18, 2021). “Still being created.” (Participant 21, personal communication, October 5, 2021).

The Communication and Empowerment Stage includes Kotter’s steps 4) Enlist a Volunteer Army (to communicate the vision), and 5) Enable Actions by Removing Barriers. The findings are as follows:

KMOC Step 4, Enlisting a Volunteer Army (to Communicate the Vision)

The new school vision for change was consistent and stable for the most part; however, school leaders adjusted it to meet the changing situations during the school closure. School leaders communicated the vision through multiple ways: during professional development and in small group coaching, on the school website, in the weekly bulletin, Coffee with the Principal, and other parent meetings. Themes across KMOC Step 4 showed, Collective (40) and Success (32) were the highest categories while External (2), Self-Efficacy (3), and Individual (3) were the least in frequency. School (28), and Opportunity (20) were higher in frequency.

Examples of Collective and Success are: “Vision was communicated via virtual meetings with the instructional leadership team, local leadership team, and town hall meetings.” (Participant 17, personal communication, October 18, 2021).

“We communicated the vision through multiple ways: during professional development, small group coaching, school website, weekly bulletin, Coffee with the Principal meetings, and other parent meetings.” (Participant 31, personal communication, October 8, 2021).

1. Strengths: Flexibility to adjust the school vision as needed was the strength school principals mentioned as crucial.
 - a. Examples/Cases: At School VIII, the school vision was adjusted to meet the needs of the constant instability of the district guidelines and policies. The initial focus was to ensure that students stayed connected by using technology and accessing the digital learning platform at this school. Once devices were made available and distributed, the focus shifted primarily toward distance learning practices. The vision emphasized accelerating learning with technological and digital support.

- b. Quotations: “Vision was consistent and stable. We also had to revise based on feedback from stakeholders.” (Participant 47, personal communication, October 8, 2021).

“We adjusted the school vision to meet the changing and fluid situation. The initial focus was to ensure students stayed connected. Once devices were made available and distributed, the focus shifted primarily towards distance learning practices, and now the emphasis is accelerating learning with supports.” (Participant 31, October 8, 2021).

2. Growth Area: Some school leaders struggled to develop a shared vision during COVID-19 due to school district policies and guidelines changes.

- a. Examples/Cases: The school principal at School IX did not create a school vision. He acted by following district mandates., only
- b. Quotations: "NO! Mainly due to the fact the District was constantly changing their guidance daily." (Participant 7, personal communication, October 15, 2021).
 “No...it is in revision, waiting for COVID dust to settle.” (Participant 6, personal communication, October 11, 2021).

“I don't feel I created a new school vision. I just acted.” (Participant 5, personal communication, October 8, 2021).

KMOC Step 5, Enabling Actions by Removing Barriers

During COVID-19, school leaders removed barriers and enabled actions by understanding the staff's problems and avoiding obstacles. School leaders provided the school staff with the opportunity to raise their concerns during professional development meetings. They met regularly with teachers and conducted virtual classroom observations to identify

barriers and obstacles to ultimately support teachers and staff.

School leaders reviewed the following information to determine how to help: needs assessment, feedback from staff during meetings- local school leadership, classified staff meetings, and classroom observations. Additionally, school leaders provided support, training, and resources to support the implementation of change. They offered training and resources to implement the Distance Learning Program and to use the central learning platform: Schoology.

Different learning Apps were added to Schoology, and teachers received training. Removing barriers required the school principal to build trust among all stakeholders to lead change. When we looked at themes across KMOC Step 5, Internal (38) and External (36) were the highest categories, while Success (5) and Community (5) were the least in frequency. School (28) was also higher in frequency. Examples of Internal and External quotes include: “The school staff was provided with the opportunity to raise their concerns during professional development meetings.” (Participant 26, personal communication, October 18, 2021). “Our School District provided several supports for Social Emotional Learning (SEL), which was very well received by staff and teachers.” (Participant 25, personal communication, October 18, 2021).

1. Strengths: Were defined as providing opportunities for all stakeholders to meet regularly and express their concerns and fears, building trust by recognizing everyone’s strengths, using surveys and needs assessments, frequent check-ins, and social-emotional learning.

- a. Examples/Cases: During the COVID-19 crisis, the school principal at School X identified external and internal challenges. Generally, most of the school staff was absent because of alleged contact with a positive COVID-19 person, so the school

principal learned to promote cohesiveness by creating a support team. The team consisted of the school administrative team and the office staff. The team met on Thursday only to speak with staff who faced death in their families, personal problems, financial, health, or other issues. That interaction allowed the school principal to understand school personnel issues. The principal learned to trust the people she worked with.

- b. Quotations: “I held private conversations with staff to address their personal needs.” (Participant 39, personal participation, October 8, 2021).

“Our District provided several supports for Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) which was very well received by staff/teachers. These professional development series defined many strategies that were very timely and directly applicable in the classroom. Additionally, I provided time during PD for teachers to share the implementation of these strategies and next steps to continue to engage students and families during the COVID-19 difficult time.” (Participant 25, personal communication, October 8, 2021).

2. Growth Area: Emotional barriers were more difficult to overcome to implement change.

- a. Examples/Cases: At three different schools, the school principals had an overall understanding of the various challenges the school personnel were facing on their own. The social-emotional aspect was the most complex challenge to overcome.
- b. Quotations: “I had a good overall understanding and did my best to avoid those challenges by being proactive to avoid them from surfacing.” (Participant 25, personal communication, October 1, 2021).

“I thought I did, but it takes listening to understand the depths of their concerns and obstacles.” (Participant 34, personal communication, October 8, 2021).

“I tried to understand them, but it was problematic at times. Each of them was dealing in their way, so my job was made more difficult having to navigate this time.” (Participant 28, personal communication, October 23, 2021).

The Measured of Outcomes Stage includes Kotter’s steps 6) Generate and Celebrate Short-Term Goals, and 7) Sustained Acceleration. The findings are as follow:

KMOC Step 6, Generating and Celebrating Short-Term Goals

In this category, the school leaders focused on access to using achievement instruments, rather than establishing measurable short-term goals for student achievement. For example, they ensured 100% of the students took the DIBELS reading assessment remotely but did not focus on the reading performance data. They did not measure how every student did in order to have evidence of a successful implementation of the distance-learning program.

School leaders relied on the expertise of the staff and asked specific individuals to co-present or showcase to identify and recognize experts on campus who could support. Celebrations of school goals continued to be the same, such as student of the month for attendance and citizenship (students following digital learning etiquette), and recognition of teachers who gained expertise in utilizing the different distance-learning platforms.

Themes across KMOC Step 6 showed, Community (9) and School (8) were the highest categories while Self-Efficacy (1), and Individual (1) were the least in frequency. Examples of Community and School are: “We had school assemblies on Zoom and took the time to recognize students for logging in and doing work online.” (Participant 28, personal participation, October

23, 2021).

“We created both short and long-term goals by grade level and school. We celebrated student engagement at the end of school year.” (Participant 25, personal participation, October 8, 2021).

1. Strengths: Schools focused on measurable data such as attendance (attending synchronous classes) and DIBELS reading assessments (number of students taking the test).
 - a. Examples/Cases: The school principal at School XI created both short and long-term goals by grade level and school. At this school, they celebrated student engagement at the end of the year in addition to staff celebrations. The school principal highlighted each student’s and teacher's most important traits, skills, and achievements at monthly celebrations.
 - b. Quotations: “We created both short and long-term goals by grade-level and school. We celebrated student engagement at the end of the year in addition to staff celebrations.” (Participant 25, personal participation, October 8, 2021).

“We acknowledged class attendance (official attended class) as well as classroom-wide attendance, monthly student of the month, and semester academic awards.” (Participant 41, personal participation, October 11, 2021).

“Celebrating virtually is not the same as in-person, but we tried to make it fun by honoring the distinct attributes for each staff member that we wanted to highlight and celebrate. Each teacher was able to shine in one way or another just as the students.” (Participant 25, October 8, 2021).

“When we had to assess DIBELS remotely, we would share the

completion data and provide support to get to that 100% expectation.” (Participant 31, personal participation, October 8, 2021).

2. Growth Area: School principals expressed a lack of time to create short and long-term goals, due to the new district initiatives being implemented in a short time, which was a challenge. Celebrations were based on participation rather than academic achievement.
 - a. Examples/Cases: The school principal at School XII celebrated achievements during Monday Assembly and staff meetings. The school also did a virtual student of the month, student achievement awards, and attendance recognitions. For access, these items were posted on the school website and the Schoology learning platform. The principal tapped into the expertise of the staff by recognizing when someone was doing something well. All the different celebrations were adapted to a remote setting.
 - b. Quotations: "There was no time to create SMART goals. We had to establish short and achievable goals. We celebrated every effort to provide students with what they needed to implement the distance learning program." (Participant 26, personal participation October 18, 2021).

“We celebrated in the following ways: (1) We held virtual Monday Morning Assemblies and highlighted things we observed during the week that we want to label and celebrate. (2) During staff meetings, we would bring student work and ask a teacher to share what they did in their classroom that worked. We would often highlight this in the Monday Assembly, especially student work.” (Participant 31, personal participation, October 8, 2021).

“We got almost 100% of students login in daily to their virtual classes.

100% of students were provided with technology.” (Participant 26, personal participation, October 18, 2021).

KMOC Step 7, Sustaining Acceleration

The school leaders ensured the full implementation of the distance-learning program during COVID-19 by communicating school district initiatives to all stakeholders and distributing technology to students and staff. Regarding the success of the distance-learning program, some school leaders believed it was good despite the circumstances. Others thought there were many challenges in which they were not successful compared to in-person instructions. Attendance and engagement were the main challenges.

School leaders did not have enough data to measure academic progress, and passing rates were lowered to allow students to move to the next grade level. Overall, school leaders do not have a sense of how successful the implementation of a distance-learning program was, as they had as a priority the well being of the students and school community. Themes across KMOC Step 7 showed, School (8) and Community (8) were the highest categories while Self-Efficacy (1), and Individual (1) were the least in frequency. Examples of School and Community quotes are: “I can say that the main success was to keep the school community together and be able to continue classes via Zoom.” (Participant 42, personal participation, October 25, 2021). “I don’t know how successful it was. I feel we tried to hold the community together.” (Participant 38, personal participation, October 11, 2021).

1. Strengths: School staff and students were exposed to technology and digital learning platforms as an opportunity they did not have in the past. The school district provided the required technology (laptops, chrome books, hot spots, and other technological devices) to the schools and students.

- a. Examples/Cases: The school principals provided access to required technology and digital learning tools.
- b. Quotations: "All my teachers are now technology gods! They are well versed in remote learning and have continued with SEL strategies to continue to build relationships with their students and their families." (Participant 28, personal participation, October 23, 2021).

"If I look at everyone's personal growth in regards to technology, it was a huge success. Many veteran teachers showed progress in their learning and were willing to implement new things. Some labor partners made full implementation challenging." (Participant 16, personal participation, October 1, 2021).

1. Growth Area: School principals ensured the implementation of school district initiatives, rather than monitoring and evaluating the efficacy of the distance- learning program.
 - a. Examples/Cases: Many school principals admitted there were too many factors beyond the control of both school and teachers, i.e., technology issues, parents' lack of support to their children, lack of motivation by students, and the emotional aspect of losing relatives or acquaintances. The school principals and teachers did everything in their power to motivate and keep students focused during the implementation of distance learning.
 - b. Quotations: "Many of the changes in instruction are continuing and have brought about long-term pedagogical changes." (Participant 34, personal participation, October 1, 2021).

"The success is somewhat hard to measure. I honestly believe that some students regressed, and others barely maintained what they had learned while in

person. I can say that the main success was keeping the school community together and being able to continue classes via Zoom." (Participant 42, personal participation, October 1, 2021).

“Beyond the academics, we've had to deal with grief and loss, uncertainty and fear, hope and hesitancy...those threads all connect us to a moment that indelibly marks our professional careers.” (Participant 31, personal participation, October 8, 2021).

In the last stage, named Culture, the researcher included Kotter's step 8) Institute Change. The findings are shown below:

KMOC Step 8, Instituting Change

In this stage, many school principals agreed that using technology and a digital learning platform was one of the significant changes that will be part of the schools' systems and operations initiated by COVID-19. They also believed that continuing with virtual office hours and Zoom meetings would remain as one of the essential tools to communicate with families and school stakeholders. The safety and social-emotional stability of all will continue to be a priority.

COVID-19 protocols would continue to be implemented as part of the school operational system to prevent the spread of the virus. School leaders will continue to ensure technology is used regularly. Most importantly, school leaders will anticipate potential threats and plan accordingly to prepare for the educational system's new challenges.

Themes across KMOC Step 8 showed that Success (42) and Collective (33) were the highest categories while, Individual (6) and External (3) were the least in frequency. Opportunity (27) and Internal (26) were also higher in frequency. Examples of Success and Collective quotes are: “We’ve identified a set of promising practices and we hope to carry that forward now that

we are in person.” (Participant 31, personal participation, October 8, 2021).

“We also have a set of promising practices that we grew together as a shared staff. What we’re going through has brought us together.” (Participant 31, personal participation, October 8, 2021).

“Now, we are more aware and could be more proactive regarding potential threats to our school communities.” (Participant 42, personal participation, October 1, 2021)

1. Strengths: Among all the strengths mentioned by school principals, use of technology, digital learning platforms, anticipating challenges, students' safety, and virtual office hours to communicate with all stakeholders were foremost.
 - a. Examples/Cases: The school principal at School XII considers all school leaders to have an identified set of promising practices that need to be carried forward in future years. In addition, school principals need to understand how vital social-emotional well-being is to student learning. Those SEL Core Competencies aligned with best teaching practices will help to yield high results and teach students the necessary skills and mental aptitude to persevere and remain resilient.
 - b. Quotations: “I hope the use of such educational resources will continue to be used to achieve previously announced district goals such as Century 21 skills acquisition. Another big change I anticipate is the follow-up in health and control over possible epidemic diseases. Now we are more aware and could be more proactive regarding potential threats to our school communities.” (Participant 42, personal participation, October 1, 2021).

“We learned many things during the school closures. I feel that change will always be part of the system for many reasons. The pandemic has taught me

that nothing is static and always fluid. Change is difficult for many, but it is part of the structure created by policy-makers that are out of tune with the daily operations of schools.” (Participant 7, personal participation, October 15, 2021).

2. Growth Area: School principals agreed school district focused on compliance rather than instruction. School principals considered safety protocols during COVID-19 took precedence over education. School principals were required to keep students safe and to control the spread of the COVID-19. It was a stressful situation for school leaders.
 - a. Examples/Cases: According to the school principal at School XIII, every single school district meeting was about COVID-19: vaccination, testing, mental stressors, SEL strategies, and keeping a safe school building.
 - b. Quotations: “I will be retiring as soon as I can. All of the added work has increased my stress.” (Participant 11, personal participation, October 9, 2021).

“It does not allow for us to be instructional leaders or support teachers. We are not contact tracing experts and worried about many other concerns.” (Participant 19, personal participation, October 1, 2021).

“I attended all meetings and the point of discussion was always COVID-19 testing, vaccinations, and mental stressors” (Participant 19, personal participation, October 1, 2021).

School Principals: A Profile of Change

The principal profiles of change derived from the Observed School Leader’s Behaviors (OSLEB), which is a data collection instrument. It was created to gather information from focus groups that included school staff and parents regarding observed behavior in the school leader to promote change.

As we observed in previous results, the management of schools implemented by school leaders radically changed during the unprecedented time experienced during COVID-19. School leaders had to look for different ways to lead the staff and look for varying methodologies to continue providing education to students and to support their families.

According to Ramos-Pla, and del Toro (2021), the educational planning process initiated and implemented in educational institutions for the academic year 2019–2020 was altered entirely. Furthermore, school leaders had to modify operational, pedagogical, and safety actions over a short period of time. For the purpose of the present research study, we focus on the observed behaviors from school leaders to promote change. Gathering information from main stakeholders, school staff, and parents helped the researcher to understand how the pandemic affected leadership practices to implement change.

The Processes and Actions to Leading Change at Schools (PALCS) showed us how the school leaders implemented processes and actions based on Kotter's Model of Change (KMOC). Preliminary results of the PALCS showed us most school principals scored their leadership actions and skills remarkably high in most of the KMOCs, except for developing short and long-term goals to sustain the change. The OSLEB provided additional information to describe the areas in which school principals scored the highest, and defined a profile for high-performing school principals during COVID-19.

According to National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP, 2016), a high-performing school principal possesses the following skills and behaviors: communication, relationship building, collaboration, creating a culture of trust, shared leadership, persistence, personalization, community outreach, and knowledge of curriculum instruction and assessment. On another perspective, Great Schools.Org (2022) considers a high-performing principal to be

the one who takes responsibility for school success, leads teaching and learning, develops and hires excellent teachers, and builds a strong community.

Shannon and Bylsma (2007) consider the following nine behaviors and actions when describing a high-performing school leader: (1) clear and shared focus, (2) high standards and expectations for all students (3) effective school leadership, (4) high levels of collaboration and communication, (5) curriculum, instruction, and assessments aligned with state standards, (6) frequent monitoring of learning and teaching, (7) focused professional development, (8) a supportive learning environment, and (9) high levels of family and community involvement.

For this researcher, Kotter's Eight Steps to Implement Change (Kotter's Model of Change, KMOC), along with the analysis of the focus groups' data collection, were the foundation to define the eight behaviors of a high-performing principal. The eight behaviors related to each KMOC are as follows:

1. Creating a sense of urgency: Honest dialogue with all and discussions to communicate a sense of urgency.
2. Building a guiding coalition: Ability to convey to a team what is needed to support the organizational change.
3. Forming a strategic vision and initiatives: Having a vision with solid core values and defined strategies to make change happen.
4. Enlisting a volunteer army (communicating the vision): Effective communication.
5. Enabling actions by removing barriers: Ability to empower others by providing training resources and identifying barriers to change.
6. Generating and celebrating short-term wins (short-term goals): Establishing short-term goals to measure progress and monitor the implementation of change.

7. Sustaining acceleration (long-term goals): Establishing long-term goals and celebrating the achievement of short and long-term goals.
8. Instituting change: Ensuring permanency of the change as part of the school culture.

Based on the data analysis in Phase One, the focus groups included parents and school staff from one of the highest-performing principals. The data from the PALCS and focus group confirmed that effective, adaptive, and transformational leadership, as defined by NASSP (2016) and Shannon and Bylsma (2007), consistently characterized the high-performing principal.

High Performing School Principal

The PALCS data analysis helped the researcher to identify one of the high-performing principals in the area of Boyle Heights. Boyle Heights is a neighborhood located east of the Los Angeles River and is characterized by its historic Chicano-Mexican American culture. The school principal scored their leadership actions and skills remarkably high. The Community of Schools Administrator (CoS) identified this school as one of the highest performing schools in the area. Based on the focus groups' responses and Kotter's Eight Steps to Implement Change Framework, we identified the characteristics of a high-performing school principal during COVID 19.

Overall, the participants of the focus group commented that the principal was “very involved and hands-on to make changes” (Participant FG1, November 19, 2021), “was very empathetic and understanding: (Participant FG5, November 19, 2021), “was constantly communicating” (Participant FG1, November 19, 2021), and “was seen as a good leader” (Participant 3, November 19, 2021).

KMOC 1 (Sense of Urgency)

“Our Successful Principal was very empathetic and understanding of everyone's needs, which made us all feel at ease.” (Participant FG5, November 19, 2021). Leadership that leads with empathy is powerful and effective. The Successful Principal connected to the needs of their constituents and “ensured everyone had their needs met including students, teachers, and aides” (Participant FG1, November 19, 2021).

The Successful Principal employed clear and consistent communication and provided “a lot of support and information” (Participant FG6, November 19, 2021). There is never too much communication, and this level of redundancy ensures that constituents have heard the message. This communication is always a two-way street and connects back to the essential skill of empathy, where in the leader connects to and understands the populations that they are serving. Communication is as much about conveying information as it is listening to stakeholders.

In communicating the sense of urgency, the Successful Principal provided clear and simple explanations for changes “We needed to make it easy”, (Participant FG3, November 19, 2021). Communication needs to be comprehensible to those who are receiving it, not only to the one sending it.

KMOC 2 (Building a Guiding Coalition)

Our Successful Principal created a team “involving other administrators... to make changes” (Participant FG1, November 19, 2021) to support the organizational change. The Successful Principal ensured that the right people were committed to the change initiatives during COVID-19 were part of the team by including “the principal, APEIS, and office technicians were all involved in creating the strategic school vision for change” (Participant FG1,

November 19, 2021). Establishing regular team meetings to guide change led to the success of the school principal as a leader. “The principal ensured performance reviews and weekly meetings” (Participant FG7, November 19, 2021).

KMOC 3 (Forming a Strategic Vision and Initiatives)

Our Successful Principal was **visionary** with knowledge of school policy, initiatives, and strategies to make change happen. “The principal involved district policy to make changes during COVID-19” (Participant FG1, November 19, 2021) and demonstrated that success in leading change requires initiatives and a strategic vision.

The Successful Principal incorporated critical elements to developing a shared vision, such as motivating people to take action and providing multiple opportunities for “all teachers to share the need for change” (Participant FG1, November 19, 2021). The Successful Principal was accountable for leading the general direction for change by developing, implementing, and evaluating and communicating the vision clearly. The Successful Principal ensured, “the vision changed according to new district policies and initiatives, but overall maintaining it stable and communicated to staff” (Participant FG1, November 19, 2021).

KMOC 4 (Enlisting a Voluntary Army to Communicate the Vision)

Our Successful Principal and the guiding coalition team effectively communicated the vision for change by providing clear messages during COVID-19 by “offering meetings before our workday to communicate any changes”(Participant FG1, November 19, 2021).

The Successful Principal used every opportunity to communicate the new vision, enabling the team to support communication ensuring “there were many signs guiding adults and students” (Participant FG6, November 19, 2021).

The Successful Principal talked often about the vision and was “constantly emailing and

communicating” (Participant FG1, November 19, 2021) the need for change with all stakeholders.

The Successful Principal used all organizational communication channels and platforms including “weekly meetings via Zoom where the changing vision during COVID was communicated to us” (Participant FG1, November 19, 2021).

KMOC 5 (Enabling Actions by Removing Barriers)

Our Successful Principal understood the barriers that school staff faced during implementation of distance learning and facilitated support and training to all constituents at the school. The Successful Principal guaranteed that, “all became familiar with digital learning platform the staff needed to implement” (Participant FG7, November 19, 2021). This included visiting Zoom classrooms and maintaining the system of accountability that was in place before the pandemic-induced changes. The Successful Principal empowered the school staff to do their best and to face challenges with “provided support, training, and Zoom virtual classrooms observations” (Participant FG1, November 19, 2021).

KMOC 6 (Generating and Celebrating Short-Term Wins)

Our Successful Principal identified specific areas to monitor, such as instruction during the distance learning program and attendance, and “ensured educational online strategies that gave effective learning support were implemented” (Participant FG7, November 19, 2021) as a feasible short-term goal.

Although data collection and analysis were not feasible because assessing students’ academic achievement and evaluating teachers’ performance was paused due to implementation of distance learning, the Successful Principal built momentum by celebrating efforts and small achievements by “announcing the staff met goals during professional development, or at times

via email” (Participant FG7, November 19, 2021).

To keep the momentum going and to encourage employees to keep supporting the change, the Successful Principal “dropped in during Zoom meetings. He helped with student attendance, support with behaviors, and helped with implementing distance learning” (Participant FG7, November 19, 2021).

KMOC 7 (Sustaining Acceleration and Long-Term Changes)

The Successful Principal often communicated the need for change in the school vision to revisit the urgency of what needed to improve. He connected the vision with all the performance reviews, training, and parent meetings to develop long-term goals celebrated when achieved to sustain acceleration.

The Successful Principal made sure the staff persistently “worked hard to offer students with the best and adequate teaching” (Participant FG5, November 19, 2021). He consolidated the gains and “celebrated success when staff had evaluations” (Participant FG1, November 19, 2021) to continue working on implementing larger changes within the school system.

KMOC 8 (Establishing the Culture)

The Successful Principal ensured that change became an integral part of the permanent school culture and was visible in every organizational aspect. “In addition, many students learned how to use technology; therefore, using technology became part of the school system” (Participant FG1, November 19, 2021).

Additionally, the Successful Principal often shared success stories related to change initiatives at every given opportunity. The Successful Principal nurtured a new culture in which change became permanent, and school staff reflected on the alignment of the new system elements: “If we ever go back in quarantine and have to teach online, it will be easier because of

how exceptionally the principal handled everything. We now have the ability to do it again, especially with the support from our principal" (Participant FG5, November 19, 2021).

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher presented findings after analyzing quantitative and qualitative data collected for this research. The researcher examined the primary question to discover the school leaders' processes and actions to promote positive, sustainable change during COVID-19 and addressed the sub-questions for research to identify: (1) specific processes and steps to implement positive change, (2) areas of growth including challenges and struggles to implement change, and (3) characteristics of a high-performing school principal that positively influenced change.

The researcher defined the school leaders' steps to promote positive change, staging Kotter's Eight Step Change Model in four stages when looking at the processes and actions the school leader implemented during COVID-19.

The Preparatory Stage included Kotter's steps: (1) Creating a Sense of Urgency, (2) Building a Guiding Coalition, and (3) Form a Strategic Vision and Initiatives.

Overall, in this preparatory stage, the school principals demonstrated the ability to effectively create a sense of urgency and to build a team to implement change, but were less successful in developing a strategic vision, as school district initiatives had to be implemented.

Among the strengths identified in this stage were outlining areas of priority, planning, and organizing, using and monitoring distance learning platforms, using technology devices, identifying staff needs, focusing on students, and forming teams (instructional, leadership, and safety). At this stage, having representation from all, principals, teachers, and parents as part of the guiding coalition team, and meeting regularly to develop a shared vision strengthen the

implementation of change.

The Communication and Empowerment Stage included Kotter's steps: (4) Enlist a Volunteer Army (to communicate the vision), and (5) Enable Actions by Removing Barriers. In this stage, the researcher observed that, the school principal communicated the vision through multiple ways: during professional development and in small group coaching, on the school website, in the weekly bulletin, at Coffee with the Principal, and other parent meetings. It was observed that success depended on the ability to communicate in the parents' primary language. Empowering school staff by removing barriers and providing support was one of the steps that successfully supported change.

Among the strengths observed in this stage to promote change are providing opportunities for all stakeholders to meet regularly and express their concerns and fears, building trust by recognizing everyone's strengths, surveying school staff, completing needs assessments, and supporting and enhancing social-emotional and well-being.

The Measured of Outcomes Stage includes Kotter's steps: (6) Generate and Celebrate Short-Term Goals, and (7) Sustained Acceleration. In this stage, the school leaders focused on meeting school district compliance mandates such as documenting administration of academic assessment, rather than establishing short-term goals that measured student achievement.

Among the strengths were quantifiable data such as attendance (attending synchronous classes) and DIBELS reading assessments (number of students taking the test). For sustained acceleration, the school leaders ensured the full implementation of the distance-learning program during COVID-19 by communicating school district initiatives to all stakeholders and distributing technology devices such iPads, Chromebooks, and hot spots to students and staff.

Overall, school leaders did not have a sense of how successful the implementation of a

distance-learning program was. It was a priority to the well-being of the students and school community.

In the last stage, named Culture, the researcher included Kotter's step (8) Institute Change. Many school principals agreed that using technology and a digital learning platform was one of the significant changes that would be part of the school systems and operations due to COVID-19. The safety and social-emotional stability of all would continue to be a priority. COVID-19 protocols would continue to be implemented as part of the school operational system to prevent the spread of the virus. As a strength, school leaders expressed a desired to continue anticipating potential threats and to plan accordingly to prepare for the educational system's new challenges in the future.

The growth areas, including challenges and struggles, included:

1. Creating a sense of urgency: Some school principals had difficulty outlining areas of priority, planning, and organizing while learning how to use and monitor distance learning platforms. They focused on distribution of technology devices and access to digital tools rather than assessing the school needs, focusing on students' access to learning, and forming teams (instructional, leadership, and safety) that supported the change.
2. Building a guiding coalition: People were reluctant to participate at first, as uncertainty was one of the biggest challenges to overcome by all school stakeholders.
3. Forming a strategic vision and initiatives: Schools that could not develop a shared vision for change during COVID-19 followed the school district guidelines and initiatives only and did not provided opportunities to reflect on staff performance. Those schools

struggled the most, as the information from the school district was not thorough as expected.

4. Enlisting a voluntary army to communicate the vision: Some school leaders struggled to develop a shared vision during COVID-19 due to adherence to changes on school district policies and guidelines.
5. Enabling actions by removing barriers: Emotional barriers were more difficult to overcome to implement change.
6. Generating short-term wins (goals): School principals expressed a lack of time to create short and long-term plans, due to the new district initiatives being implemented quickly. Celebrations, such as Student of the Month, Principal Awards, and Attendance Award were based on participation rather than on academic achievement.
7. Sustaining acceleration: School principals ensured the implementation of school district initiatives, rather than monitoring and evaluating the efficacy of the distance-learning program.
8. Instituting change: Compliance over instruction. Some school principals considered that the school district focused on safety protocols during COVID-19 as a priority over instruction. Many school principals felt that the requirements to keep students safe and to control the spread of the COVID-19 were stressful.

Some school leaders' characteristics positively influencing the change process were: (1) gender, (2) ethnicity, (3) highest degree, and (4) years of service. However, they did not have a significant correlation among all the variables except for ethnicity and communicating change through the school vision. It was shown by the analysis of the quantitative data. The qualitative data collected during the focus groups interviews helped the researcher define a high-performing

school principal profile and the characteristics that positively influenced the change.

Overall, the focus groups described factors such as involvement, hands-on, empathy, understanding, communication, and leadership skills as positive elements of change.

Other characteristics associated with Kotter's Eight Steps to Implementing Change Model are as follows:

1. Creating a sense of urgency requires the school principal to hold honest dialogue and discussions with staff to communicate a sense of urgency.
2. Building a guiding coalition requires for the ability to form a team to support organizational change and meet regularly with the team to provide guidance and support.
3. Forming a strategic vision and initiatives needs a visionary school principal with solid core values to define strategies to make change happen.
4. Enlisting a volunteer army requires effective communication to convey the vision.
5. Enabling actions by removing barriers depends on empowering others by providing training resources and identifying barriers to change.
6. Generating and celebrating short-term wins needs a school principal who can establish short-term goals to measure progress and monitor the implementation of change.
7. Sustaining acceleration of positive change is possible when the school principal establishes long-term goals and celebrates the achievement of short and long-term goals.
8. Instituting change requires a school principal who ensures permanency of change as part of the school culture.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Summary

Chapter 5 summarizes the research findings, describes implications for practice, and states recommendations for further research, including limitations, delimitations in defining the scope of research and conclusions. The researcher hopes to open doors for further research to implement Kotter's Eight Steps Model for Organizational Change at public schools. The main focus of future research is to define how a change model proven to be successful in implementing organizational change can support school districts to turn around and improve educational systems. It is imperative for school principals who are educational leaders, to develop a mindset that turns crises, such as the originated by COVID-19, into opportunities. It is important to understand that problems do not automatically imply failure but can be opportunities to succeed. This occurs when leadership actions, processes, and behaviors create rigorous change process to empower the leadership skills required to establish sustainable permanency of a cultural shift.

The purpose of this explanatory-sequential mixed-methods design research was to describe the steps of a proven organizational change model to sustainable change during the COVID-19 crises that involved school leaders in an urban area in Los Angeles, CA.

The researcher considered analyzing the essence of this phenomenon through a case study lens during the qualitative phase of the research. The researcher analyzed school leaders' lived experiences in implementing change during COVID-19. In a phenomenological or experiential study, the researcher described what a group of school leaders in a given school district commonly experienced when implementing learning initiatives that required management and leadership structures (Creswell & Poth, 2018; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Additionally, the researcher described the leader's processes, actions, behaviors, and skills required during the change process.

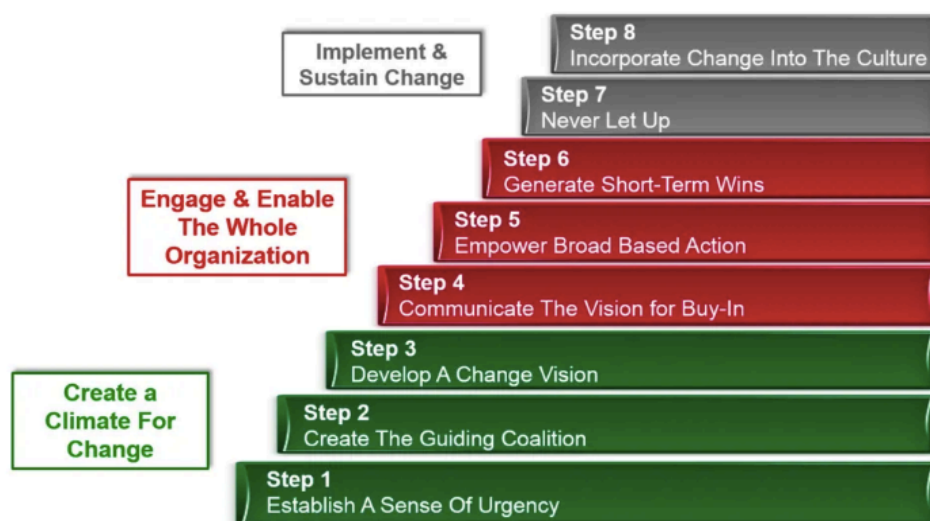
The focus was to understand and describe the essence of school leaders' experiences while implementing change during one of the major crises in educational history, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, that required school leaders to engage in new processes and actions.

Therefore, the summary of this study responds to the overarching question and sub-questions specified in Chapter 1. Data collection and analysis allowed the researcher to describe specific processes and actions that school leaders employed to promote positive, sustainable change during COVID-19, the challenges and struggles for successfully implementing change, and the characteristics that impacted the change process. Additionally, data analysis derived from focus groups provided research insight into developing a high-performing school principal profile linked to Kotter's Eight Steps for Leading Change.

Kotter describes the change in eight steps. Kotter often uses three stages or phases to categorize his eight steps (see Figure 8. 1).

Figure 8. 1

Kotter's Change Management Model (2020)



According to BizNews (2020), Kotter grouped the eight steps in three main stages:

Stage 1: Create a Climate for Change covers the first three steps: Establish a sense of urgency, create the guiding coalition, and develop a change vision. In Stage 1, establishing the climate for change and sharing a common understanding are essential to make the change happen.

Stage 2: Engage and Enable the Whole Organization, includes steps four through six:

Communicate the vision for buy-in, empower broad based action, and generate short-term wings.

Stage 3: Implement and Sustain Change includes the last two steps: Never let up and incorporate change into the culture.

However, based on this study's results, the researcher found it appropriate to group Kotter's Eight Step Change Model into four stages when observing the processes and actions the school leader implemented during COVID-19 (see Figure 9. 1).

Figure 9. 1

Staging Kotter's Model of Organizational Change



Every stage in this model summarizes the school principal's main actions established in each step of Kotter's Model of Change.

1. The Preparatory Stage includes KMOC Steps: (1) Create a sense of urgency, (2) Build a guiding coalition, and (3) Form a strategic vision and initiatives. This stage helped the school principal define the new challenges, communicate the need for change, and develop a shared vision for change.
2. The Outcomes Stage includes KMOC steps: (6) Generate and celebrate short-term goals and (7) Sustain acceleration (long-term goals). In this stage, the school principal celebrated accomplishments and monitored the achievement of short and long-term goals (if any).
3. The Permanence Stage consists of KMOC Step (8) Institute change. In this last group the school principal determined if the change occurred, and how the changes might affect what the school might do in the future.

The representation of Kotter's Model of Change in four different stages represents clearly the actions implemented by school leaders during COVID-19 and is a significant contribution to the understanding of how to apply Kotter's model to K-12 schools and districts.

To complement the researcher's representation of Kotter's Model of Change and based on a correlation of the thematic analysis and the descriptive statistics of each of the KMOC steps (as described in Chapter Four), the researcher summarizes the findings of this study into three main categories (as defined in Chapter Four): (1) Processes and actions, (2) challenges, and a (3) profile of the high-performing school principal that are listed in Table 6. 1.

Table 6. 1*Summary of the Preparation Stage (Kotter's Steps 1-3)*

Kotter's Model of Change (KMOC)	Processes and Actions	Challenges	Profile of a High-Performing School Principal
Step 1: Creating a Sense of Urgency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defined and identified the goals to be achieved • Set priority areas for students and school staff • Utilized school district initiative to implement the distance-learning program • Ensured access to technology • Gradually released of responsibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were not too many opportunities for all stakeholders to work to their potential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established honest dialogues and discussions to make people think about relevant issues
Step 2: Building a Guiding Coalition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looked for teacher leaders who mastered the new teaching techniques and methods for implementing distance learning • Looked for colleagues and school district administrators to get the support needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncertainty was one of the biggest challenges to overcome by all team members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conveyed a team to support the organizational change • Ensured that the right people committed to the COVID-19 change initiatives
Step 3: Forming a Strategic Vision and Initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The vision was developed as a collaborative effort • Used surveys to assess the needs of staff, teachers, parents, and students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to create a vision, instead followed school district initiatives and mandates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporated critical elements to develop a shared vision, such as motivating people to take action

- Met regularly to revise the vision
 - Accountability for leading the general direction for change by developing, implementing, and evaluating the vision as needed
-

The Preparation Stage sets the tone. In this stage, the school leader manifested the urgency for change and the need to have a team that represented all school personnel who supported the change and collaborated to develop a shared vision. The preparation stage tells the why (sense of urgency), who (team), and what (vision and initiatives) of the change process.

Table 7. 1 shows the summary of the Activation Stage.

Table 7. 1*Summary of the Activation Stage (Kotter's Steps 4-5)*

Kotter's Model of Change (KMOC)	Processes and Actions	Challenges	Profile of a High-Performing School Principal
Step 4: Enlisting a Voluntary Army (to communicate the vision)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school vision was communicated in multiple ways: during professional development and in small group coaching, on the school website, in the weekly bulletin, at Coffee with the Principal, and other parent meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was not a vision to communicate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effectively communicated the vision for change by providing clear messages during COVID-19 • The highly performing principal used every opportunity to communicate the new vision, enabling the team to support communication
Step 5: Enabling Actions by Removing Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided opportunity to staff to raise their concerns • Got familiar with staff's problems • Conducted needs assessment and regularly visited virtual classes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional barriers were more difficult to overcome when implementing change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensured that support and training were available to all constituents at the school • Included visiting virtual classrooms and maintaining the system of accountability that was in place before the pandemic-induced changes

The Activation Stage set the course to follow during the change process. In this stage, communication became a fundamental skill for the school leader to communicate change. Communicating the school vision and initiatives in the primary language spoken by the community allowed the school principal to establish a cultural connection with the students' families.

The activation stage summarizes the how (sharing the vision and empowering people) in change as shown in Table 8. 1.

Table 8. 1*Summary of the Outcomes Stage (Kotter's Steps 6-7)*

Kotter's Model of Change (KMOC)	Processes and Actions	Challenges	Profile of a High-Performing School Principal
Step 6: Generating and Celebrating Short-Term Wins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused on completing achievement instruments rather than establishing measurable short-term goals for student achievement • Focused on measurable data such as attendance (attending synchronous classes) and DIBELS reading assessments (number of students taking the test) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of time to create short and long-term goals due to the new district initiatives being implemented in a short time <p>Celebrations were based on participation, rather than academic achievement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built momentum by celebrating efforts and small achievements
Step 7: Sustaining Acceleration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensured the full implementation of the distance-learning program by communicating school district initiatives to all stakeholders and distributing technology devices to students and staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensured the implementation of school district initiatives rather than monitoring and evaluating the efficacy of the distance-learning program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicated the need for urgent change in the school vision • Connected the vision with all performance reviews, training, and parent meetings to develop long-term goals celebrated to sustain acceleration

The Outcome Stage is essential to measure the progress towards instituting the desired change. In this stage, the school leader ensured the implementation of change actions by establishing goals, measuring progress, providing professional development, and celebrating small successes. During COVID-19, most of the school principals rated low in implementing the outcome stage. As explained in Chapter 4, school leaders focused on frequency, rather than on measurable achievement outcomes (Table 9. 1).

Table 9. 1

Summary of the Culture Shift Stage (Kotter's Step 8)

Kotter's Model of Change (KMOC)	Processes and Actions	Challenges	Profile of a High-Performing School Principal
Step 8: Instituting Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The use of technology, digital learning platforms, anticipating challenges, students' safety, and virtual office hours to communicate with all stakeholders in the new culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compliance over instruction School principals considered safety protocols during COVID-19 should be prioritized over instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensured that the change became an integral part of the permanent school culture and was visible in every organizational aspect Shared successful stories related to change initiatives at every given opportunity

The Culture Shift Stage defined the permanent change in the school culture. It revealed when the change finally happens. In this stage, the school leader ensured that the transition became an integral part of the permanent school culture at organizational, operational, and

instructional levels.

Research Questions, Hypotheses, and Findings

1. Primary Research Question: What processes and actions did school leaders employ to promote positive, sustainable change during COVID 19?
 - a. Hypothesis: According to Kotter's Model of Organizational Change (Kotter, 2012), there are precisely eight steps that all successful change must accomplish: urgency, team, vision, communication, empowerment, short-term, long-term, and culture shift.
 - b. Summary of Findings: Based on the data analysis, unsuccessful implementation of change by school principals during COVID-19 often eliminated some of the steps, significantly step six (Generating and celebrating short-term goals) and step seven (Sustaining acceleration). The steps are listed in sequence, and the model does not explicitly address if organizational leaders must follow them in the same order or if there is flexibility allowed to among steps. However, based on data analysis, the most successful school principals implemented the steps in sequence.
1. Sub Question: What were the challenges and struggles to the successful implementation of change during COVID-19?
 - a. Hypothesis: According to Kotter and Schlesinger (2008), resistance to change is a human emotional response. For many, change appears to involve loss and uncertainty possibly due to previous emotionally changed experiences. In an organization, challenges to change might include the lack of a clear vision and expectations about the change. These challenges also may lead to a belief that

change does not make sense to its goals and purposes. Struggles might include a low tolerance of change, or the fear of losing something of value.

- b. Summary of Findings: Principals did not know how to avoid complacency when school personnel worked remotely. It was difficult for school principals to monitor employees' performance and meet with all personnel to develop a shared vision. Without a vision, schools struggle with getting timely information about school district initiatives. Most school principals expressed emotional barriers were more challenging to overcome during change.
1. Sub Question: What specific processes and steps did the school leaders implement to create positive change?
 - a. Hypothesis: Per Kotter's (2014) definition of the transformational leadership approach, processes, and actions for change can be described as "setting a direction, creating a vision and inspiring people to achieve the vision, and enabling them to do so with energy and speed through an effective strategy" (p.59). In other words, he defined leadership as the ability to mobilize individuals and groups to achieve organizational changes to provide a better future.
 - b. Summary of Findings: Regardless of gender, highest degree, or years of services, all school principals reported utilizing the same or similar processes and actions for change using Kotter's Eight Steps of Organizational Change.
 1. Sub Question: What were the school leaders' characteristics and character that positively impacted the change process?
 - a. Hypothesis: The most prepared school leaders were, the most compliant in all aspects of leadership and management of systems they were. They were also

receptive to implementing a remote distance-learning program as mandated by the school district. According to Rowland (2017), evidence suggests that school leaders are powerful levers for change, when given the proper training and support.

- b. Summary of Findings: Based on the Pairwise Rank Correlation and one-way analysis of variances (ANOVA), there was not a significant correlation among all the characteristics listed for this study (highest degree, years of service, gender, and ethnicity), except for ethnicity in using a common language to communicate the change in the school vision during COVID-19.

Limitations

This explanatory-sequential mixed-methods design is considered the most straightforward of the mixed methods designs (Creswell & Clark, 2002). Although it allowed the researcher to generate a more comprehensive analysis allowing data triangulation, it is necessary to recognize the limitations inherent in the design of the project, the study of data, and presentation of the findings. The limitations inherent in the design itself and explained by Creswell and Clark (2006) are listed as follows:

1. The explanatory-sequential mixed-method design required a lengthy amount of time to implement the two phases of the research. The time required to collect data during the quantitative phase was longer than expected, due to the school principals facing a second year of work during COVID-19. The 2021-2022 school year was the reopening year, and changes continued impacting the role of the school principals. Even though the qualitative phase was limited to a few participants, the data analysis took longer than the

quantitative phase because of the amount of information that needed to be scripted and thematically coded.

2. Selecting participants for the qualitative phase required specifying criteria to decide who were the participants in advance and required additional time to coordinate the focus groups meeting dates for all participants to be available.

Regarding the analysis and presentations of the findings, the most significant limitation was communicating the findings to other groups of individuals, to communities of schools within the same school district, and to other school districts due to the large sample size. The results from this study may be informative and helpful for scholars interested in conducting similar research, using Kotter's Eight-Step Model as a framework, or to develop performance profiles of school leaders/administrators.

Another limitation of the research, is the fact that the researcher was a school district employee. To minimize any potential conflict of interest or ethical issue related to the research, the researcher was particularly conscious of her professional and researcher roles. Masking participants' names and using data profiles helped the researcher to have a neutral perspective when collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data. Additionally, the researcher adhered to the Belmont Report (1979) to ensure unexpected ethical issues did not arise during this research. Although the researcher utilized independent data analysis by other research colleagues and experts in the field to avoid bias, the researcher's reality may have impacted the presentation of the findings because of the similar circumstances experienced during COVID-19.

One more limitation is that the researcher focused on the Eight Steps for Leading Change Model developed by John Kotter (2012) as the main theoretical frame for this research instead of selecting another framework recognized in education. Kotter's framework, which is a way to

improve an organization's ability to change and increase its chances of success that has recently impacted school leaders, is a new framework to develop sustained change in schools' operational, instructional, and cultural systems.

At the publishing of this dissertation, while pandemic cases had significantly improved since their inception in March 2020, the Los Angeles Unified School District still had a mask mandate, encouraged social distancing, and some cases were still reported. Furthermore, some of the findings may or may not apply to post pandemic times.

Due to the noted limitations for this study, the researcher recommends avoiding generalizations about the processes and actions that the school leaders employed to promote positive, sustainable change during COVID-19. Readers are advised to be cautious when drawing conclusions about the procedures, actions, and behaviors that school principals demonstrated to implement sustainable change at their schools.

Delimitations

1. Only schools in LAUSD were selected for this study because it represents large, diverse school districts, even though it is unique on their own.
2. Follow-up interviews of principals were not done because the interview questions were integrated into the survey.
3. Only data from one focus group was selected to define the profile of a high-performing school principal.

Recommendations for Further Research

Organizational change in education has gotten the attention of educational leaders in past years. Each year, superintendents, school principals, and diverse educational administrators seek organizational change theories and practices to improve the current educational system. As Kotter and Akhtar (2019) observe, inquiries about implementing organizational change at K-12 and higher education schools have increased in the past two to three years. Educational stakeholders are interested in finding specific actions and processes that result in robust, sustained change to prevent and prepare for uncertainty. They want to know how to lead change by anticipating and planning, rather than by reacting to external forces that might create a false sense of urgency.

In the words of Kotter (2008), using crises generated by external forces as potential opportunities for change requires a leader to be "exceptionally proactive in assessing how people react, in developing specific plans for action, and in implementing the plans swiftly" (p. 141).

The approach which school leaders used during the implementation of distance learning programs was significantly different and required different perspectives, behaviors, and skills that many in the educational field had to learn. As presented in the previous chapters, the findings from this study support the literature in identifying the processes and actions school leaders employed to promote positive, sustainable change during COVID-19, as linked to the Eight Steps for Leading Change Model and the Transformational Leadership Approach (Kotter, 2012; Northouse, 2016).

Using Kotter's Model of Change and the Transformational Leadership approach allowed integration of data to precisely describe the processes and steps that the school principals implemented to create positive change. The model described the challenges and struggle inherent

in the successful implementation of change during COVID-19 and revealed school principals' characteristics that positively impacted the change process. However, the findings of this study should not be generalized, as they pertain to a specific group of school principals.

Future research may involve many different directions to describe the processes and actions to implement positive and sustained change in the educational system. First, scholars might want to interview school principals from other local districts in Los Angeles Unified School District or other school districts to survey whether those school principals engaged in similar processes during COVID-19 or in other unexpected environmental crises or external forces. This inquiry might involve discovering whether other school principals employed similar processes and actions as did the school principals in LAUSD.

Also, scholars would like to determine why the school principals at this specific local school district engaged in similar processes and actions to implement change regardless of their level of education, years of experience, and gender. Since there was no significant correlation between those variables and the implementation of successful change, the question remains “why not?”.

Conventional and empirical experiences suggest that years of experience and level of education always significantly impact new initiatives in promoting change; therefore, scholars might want to look at the why, and if the change outcome is positive. The gender has also played an essential role in public research regarding the implementation of change; scholars might like to investigate whether there is a correlation between gender and implementing positive change.

Another area for further research might be why some school principals attributed the lack of success to sudden changes in school district initiatives, rather than their ability to implement change. Scholars might want to look at the school principals' skill level to lead, their leadership

approach or style, or their use of conventional power tactics (management), rather than leadership strategies. Research in this area might provide further information on school principals' motivation to lead and information about their leadership approach choices.

Another approach for further research might use a different theoretical frame to understand better how school principals have implemented change in similar situations. The main theoretical framework for this study was Kotter's Eight Steps for Leading Change. Further research could focus on the Coherence Framework by Fullan and Quinn (2016), one of the current frameworks for leading change at the Los Angeles Unified School Districts.

A final approach for further research emerging from this study is an in-depth exploration of Kotter's Eight Steps for Leading Change. Although the researcher found implementation patterns that illustrated the eight steps, scholars might like to research whether steps implemented in linear order led to a more successful change outcome. They might want to inquire if school principals are familiar with Kotter's framework of change, and to what extent they have used the steps to leading change at their schools. Additionally, scholars might want to know what other leadership approaches, actions, processes, strategies, theories, and models school principals have used to influence change at their school sites.

In summary, the recommended areas for further research could provide new insights into change management in the educational field, specifically to implement change during times of uncertainty, as applied to unexpected environmental and external forces that require quick action and a mindset of turning crisis into opportunities.

Implications for Practice

In this mix-method research design, four implications were embedded. The first implication is that Kotter's Model of Organizational Change presents an effective strategy for schools to

prepare for, implement, and measure successful change. The Eight Steps to Leading Change Model by John Kotter is an option for school principals to lead change. This model is even more critical and applicable during times of uncertainty (e.g., COVID).

The implementation of Kotter's Model of Change (KMOC) frequency analysis, defined three subsequent guidelines for this implication for practice:

1. Every school leader can prepare, activate, establish outcomes for change, and ensure that change becomes an integral part of the school culture even when forced to face environmental crises. Collaboration with staff, parents, and students to implement change during an unexpected environmental crisis is essential for sustained implementation of change.
2. The school leader demonstrated the ability to work collectively to achieve desired results. The collaborative work required the school principal to communicate a vision of change, to form a guiding coalition team with influential and dedicated stakeholders, and to provide them with a clear voice to express concerns and possible solutions while communicating the vision of change.
3. Forming a strategic vision and initiatives based on the analysis of school needs supported the school leaders when facing technological challenges and breaking down old fixed patterns. The strategic vision helped the school leaders to develop an action plan that incorporated the distribution of the required technology to all students so they could access the distance-learning program. The vision allowed the school principals to align with school district initiatives requiring all stakeholders to use the new digital learning platforms. Aligning the strategic vision with the school district initiatives required regular

meetings with the coalition team to reevaluate accessibility, implementation, and emergent needs to adjust sustained change.

The second implication: Cultural and linguistic diversity are important factors in positioning school leadership roles. These are derived from the only factors related to principal characteristics: ethnicity and communication as supported by data. The Pairwise Rank Correlation and one-way analysis of variances (ANOVA) showed no significant correlations among all the variables (gender, highest degree, years of service, and ethnicity), except for ethnicity and use of common language to communicate the change in the school vision during COVID-19.

Regardless of gender, highest degree, and years of service, all school principals reported utilizing the same or similar processes and actions for change using Kotter's Eight Steps of Organizational Change.

A thematic analysis (as noted in Chapter 4, Table 7. 1) and the correlation between ethnicity and communicating the vision for change supported the following implications for practice:

1. Communicating the vision for change through multiple opportunities, and in a language that all stakeholders understand, ensures an effective change process that leads to instituting a new school culture. The school leaders who communicated the need for change in multiple ways (weekly bulletin, school newsletter, school website, at Coffee with the Principal, and leadership committees' meetings, among others) and the stakeholders' primary language, were more successful in ensuring permanency of change in the school culture.

2. Collective effort that includes family and community engagement supports sustained acceleration and secures permanency of change as part of the school culture. The school principal, who implemented promising collaborative practices and built capacity for all involved, observed an efficient implementation of the distance-learning program. School leaders observed higher attendance rates in virtual classes and distribution of technological resources. As shared by participant 28, "We got almost 100% of students' login in daily to their virtual classes, and 100% of students were provided with technology." (October 8, 2021).
3. The most successful principals followed all of the eight steps in sequence. However, schools were weakest in Step 6 (Generating and Celebrating Short Term Wins) and Step 7 (Sustaining Acceleration), which are most closely tied to measurable outcomes. The implementation frequency of change (Figure 7. 1 in Chapter 4) illustrates the researcher's four stages to determine the frequencies and central tendency of successfully implemented processes.

The four stages defined by the researcher are systematically grouped to show the school principals' leadership actions, strategies, and practices for change. These stages (preparatory, activation, outcomes, and change) are linked to Kotter's Steps of Change (KMOCs) as explained in Chapter Four) and led to the subsequent implications for practices. These are:

1. The school leader sets the preparatory stage for change, understands and communicates the sense of urgency, builds a guiding coalition team, and forms a strategic vision and initiatives. Findings of the qualitative research (described in Chapter 4) indicated during the preparatory stage, that the school principals established a sense of urgency by defining and identifying the goals to be achieved during the school closure. They set

priority areas for students and school staff by surveying all stakeholders. The school leaders utilized the district-mandated initiatives to implement distance learning and ensured all students had access to the required technology. The school leaders built a guiding coalition team by looking for teacher leaders who had mastered the new teaching techniques and methods to implement distance learning and included them in the leadership team.

Additionally, they looked for colleagues and school district administrators to provide the support needed. The school principals developed a vision for change that required a collaborative effort among the instructional leadership team and local school leadership comprised of administrators, certificated and classified staff, and parents. They held regularly established meetings with the leadership team to reevaluate staff, students, and community toward progress in order to adjust the vision and instructional initiatives based on performance data.

2. The activation stage focus on communicating the vision and required a team of committed and dedicated members who would voice concerns, solutions, and communicate the new vision for change. School principals emphasized the use of technological and digital supports to enhance learning during the pandemic. They realized adjusting the vision was necessary to meet the school district's demands, while meeting the students' needs when using technology and accessing the digital learning platform.

Building trust among all stakeholders to lead change required understanding the school staff's job problems and emotional implications in order to remove barriers and enable actions. The school leaders provided the school staff with the opportunity to voice

their concerns during professional development meetings. They met regularly with teachers and conducted virtual classroom observations to identify barriers and obstacles to support teachers and staff. They conducted a staff needs assessment, collected feedback from staff during meetings, local school leadership, along with classified staff meetings and classroom observations. Additionally, school leaders provided support, training, and resources to support change.

3. The third stage involved outcomes. It was formed by Kotter's Steps of Change 6 (Generating and Celebrating Short-Term Wins) and 7 (Sustained Acceleration). This stage involved the additional implication of practice:
 - a. During COVID-19, the implementation of the distance-learning program required communication of school district initiatives and distribution of technology to achieve instructional outcomes. These were not measured as compared to in-person instruction.
 - b. The school principals did not have enough data to measure academic progress, and passing rates were lowered for students who might move to the next grade level.
 - c. Overall, school leaders did not have a sense of how successful was the implementation of a distance-learning program since they had as a priority the well-being of the students and school community. School Leaders must focus on and be accountable for measurable outcomes such as academic scores, attendance, and socioemotional data such as number of students' referrer to, or receiving school counseling services.
3. The last stage, Culture, brings the last implication of practice:

- a. The use of technology and digital learning platforms is a significant change that would be part of the daily school operational and instructional system.
- b. The school principals realized how important it is to continue providing students with the opportunity to use technology for learning.
- c. Continue with COVID-19 safety protocols.
- d. Continue providing school staff, students, and their families with Social-Emotional Learning strategies and mental health supports.
- e. Most importantly, school principals expressed the importance of anticipating potential threats, plan accordingly, and prepare for new educational challenges.

This last implication for the study is that typically school principals rated themselves higher than the CoS administrators did. Both principals and district leaders should use and be guided by the same data or a defined set of leadership skills and behaviors to determine their success. CoS administrators should look at effective ways to develop principals as school site leaders. Data analysis of the focus group responses provided the researcher with information to define eight behaviors of a high-performing school principal that relates to this last implication of practice: A high-performing school principal who effectively creates a capacity for sustainable change implements processes and actions that enable specific leadership behaviors, as follows:

1. Creating a sense of urgency using honest dialogue and discussions.
2. Building a guiding coalition by forming effective teams.
3. Forming a strategic vision and initiatives that include solid values and strategies.
4. Enlisting a volunteer army by effectively communicating the vision.
5. Enabling actions by identifying, defining, communicating, and removing barriers
6. Generating and celebrating short-term wins or goals that measure progress and change.

7. Sustaining acceleration by establishing long-term goals and celebrating the achievement of both short and long-term goals.
8. Instituting change and ensuring its permanency in the school culture.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, our world has changed in the past century and especially in the past two years. It continues changing at a fast rate, which makes it challenging to retain the same systems and structures as in the past. The demands of the current human population and its diverse cultures are higher, and changes can be unpredictable. Even more, those are changes for which we are not prepared, such as school closures and implementation of distance learning due to global pandemic.

The COVID-19 challenges forced the closure of schools and forced all educational stakeholders to learn new ways to lead in a time of crisis. It forced school principals do best to implement new initiatives leading system changes.

It was a time of sacrifice and determination for many and hope and optimism for others. It was a time to reflect on the school leaders' approaches when facing external forces that might destabilize old and traditional leadership patterns, but that could lead to success and achievement if taken as an opportunity to improve.

The purpose of this study was to describe processes and actions the school leaders employed to promote positive, sustainable change during the pandemic. The findings helped the researcher explain how those processes and activities related to Kotter's Eight-Step Model to the Transformational Leadership Approach. Data analysis supported the description of specific actions related to each step of the change process, the challenges and struggles to implement change successfully, and the characteristics that positively impacted the change process. An

unexpected outcome of the research was the opportunity to develop a profile of high-performing school principals during COVID-19.

The significant finding of the research was that school principals highly valued their performance during these unprecedented times, as evidenced by their high ratings when completing the survey. However, the honesty and clarity to answer open-ended questions to collect quality data demonstrated a genuine description of the process, actions, and behaviors during the school closure period. Additionally, the data gathered from the focus groups corroborated the school principals' responses.

A significant finding was that school principals were able to communicate a sense of urgency for change, formulate a shared vision, build a guiding coalition team with the representation of all stakeholders, communicate the vision, enable actions by removing barriers, and institute change as part of the school culture.

However, they were unsuccessful in creating short and long-term goals that helped measure academic achievement and the success of the expected change. School principals were more engaged in ensuring participation and engagement rather than evaluating the students' learning process and educational outcomes. They celebrated the achievement of small steps related to the school district's initiatives, such as attendance and participation in the distance-learning program. The researcher would like to recommend further research on students' learning and educational outcomes during COVID-19.

Additionally, school principals need to be aware of the external forces affecting education and be prepared for unexpected constraining forces requiring fast pacing and sudden change. To move forward with unforeseen changes, the school principal requires having:

1. The establishment of honest dialogue and discussions to communicate a sense of urgency.
2. The ability to form a team to support organizational change.
3. The skill to be a visionary with solid core values and defined strategies to make change happen.
4. The ability to establish effective communication to align a vision.
5. The ability to empower others by providing training resources and identifying barriers to change.
6. The capacity to generate short-term goals to measure progress and monitor the implementation of change, while celebrating small successes.
7. The expertise to establish long-term goals to sustain acceleration.
8. The capacity to ensure permanency of the change as part of the school culture.

The researcher's hope is that this study will provide school principals with an overview of the processes and actions they implemented during COVID-19. The hope is to inform the transformational behaviors demonstrated during this time of uncertainty, and show how they are linked to a proven model for organizational.

If this change is implemented in our schools, there could be opportunity to encourage progress and support improvement for school leaders, teachers, parents, and the students they sustain.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Processes and Actions to Leading Change at Schools- School Leaders

This form was created to gather information from school leaders in LAUSD regarding the implementation of processes and actions to promote positive, sustainable change at schools by school leaders during COVID-19 (closure/reopening). Please answer all questions to the best of your ability. All answers and respondents are anonymous. Questions are based on the Eight-Step Process for Leading Change by John Kotter. There are no perceived risks from participating in this study and the information provided is confidential. The anticipated benefit of the research is to provide school leaders with the steps of a proven organizational change model to leading change at the school sites. Your decision to participate is voluntary and you may withdraw from your participation at any time. If you decide to not participate in this study, it will not affect the benefits to which you are entitled. If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to get in touch with the researcher at silvia.lopez@eagles.cui.edu or svl1524@lausd.net

*** Required**

1. Understanding the benefits and risks of the study, I voluntarily provide consent to participate in this research. *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes, I give my consent
 No, I do not give consent

2. Community of Schools *

Check all that apply.

- LHS
 ELAS
 BH
 HPV
 MCB
 STHG

3. School Location Code *

4. Years of Service in this position *

5. Gender *

Mark only one oval.

Female

Male

Other: _____

6. Ethnicity *

Mark only one oval.

White

Black

Asian

Latino

Other

7. What is your highest degree completed? * *Mark only one oval.*

Doctorate Degree

Master's Degree

Bachelor's Degree

Other: _____

School Change/Reform Questions

Please, indicate your level of agreement with each of the following questions (1 = completely disagree, 5 = completely agree).

8. During schools closure, I identified and highlighted potential threats. *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Completely Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Completely Agree

9. I examined opportunities and effective interventions. *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Completely Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Completely Agree

10. I initiated honest dialogues and discussions to make people think over the prevalent issues and gave convincing reasons to the school staff and families. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Completely Disagree Completely Agree

11. Describe how did you define the goals to be achieved or a purpose to be served * during COVID-19.

12. How did you avoid allowing too much complacency to get the job done during the * implementation of the distance-learning program?

13. I identified the effective changes the key school stakeholders needed to implement in the school during the schools closure. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Completely Disagree

Completely Agree

14. I formed a powerful change coalition to be working as a team (e.g. Instructional Leadership Team, COVID-19 Task Force). *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Completely Disagree Completely Agree

15. I ensured the leadership teams had representation from all different groups including but not limiting to teachers, classified staff, community partners, and parents) *

1 2 3 4 5

Completely Disagree Completely Agree

16. Explain how well did you recognize your potential to lead organizational change at your school during COVID-19/schools closure. *

17. In which way were the members of the guiding coalition representatives influential and dedicated? *

18. I collaboratively determined the core values, vision, and strategies for realizing a change in the school. *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Completely Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Completely Agree

19. I ensured that the change leaders described the vision effectively in a manner that was easily understood and followed. *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Completely Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Completely Agree

20. Who was involved in creating the strategic school vision for change and learning strategies during COVID-19? *

21. How was the school vision created? *

22 I successfully and effectively communicated the change in the school vision often * and connected the vision with all the performance reviews, training, etc.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Completely Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Completely Agree

23. I effectively handled the concerns and issues of people honestly and with involvement. *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Completely Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Completely Agree

24. How was the vision communicated to the staff? *

25. Was the school vision consistent and stable? *

26 Specify in which ways you trusted the school leadership team to lead change during COVID-19? *

27. I ensured that school organizational processes and structures were in place and aligned with the overall school vision. *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Completely Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Completely Agree

28. I checked for barriers or people resisting change and opportunely implemented proactive actions to remove the obstacles.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Completely Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Completely Agree

29. I rewarded people for endorsing and supporting change in the process. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Completely Disagree Completely Agree

30. Express how well did you understand your staff job problems and needs to avoid obstacles? *

31. Tell what type of supports, training, and resources were provided to implement the change? *

32. I created SMART short-term goals early in the change process. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Completely Disagree Completely Agree

33. I created many short term targets instead of one long-term goal to avoid

failure. * *Mark only one oval.* 1 2 3 4 5

Completely Disagree Completely Agree

34. Explain how did you celebrate the efforts to implement the distance learning program and student achievement during COVID-19? *

35. Provide specific examples of how achievement of short-term wins (goals) were celebrated, rewarded, announced? *

36. I continuously rewarded the contributions of people who were involved in meeting the targets/goals. *

Mark only one oval.

Completely Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Completely Agree

37. I successfully achieved continuous improvement as a school leader by analyzing and learning from individual success stories. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Completely Disagree Completely Agree

38. I discussed successful stories related to change initiatives on every given opportunity. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Completely Disagree Completely Agree

39. Describe how did you ensure full implementation of the distance-learning program during COVID-19? *

40. How successful was the full implementation of the distance-learning program during COVID-19? *

41. I ensured that the change became an integral part of the school culture and was visible in every school organizational aspect. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Completely Disagree Completely Agree

42 I ensured that the support of the existing school leaders continued to extend their support towards the change. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Completely Disagree Completely Agree

43. In the future, how will the changes made as a result of COVID-19 be part of the school's systems and operations? *

44. How do changes happening now as a result of COVID-19 will affect what you will be doing in the future? *

45. Name and email to participate in the raffle of a \$25.00 Starbucks gift card

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Appendix B: OBSERVED SCHOOL LEADER'S
BEHAVIORS PROMOTING CHANGE -

OSLEB

This form was created to gather information from school staff and parents regarding observed behavior in the school leader to promote change. Please answer all questions to the best of your ability. All answers and respondents are anonymous. There are not perceived risks from participating in this study and the information provided is confidential.

The anticipated benefit of the research is to provide school leaders with the steps of a proven organizational change model to leading change at the school sites. Your decision to participate is voluntary and you may withdraw from your participation at any time. If you decide to not participate in this study, it will not affect the benefits to which you are entitled. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the researcher at svl1524@lausd.net.

* Required

1. Understanding the benefits and risks of the study, I voluntarily provide consent to participate in this research. *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes, I give my consent
 No, I do not give consent

2. Role (select one) *

Mark only one oval.

- School Staff
 Parent
 Certified
 Classified

3. Years of Service in this position (if school staff) *

4. Gender * Mark only 1 oval

- Male
- Female
- Other:

5. Ethnicity *

Mark only one oval.

- White
- Black
- Asian
- Latino
- Other

6. What is your highest degree completed? *

Mark only one oval.

- Doctorate Degree
- Master's Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Other: _____

School Change/Reform Questions

Please, indicate your level of agreement with each of the following questions (1 = completely disagree, 5 = completely agree).

7. 1. The school principal establishes honest dialogues and discussions to make people think about prevalent issues and examine effective interventions. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Completely Disagree Completely Agree

8. 2. How did the school principal communicated the urgency to get the job done during the implementation of the distance-learning program and the goals to be achieved during the school closure? *

9. 3. The school principal involved people across departments and levels (e.g. teachers, classified employees, parents) to form a supporting team to implement changes. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Completely Disagree Completely Agree

10. 4. Describe the school principal's potential to support organizational change at your school during COVID-19/schools closure. *

11. 5. The school principal collaboratively determined the core values, vision, and strategies for realizing a change in the school. *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Completely Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Completely Agree

12. 6. Who was involved in creating the strategic school vision for change and learning strategies during COVID-19 and how was the vision created? *

13. 7. The school principal communicated the need for change in the school vision often and connected the vision with all the performance reviews, training, and parent meetings, etc. *

Mark only one oval. 1 2 3 4 5

Completely Disagree Completely Agree

14. 8. How was the vision communicated to you? *

15. 9. Was the school vision consistent and stable? *

16. 10. The school principal ensured that school goals were developed and aligned with the overall school vision. *

Mark only one oval.

 1 2 3 4 5

Completely Disagree Completely Agree

17. 11. Tell what type of supports, training, and resources were provided to implement the change? *

18. 12. The school principal created many short-term goals instead of one long-term goal to avoid failure. *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Completely Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Completely Agree

19. 13. Provide specific examples of how achievement of short-term goals were celebrated, rewarded, announced? *

20. 14. The school principal discussed successful stories related to change initiatives at every given opportunity. *

Mark only one oval.

Completely Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Completely Agree
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	

21. 15. Describe how the school principal ensured the full implementation of the distance-learning program during COVID-19. *

22. 16. The school principal ensured that the change became an integral part of the permanent school culture and was visible in every school organizational aspect. *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Completely Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Completely Agree

23 17. In the future, how will the changes made during COVID-19 be part of the school's systems and operations? *

24. 18. How do changes happening now affect what you will be doing in the future to ensure students' success? *

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Appendix C: CONDUCTAS OBSERVADAS EN EL
LIDER ESCOLAR PARA PROMOVER

CAMBIOS - OSLEB

Este formulario fue creado para recopilar información del personal de la escuela y los padres sobre el comportamiento observado en el líder escolar para promover el cambio. Responda todas las preguntas lo mejor que pueda. Todas las respuestas y los encuestados son anónimos. No se perciben riesgos por participar en este estudio y la información proporcionada es confidencial. El beneficio anticipado de la investigación es proporcionar a los líderes escolares los pasos de un modelo de cambio organizacional comprobado para liderar el cambio en los sitios escolares. Su decisión de participar es voluntaria y puede retirarse de su participación en cualquier momento. Si decide no participar en este estudio, no afectará los beneficios a los que tiene derecho. Si tiene alguna pregunta o inquietud, comuníquese con el investigador en svl1524@lausd.net.

* Required

1. Al comprender los beneficios y los riesgos del estudio, doy voluntariamente mi consentimiento para participar en esta investigación. *

Mark only one oval.

- Si, si doy mi consentimiento
- No, no doy mi consentimiento

2. Rol (seleccione los que aplican) *

Mark only one oval.

- Personal Escolar
- Padre de familia
- Certificado
- Clasificado

3. Años de servicio en este puesto (si es personal de la escuela) *

4. Género *

Check all that apply.

Femenino

Masculino

Otro

Other: _____

5. Etnicidad *

Check all that apply.

Blanco

Negro

Asiatico

Latino

Otro

6. ¿Cuál es su título más alto completado? *

Mark only one oval.

Doctorado

Doctorate Degree

Licenciatura

Otro

Other: _____

Preguntas sobre cambio / reforma escolar

Por favor, indique su nivel de acuerdo con cada una de las siguientes preguntas (1 = completamente en desacuerdo, 5 = completamente de acuerdo).

7. 1. El director de la escuela establece diálogos y discusiones honestos para que la gente piense sobre los problemas prevalentes y examine las intervenciones efectivas. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Completamente en desacuerdo

Completamente de acuerdo

- 8 2. ¿Cómo comunicó el director de la escuela la urgencia de hacer el trabajo durante la implementación del programa de educación a distancia y las metas que se deben lograr durante el cierre de la escuela? *

9. 3. El director de la escuela involucró a personas de todos los departamentos y niveles (por ejemplo, maestros, empleados clasificados, padres) para formar un equipo de apoyo para implementar los cambios. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Completamente de acuerdo

Completamente en desacuerdo

10. 4. Explique qué tan bien reconoce su potencial para apoyar el cambio *
organizacional en su escuela durante el cierre de escuelas durante
COVID-19

11. 5. El director de la escuela determinó en colaboración los valores
fundamentales, la visión y las estrategias para lograr un cambio en la
escuela. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Completamente de acuerdo

Completamente en desacuerdo

12. 6. ¿Quién participó en la creación de la visión estratégica de la escuela
para el cambio y las estrategias de aprendizaje durante COVID-19 y
cómo se creó la visión? *

13. 7. El director de la escuela comunicó la necesidad de cambiar la visión de la escuela con frecuencia y conectó la visión con todas las revisiones de desempeño, capacitación, etc. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Completamente de acuerdo

Completamente en desacuerdo

14. 8. ¿Cómo se comunicó la visión al personal? *

15. 9. ¿Fue la visión de la escuela consistente y estable? *

16. 10. El director de la escuela se aseguró de que las metas de la escuela fueran desarrolladas y alineadas con la visión general de la escuela. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Completamente de acuerdo

Completamente en desacuerdo

17. 11. Indique qué tipo de apoyo, capacitación y recursos se brindaron para implementar el cambio. *

18. 12. El director de la escuela creó muchas metas a corto plazo en lugar de una meta a largo plazo para evitar el fracaso.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Completamente de acuerdo

Completamente en desacuerdo

19. 13. ¿Proporciona ejemplos específicos de cómo se celebró, recompensó y anunció el logro de las metas a corto plazo? *

20. 14. El director de la escuela discutió historias exitosas relacionadas con iniciativas de cambio en cada oportunidad que se le dio. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Completamente de acuerdo

Completamente en desacuerdo

21. 15. Describa cómo el director de la escuela aseguró la implementación completa del programa de educación a distancia durante COVID-19 y cómo fue exitoso. *

22. 16. El director de la escuela se aseguró de que el cambio se convirtiera en parte integral de la cultura escolar y fuera visible en todos los aspectos organizativos de la escuela. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Completamente de acuerdo

Completamente en desacuerdo

23. 17. En el futuro, ¿cómo piensa usted los cambios realizados durante COVID-19 serán parte de los sistemas y operaciones de la escuela? *

24. 18. ¿Cómo afectan los cambios que suceden ahora a lo que hará en el futuro? *

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APPENDIX D: CITI IRB Training Certificate

		<p>Completion Date 01-Oct-2020 Expiration Date 01-Oct-2023 Record ID 38667494</p>
<p>This is to certify that:</p>		
<p>Silvia Lopez</p>		
<p>Has completed the following CITI Program course:</p>		
<p>Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher Social & Behavioral Research 1 - Basic Course</p>	<p>(Curriculum Group) (Course Learner Group) (Stage)</p>	<p>Not valid for renewal of certification through CME. Do not use for TransCelerate mutual recognition (see Completion Report).</p>
<p>Under requirements set by:</p>		
<p>Concordia University Irvine</p>		
 <p>CITI Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative</p>		
<p>Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wf93343af-c382-4535-9e6c-548fd9622497-38667494</p>		