

CRISIS LEADERSHIP DURING PANDEMIC

by:

Meriesol T. Camacho

Head Teacher III, Limay National High School

Many schools struggled to respond swiftly and appropriately as the COVID-19 pandemic expanded across the globe. One of the most major societal institutions affected by the pandemic was schools. Most school leaders, on the other hand, have little to no experience in crisis management and have never dealt with a crisis of this magnitude and complexity.

Predictable, anchoring rituals quiet our physiological responses. We have entered the school building for years, hugged youngsters, and boasted about our collaborative, group work. COVID has disrupted every grounding habit we've ever known, leaving educators to make sense of the situation.

The pressure is relentless for school leaders working in these demanding and chaotic situations, the options are limited, and sleepless nights are common. Staff meetings, coffee catch-ups, and corridor discussions with coworkers that used to make up a school day are no longer there. All of those key, informal moments when social bonds are formed, and leadership is demonstrated simply vanished. Parents, students, and instructors now live in a twilight education world, waiting for normal service to return or hoping for a new normal that will provide stability, continuity, and reassurance. The harsh reality is that neither will happen any time soon.

Meanwhile, school administrators find themselves in the unfavorable position of becoming the system's bottleneck. They rely on instructions from above on COVID-19 replies, processes, procedures, and protocols. Depending on how the virus evolves, these can alter rapidly. Simultaneously, school administrators must cope with constantly

changing staffing realities, which means they must do much more with much less. Staff and students are socially separated, which means more work and pressure for those who can return to work. Every expectation, whether from above or below, places more professional and personal demands on school leaders.

This is a perfect storm with faulty leadership. 'In a time of crisis, leaders must respond quickly and with foresight, but also with serious assessment of options, repercussions, and side effects of actions chosen,' writes Netolicky (2020). This is undoubtedly true, but no one can foretell what the best answers, actions, or consequences of any actions performed in this crisis will be. Without a safety net, school leaders are walking a tightrope. In a pandemic, there are no precedents or recommendations for leading schools.

During the pandemic, academic leaders should focus on best practices, strive to discover possibilities in the crisis, communicate clearly, engage with others, and share leadership within the organization, according to Fernandez and Shaw (2020). "Most school leadership preparation and training programs... are likely to be out of sync with the issues facing school leaders today," according to Harris and Jones (2020), and "self-care and thoughtfulness must be the major priority and prime concern for all school leaders." "Crisis and change management are becoming vital abilities of a school administrator... that require more than routine problem dealing or occasional firefighting," they added.

Rigby et al. (2020) identified three promising practices for school systems in one of the few empirical studies on pandemic-era school leadership to date: recognizing families as equal partners in learning, persisting to provide high-quality learning opportunities for students, and coordinated, coherent, and inclusive decision-making.

School leaders cannot replicate the leadership techniques they saw or enjoyed during an era of stability, continuity, and relative quiet in such turbulent times. Leading

in turbulent times requires the ability to chart a new course, to forge new paths through the chaos. On this path, school leaders are defined by their drive, hope, and unwavering belief that, whatever occurs, whatever the cost, whatever the enormity of the problem, they would do everything in their power to protect all young people's learning.

References:

Fernandez, A. A., and Shaw, G. P. (2020). Academic leadership in a time of crisis: the coronavirus and COVID-19. *J. Leadersh. Stud.* 14, 1-7. doi: 10.1002/jls.21684

Harris, A., and Jones, M. (2020). COVID-19 - school leadership in disruptive times. *School Leadersh. Manag.* 40, 243-247. doi: 10.1080/13632434.2020.1811479

McLeod S. & Dulsky S. (2021) Resilience, Reorientation, and Reinvention: School Leadership During the Early Months of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Netolicky, D. M. (2020). "School Leadership During a Pandemic: Navigating Tensions." *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*. Retrieved from <https://www.emerald.com/insight/publication/issn/2056-9548#earlycite>

Rigby, J., Forman, S., Foster, L., Kazemi, E., and Clancey, S. (2020). *Promising District Leadership Practices for Transformative Change in the Context of COVID-19*. Washington: University of Washington.