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# K-12 Christian School Sustainability: Leadership Practices

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# K-12 Christian School Sustainability: Leadership Practices

## **Abstract**

K-12 Christian schools in the United States are experiencing decreases in enrollment and an increasing number of closures. This qualitative phenomenological study used semi-structured interviews to gain an understanding of the leadership practices of K-12 Christian school leaders in the United States. Six K-12 Christian schools located in the United States were identified as sustainable and their school leaders were interviewed. The leadership practices involved in managing their respective schools were studied and analyzed using three phases: in vivo coding, pattern coding, and code weaving. Findings showed that the school leaders worked within a supportive board governance structure in which the school leader focused his or her energies within four categories and 13 embedded and interconnected practices. The four categories included financial stewardship, managing the culture, striving for excellence, and collaborative leadership. Within financial stewardship the leader practiced strategic planning, sound-fiscal practices, staying mission-focused, and forecasting. Within managing the culture the leader practiced spiritual focus, authentic relationships, and telling the story. Within striving for excellence the leaders practiced innovation, maintaining excellent programs, and hiring excellent people. Within collaborative leadership the leaders practiced leading the process, inspiring others, and shared decision-making. Better understanding of the leadership practices of school leaders will assist current school leaders in their positions and help schools in the selection of their leaders. In addition, this study will add to the leadership science and training programs of K-12 Christian schools to promote increased sustainability of these organizations.

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## **Dedication**

“Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed” Proverbs 15:22. I dedicate this dissertation to those that made it possible by encouraging, counseling, loving, and carrying me through the most difficult of times. My children, Michaela, Megan, and Joseph, you are the joy of my life. You teach me to dream, to strive, and to be the man of God that I must be. My mother, Kathleen Capone, you love me, believe in me, and inspire me to reach heights I could never reach on my own. Your encouragement, prayers, and selfless hours spent supporting my work blessed me more than you will ever know. My mother-in-law, Linda Watkins, I could not have finished this journey without your expertise and help with transcription. Dr. Don DeJohn, “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” Proverbs 17:17. You have taught me much of leadership and of friendship. Dr. Berman, you reminded me that teaching that transforms lives involves loving selflessly and taking the time to advocate for your students. Dr. Robinson and Dr. VanDerLinden, my journey would never have been successful without your guidance and endless hours of support.

Above all I wish to dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Connie Capone. You are my best friend and my greatest champion. You are the love of my life and I thank God for you endlessly. Lastly, I dedicate this work to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in whom I have been redeemed. As an adopted child of the King I have come boldly before the throne of grace again and again in time of need and have always been met with

the mercy and grace that has been promised. To God be the glory, the creator and sustainer of all things.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Neal Capone is currently the head of school at Faith Heritage, a K-12 Christian school in Syracuse, NY. Mr. Capone attended Oswego State University and received his Bachelor of Science degree in 7-12 Mathematics Education in 1996. He attended The George Washington University and received his Master of Arts degree in Educational Leadership in 2002. He attended Oswego State University and received his Certificate of Advanced Study in Educational Leadership in 2008. Mr. Capone came to St. John Fisher College in the spring of 2013 and began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. He pursued his research in K-12 Christian School Sustainability under the direction of Dr. Michael Robinson and Dr. Kim VanDerLinden and received the Ed.D. degree in 2016.

## **Abstract**

K-12 Christian schools in the United States are experiencing decreases in enrollment and an increasing number of closures. This qualitative phenomenological study used semi-structured interviews to gain an understanding of the leadership practices of K-12 Christian school leaders in the United States. Six K-12 Christian schools located in the United States were identified as sustainable and their school leaders were interviewed. The leadership practices involved in managing their respective schools were studied and analyzed using three phases: in vivo coding, pattern coding, and code weaving.

Findings showed that the school leaders worked within a supportive board governance structure in which the school leader focused his or her energies within four categories and 13 embedded and interconnected practices. The four categories included financial stewardship, managing the culture, striving for excellence, and collaborative leadership. Within financial stewardship the leader practiced strategic planning, sound-fiscal practices, staying mission-focused, and forecasting. Within managing the culture the leader practiced spiritual focus, authentic relationships, and telling the story. Within striving for excellence the leaders practiced innovation, maintaining excellent programs, and hiring excellent people. Within collaborative leadership the leaders practiced leading the process, inspiring others, and shared decision-making.

Better understanding of the leadership practices of school leaders will assist

current school leaders in their positions and help schools in the selection of their leaders. In addition, this study will add to the leadership science and training programs of K-12 Christian schools to promote increased sustainability of these organizations.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Schooling in the United States comes in a variety of shapes and sizes. Public schooling is certainly the most popular option for families. Public schooling is mandated by each state, which allows every child to have a tuition-free K-12 education (Center on Education Policy, 2007). In addition to public schooling, there is a plethora of schooling choices that include religious schools, Jewish day schools, Muslim schools, private college preparatory schools, charter schools, and homeschooling.

In 2013, private religious schools made up 7.5% of K-12 students in the United States compared to 3.7% for public charter schools, 1.9% private non-religious, 3% homeschooled, and 83.9% for traditional public school (Snyder & Dillow, 2013). With 5.7 million students enrolled in private religious schools, this sector of K-12 education remains one that is in high demand.

Despite religious schools representing a significant percentage of the schooling market, there has been a decrease in enrollment over the last two decades. Private K-12 *Christian schools* in the United States are finding it difficult to survive in a changing and competitive educational environment. When compared to all K-12 students in the United States, the number of students in private schools has dropped from 12% in the 1996 school year to 10% in the 2012 school year. This same study showed that conservative Christian schools decreased by 7.6% over the same period (Kena et al., 2015). Sustainability is a critical issue for K-12 Christian schools as increased school closures are threatening their future existence and impact. Sustainability is defined in Webster's

Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary (1971) as “the ability to keep going as an action or process, or enduring without giving way or yielding.” Fullan (2005) defines sustainability as "the capacity of a system to engage in the complexities of continuous improvement consistent with deep values of human purpose” (p. 2). Fullan continues by acknowledging that sustainability requires "continuous improvement, adaptation and collective problem-solving in the face of complex challenges that arise. Similar definitions of sustainability include "keeping the business going, future proofing the organization (Colbert & Kurucz, 2007) and achieving success today without compromising the needs of the future (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2005). In studying the sustainability of the Ford Corporation, Kibert (2012) speaks of sustainability as the ability to meet the needs of present customers while taking into account the needs of future generations.

Leaders of K-12 Christian schools play a major role in sustainability. These leaders will need to recognize the complexities of continuous improvement and be able to respond to challenges as they arise. These leaders will need to navigate the changing educational waters and adapt with problem-solving skills and innovative practices that will future-proof their organizations to ensure Christian schooling exists for future generations.

### **Problem Statement**

In the United States, K-12 education as a whole has been undergoing significant changes. The 1983 Nation at Risk report exposed that American students were performing below their peers in other industrialized countries in math and science (U.S. Department of Education, National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

Emphasis on improving the educational standing of the United States involved a focus on creating agreed upon standards across states (Normore, 2003). The standards movement in the 1990s led the way to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 which increased the focus on accountability and high standards for improving student achievement. Competition for federal funding and monetary sanctions accompanied the NCLB legislation. Schools became accountable for making adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward closing performance gaps in English language arts and mathematics. The demands during this age of accountability in K-12 education changed the face of school leadership and created a competitive environment for achieving academic success (Elmore, 2005).

Leaders in Christian schools are leading schools within this age of accountability and are required to respond to academic performance demands along with a list of additional responsibilities. The head of school position in a private K-12 school is similar to both that of a college president and public school superintendent. Akin to a college president, a K-12 Christian school leader focuses on fund-raising, budgets, community relations, and strategic planning (Cook, 2012). Like a public school superintendent, a Christian school leader reports directly to a school board, having ultimate responsibility for the school while overseeing facilities, mission, vision, and all school personnel. Superintendent roles and responsibilities vary and may include:

1. Assuming the role of CEO and complete oversight of the institution;
2. Instructional leadership including planning and evaluating curriculum;
3. Supervision of all personnel including evaluation, and staffing;
4. Creation and implementation of the budget;

5. Facilities management including usage, maintenance, and construction;
6. Board relations and policy development; and
7. Community relations (Kawalski, 2006).

Leaders in K-12 Christian schools often have different job titles. Job titles may include the head of school, superintendent, headmaster, headmistress, executive director, president, principal, and chief executive officer (CEO). For this study, the term leader will be used to represent the wide range of titles describing who reports directly to the school board and who is directly or indirectly responsible for all of the school's personnel, programs, and functions.

The managerial challenges and job complexity for K-12 Christian schools has resulted in high attrition rates for school leaders. One in five leaders of private schools turns over each year (Independent School Management, 2016). This research suggests that the average tenure of a private school leader is close to 4 years, hardly enough time to provide consistency and promote sustainability within the organization. Equally disturbing is that in this same study Independent School Management found that one in 10 private school leaders leaves the position of school leader entirely. In the midst of increasing Christian school leader managerial demands, leader attrition, competition, and accountability, more than 500 Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) accredited Christian schools in the northeast alone have closed between 2009 and 2013 (Private School Enrollment Dips, 2013). Declining enrollments and increased K-12 Christian school closures are threatening the future of K-12 Christian schooling options for families in the United States.

Since 2005, Christian schools have been closing at a rate of 150 per year (ACSI,

2007). Christian schools were not alone in this decline. While Aud et al. (2010) showed that private schools in 2009 still totaled 25% (33,740) of all schools in the United States and served more than 5.9 million elementary and secondary students, they experienced a 5.3% dip in enrollment from 2005 to 2009 (Private School Enrollment Dips, 2013).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reveals that the top 11 evangelical Christian school associations in America for which data is collected and published have experienced some level of decline over the past ten years (Nichols, 2016). Additionally, during the period 2005-2006 to 2009-2010, every association declined at some point. Of the 11 associations discussed, only two had more member schools at the conclusion of 2011-2012 than they did at the end of 2006, and the gains were numerically small. As a composite group, the 11 associations have dropped from a combined membership of 8,064 schools in 2005-2006 to 6,484 in 2011-2012, a decline of 19.6% (Nichols, 2016). This shows that over a 6-year period, approximately one in five Christian schools either closed or chose to no longer continue with membership support from an association.

The recent trending decline in private education enrollment, the decrease in evangelical Christian school accreditation affiliation, and the increase in school closures brings a good deal of question into the sustainability of K-12 Christian education in the United States. Hunt (2012) points to challenging economics, a changing spiritual focus of the church, and an increase in homeschooling as contributing factors to the waning of Christian K-12 schools. In addition, the top three *stability markers* for sustainability of K-12 non-public schools have been identified by the Independent School Management group (ISM) as (a) cash reserve/debt/endowment mix, (b) strategic plan/strategic

financial plan, and (c) executive leadership (Independent School Management, 2015).

ISM is a leadership research organization that is dedicated to the advancement of school management and providing creative strategies for schools through the use of extensive research. The sustainability markers identified by ISM point to the importance of adherence to best practices as it relates to finances, strategic planning, and leadership. The leader has the primary responsibility for enrollment, the quality of the educational programs, and the main responsibility for the financial health and well-being of private schools (Kurland, Peretz, & Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2010).

As enrollments continued to decline over the past decade, many Christian schools have been forced to close (Barna, 2003; Lopez, 2009). As enrollment decreases in Christian K-12 schools, quality school leadership is in greater demand. The leadership of the school administrator has a direct impact on school success, including faculty and student behaviors, faculty and student self-efficacy, and teaching practices of faculty (Marzano, 2007; Sergiovanni, 2006; Snowden & Gorton, 2002). Conversely, there is a strong relationship between Christian school closure and failed leadership (Nichols, 2006).

Research is showing that there is a need for strong leadership in K-12 Christian education. Fullan (2005) specifically identifies leadership at all levels as the primary engine for mobilizing and achieving organizational sustainability. He lists seven elements of leadership that lead to organizational sustainability: (a) public service with a moral purpose, (b) commitment to changing context at all levels, (c) lateral capacity-building through networks, (d) new vertical relationships that are co-dependent encompassing capacity building and accountability, (e) deep learning, (f) dual

commitment to short-term and long-term results, and (g) cyclical energizing. The connection between leadership and organizational sustainability is reinforced in the literature (Dubois et al., 2015; Fullan, 2005; Independent School Management, 2015; Kowalski, 2006; Latham, 2013; Sanzo, Sherman, & Clayton, 2011; Waite, 2014). Additionally, Liethwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) stated that "there are no documented instances of troubled schools turning around or improving without the work and influence of solid, inspiring, talented leadership" (p. 4).

Leadership is a fundamental element of organizational sustainability. Lockerbie (2008) indicates that it is vital for researchers to focus their attention on leadership in Christian schools to ensure the future existence and success of the Christian school movement. Since the leader is essential to school sustainability, it is critical to study the practices of these leaders. The primary goal of this study was to identify the leadership practices of K-12 Christian school leaders that promote sustainability.

### **Theoretical Rationale**

As Christian K-12 schools across the United States experience decreasing enrollments and increasing closures, identifying the practices of Christian school leaders that promote sustainability will be valuable. The leadership of the school administrator has a direct impact on sustainability and school success including behaviors, self-efficacy, and teaching practices of faculty and staff members (Marzano, 2007; Sergiovanni, 2006; Snowden & Gorton, 2002). Looking at leadership through Mintzberg's ten managerial roles is one way to understand what school leaders do as they manage their schools on a daily basis (Mintzberg, 1973). Using theory to interpret the practices of leaders is valuable.

Theory is a dirty word in some managerial quarters. That is rather curious, because all of us, managers especially, can no more get along without theories than libraries can get along without catalogs and for the same reason: theories help us make sense of incoming information. (Mintzberg, 2011, p. 15).

Mintzberg (2011) believes that organizations need managers who can lead rather than a class of superhuman, remote leaders overseeing unimaginative leaders. In his taxonomy for describing management Mintzberg includes leadership as an important role of the manager. Yukl (1989) used the term managerial leadership to show that management and leadership are intricately connected and are not able to be separated. This study looks at practices of leaders in K-12 Christian schools that promote sustainability, and the managing of the organization is an important concept. Throughout this study, leadership and management is used at times interchangeably and to illustrate the nuanced dimensions of the leadership role.

**Mintzberg's 10 managerial roles.** Henry Mintzberg is a world-renowned business thinker and corporate strategist who first contributed to the study of managerial work activity in his 1973 book, *The Nature of Managerial Work*. Mintzberg gained the main ideas for his work from a doctoral dissertation that he completed upon graduation from the Sloan School of Management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1968. Through observing senior managers of organizations in a variety of real-life settings, he was able to determine what leaders do when they manage.

What Mintzberg found was that the best leaders did not spend much time in the traditional leadership roles of planning, organizing, coordinating, and controlling (Turner, 1990). What they did instead was spend the majority of their energies making judgments

based on interpersonal communications.

Mintzberg (1973) determined that managers have common characteristics. First, he concluded that they have formal authority over what he calls an organizational unit. Second, he observed that their formal authority leads to relationships that provide an opportunity for acquiring valuable information. Thirdly, the manager uses this information to make decisions that impact the organization in significant ways. In a 2005 interview, Mintzberg emphasized the importance of executive leaders staying informed as to what is going on at the ground level of their organizations (Coomber, 2005). Coomber quotes Mintzberg in describing the work of effective managers saying that "they are not big on managerial correctness" and that they have a "deep tacit understanding of what they are managing."

The practices of information gathering and decision-making are evident in Mintzberg's taxonomy of managerial roles. Mintzberg concluded from his research that there are ten managerial roles performed by leaders, and he classified these roles into three categories: (a) interpersonal relationships, (b) transfer of information, and (c) decision-making. Mintzberg (1990) defined a role as "an organized set of behaviors identified with a specific management position" (p. 168). The area of interpersonal relationship includes the roles of figurehead, leader, and liaison. Transfer of information includes the three managerial roles of monitor, disseminator, and spokesperson. Lastly, the area of decision-making describes the manager as involved in four roles: entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator, and negotiator. These three categories -- interpersonal, informational, and decisional -- are not separable but function as an integrated whole.

The interpersonal area of management allows the manager to operate as a "nerve center" for the organization. By way of his leadership position a manager has access to networks, information, and ideas that subordinates may not have.

Current K-12 Christian schools and school leaders were identified and chosen because their schools demonstrated sustainability. Mintzberg's framework provided one lens that assisted in determining and describing the actions of these K-12 Christian school leaders. Mintzberg's managerial roles were considered when designing the interview questions and they were used to help make sense of the qualitative data that was collected. Mintzberg's model shows that effective leaders must demonstrate a multi-faceted skillset. Quality leadership is not easily defined, illustrated by the numerous leadership theories prevalent in the literature. It will be shown, through structured interviews and data analysis that the participants in this study engaged in informational, interpersonal, and decisional practices. The data will also reveal that K-12 Christian school sustainability requires leadership traits and practices highlighted by other prominent leadership theories.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The first step in understanding the type of leadership needed for K-12 Christian school organizational sustainability is understanding the practices of K-12 Christian school leaders who are leading in schools that have experienced degrees of sustainability. The purpose of this study was to identify the effective leadership practices of K-12 Christian school leaders that promote sustainability.

## **Research Questions**

1. What are the leadership practices of K-12 Christian school leaders that promote sustainability?
2. From the perspective of the K-12 Christian school leader, which leadership practices are most important to the sustainability of their school?

## **Potential Significance of the Study**

This study provides a contribution to the scholarly work related to leaders in K-12 Christian schools and research related to leadership in education. Identifying the leadership practices of K-12 Christian schools that promote sustainability provides a leadership model for other K-12 Christian school leaders, possibly leading to increased success and sustainability.

Understanding what K-12 Christian school leaders of schools demonstrating sustainability do will be helpful in several ways. First, this study will add to a very shallow pool of research on K-12 Christian school leadership. Research related to education and leadership is plentiful (Avolio & Bass, 2002; Yukl & Lepsinger, 2007). There is limited research, however, in the area of Christian school leadership and there is no research that uses Mintzberg's ten managerial roles as a theoretical framework for understanding the leadership practices of K-12 Christian school leaders (Vaught, 2010). Secondly, understanding K-12 Christian school leadership practices can assist in the development of leaders. Henry Mintzberg acknowledged the fact that "managing is neither a science nor a profession, it is a practice, learned primarily through experience, and rooted in context" (Mintzbert, 2011, p. 9). Leaders will be able to see and understand what leadership in sustainable K-12 Christian schools looks like and use this information

to reflect on their leadership practices. Lastly, this study will help K-12 Christian school boards in the recruitment and evaluation of leaders.

### **Definitions of Terms**

*Christian school:* In this study all references to Christian school refer to any grade range of private K-12 school accredited by the Association of Christian Schools International.

### **Chapter Summary**

K-12 Christian schools in the United States are experiencing decreasing enrollments and an increasing number of school closures. It is more important than ever to identify the leadership practices of K-12 Christian school leaders that promote sustainability. Using Mintzberg's ten managerial roles as a theoretical rationale to understand these practices has the potential to be valuable for the field of research related to leadership in K-12 Christian schools and for the recruitment, development, and accountability of these leaders.

Chapter 2 is a review of the literature. Chapter 2 will outline the literature related to Mintzberg's ten managerial roles, the state of the K-12 Christian school, and leadership practices that promote sustainability in education, independent schools, and non-profit organizations. Chapter 3 describes the research context, research participants, research design, and research methodology for this study. Also discussed in Chapter 3 is the plan for collecting and analyzing the data. Chapters 4 discusses the results of the research and the analysis of the data. Chapter 5 provides a further summary of the findings while also describing the limitations of the study, implications of the findings, and recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

### **Introduction and Purpose**

The recent trending decline in private education brings into question the sustainability of K-12 Christian education in the United States. The school leader has the primary responsibility for enrollment, the quality of the educational programs, and the primary responsibility for the financial health and well-being of private schools (Kurland, Peretz, & Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2010).

As enrollment decreases in Christian K-12 schools across the United States, school leader excellence is in greater demand. The leadership of the school has a direct impact on school success including faculty and student behaviors, faculty and student self-efficacy, and teaching practices of faculty (Marzano, 2007; Sergiovanni, 2006; Snowden & Gorton, 2002). Conversely, there is a strong relationship between Christian school closure and failed leadership (Nichols, 2006).

This study looks at the leadership practices of school leaders of ACSI-accredited schools in the United States that have been identified as sustainable K-12 Christian schools. Once the schools for the study were identified, the leadership skills of these school leaders were explored. The results of this study will assist K-12 Christian schools in the United States by helping them to understand the leadership practices of Christian school leaders who are leading sustainable K-12 Christian schools.

### **Review of the Literature**

Chapter 2 is a review of literature that will start with a closer look at the history of

management leading up to Mintzberg (1973) and his model of managerial roles. The literature will include an exploration of how Mintzberg's work has been applied in educational settings. Secondly, literature related to leadership and sustainability will be discussed. This will include other leadership theories including transformational leadership, servant leadership, and collaborative leadership. Thirdly, the history of K-12 Christian education leadership in the United States will provide a context for Christian school leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Chapter 2 will conclude with a review of research specific to leadership and sustainability in K-12 Christian schools.

**History of management.** Management has roots dating back to the history of humankind. For as long as things have needed to be done there has been a need for managers to lead people and manage the work. Earliest forms of management were based on religious models. Dionysius the Areopagite, in his writings on heaven and the angels, identified levels of celestial beings (Zaleski & Zaleski, 2000). Just as the heavens were understood to be ordered hierarchically, so were early organizations leading up to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Fitzgerald (2002) considers four phases of the evolution of management and organizations through the 20<sup>th</sup> century up to the current period. He sees organizations moving from traditional, formal, standardized, mechanistic, closed and bureaucratic systems to open systems characterized by informality, flexibility, ambiguity, and opportunity.

The first phase began with the industrial revolution and the advent of factories. During this time, American engineer Frederick Taylor developed the scientific method. His 1911 book, *Principles of Scientific Management*, applied the scientific method to

understand management as mechanistic. Organizations were finely-tuned machines where the workers were seen as interchangeable parts (Taylor, 2008). Thomas Carlyle was a contemporary of Taylor and developed the great man theory (Carlyle, 1910). Carlyle's theory distinguished leaders by certain traits they possessed such as intelligence, physical strength, and creativity.

A significant managerial theorist in this first phase period before 1930 was Henri Fayol. Fayol (2013) determined that there be 14 universal principles of organizations. These principles ranged from the division of labor and discipline to centralization and order. Through Fayol's work came the four areas of management that many hold today, planning, organizing, commanding, and controlling (Fitzgerald, 2002).

The Great Depression of the early 1930s brought what Fitzgerald (2002) considers the second phase of managerial and organizational evolution. Behavioral sciences gained attention, and so birthed a new type of manager. Elton Mayo and Chester Barnard were individuals that contributed to the human relations movement of the 1930s and 1940s as management and organizations saw the need to balance organizational goals and the needs of individuals (Dale, 1978). Another contributing management voice during this phase leading up to the early 1960s was Warren Bennis, who heralded the death of bureaucracy and the decentralizing of decision-making. Dale indicates that organizations began to see that expertise now demanded authority as opposed to hierarchical positions. The need for increased authority was brought on by once stable industries now being challenged by accelerated changes, including technologies. Additionally, influenced by behavioral theory, Chris Argyris's work demonstrated the leaders needed to balance both values and behaviors (Argyris, 1960).

The third phase of management occurred from the early 1960s into the late 1970s. This phase was characterized by systems theory. Systems theory brought about a shift from understanding organizations as closed systems to seeing organizations as open systems (Fitzgerald, 2002). Zaleznik (1967) understood that organizations were dependent on their environment, and they needed to adapt to their surroundings to be sustainable. Where previously management was understood as scientific and mechanistic, this phase also brought about contingency approaches to organizational models. Management and organizational structure should be contingent on such environmental factors as size and dependency on technology.

Fitzgerald (2002) believes that the fourth phase began in the 1970s and continued to present time. Theories have abounded during this time, but all theories have been primarily based on approaching organizations as open systems. It is during this phase that Henry Mintzberg, a contingency theorist, developed his theories around workplace configurations and the roles of managers within an organization (Mintzberg, 1973; Mintzberg, 1980).

Henry Mintzberg is a world-renowned business thinker and corporate strategist who first contributed to the study of managerial work activity in his book, *The Nature of Managerial Work* (Mintzberg, 1973). Mintzberg's work stemmed from a doctoral dissertation that he completed upon graduation from the Sloan School of Management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1968. Through observing senior managers of organizations in a variety of real-life settings, he was able to determine what leaders do when they manage.

What Mintzberg found was that the best leaders did not spend much time in the

traditional leadership roles described by Fayol, planning, organizing, coordinating, and controlling (Turner, 1990). Mintzberg (1973) concluded that these traditional roles were overly simplistic and not descriptive of what managers spent their time doing on a daily basis. What managers did instead was spend the majority of their energies making judgments based on interpersonal communications and information gathering. Mintzberg determined that managers have many common characteristics. First, he concluded that they have formal authority over what he calls an organizational unit. Second, he observed that a manager's formal authority leads to relationships that provide an opportunity for acquiring valuable information. Thirdly, the manager uses this information to make decisions that impact the organization in significant ways.

Henry Mintzberg set out to determine "if it is possible to arrive at a specification of what constitutes the job of a top manager" (Mintzberg, 1971, p. 98). Using a method called structured observation and a process of induction, Mintzberg sought to make a statement regarding managerial work that would have empirical validity. For periods of a week's time, Mintzberg observed chief executives from five medium-to-large firms. These firms included a consulting firm, a school system, a technology firm, a consumer goods manufacturer, and a hospital (Mintzberg, 1971). Mintzberg concluded that the work of top executives is much more complex than had been previously described. He found through his analysis that there are six sets of managerial characteristics. Each of the six characteristics was significant related to the executive's ability to lead the organization effectively:

1. The manager performs a great quantity of work at an unrelenting pace;
2. Managerial activity is characterized by variety, fragmentation, and brevity;

3. Managers prefer issues that are current, specific, and ad hoc;
4. The manager sits between his organization and a network of contacts;
5. The manager demonstrates a strong preference for verbal media;
6. Despite the preponderance of obligations, the manager appears to be able to control his own affairs (Mintzberg, 1971, pp. 99-101).

After analyzing 890 pieces of mail and 368 verbal contacts, Mintzberg (1973) was able to categorize 10 specific roles of the manager into three basic behaviors, or categories, as shown in Table 2.1. The first of the three managerial categories is interpersonal relationships and includes the roles of figurehead, leader, and liaison.

**Figurehead.** As a figurehead of an organization, a leader is involved in what Mintzberg calls ceremonial duties. This role might involve seemingly menial activities such as greeting important guests, attending a wedding of a prominent donor, or taking a valuable customer to lunch. Mintzberg (1990) found that 12% of contact time with CEOs was on ceremonial duties. While some might consider this role lacking as a serious means of communication or a distraction from meaningful work, Mintzberg found that it was paramount to the smooth functioning of an organization.

**Leader.** Mintzberg (2011) believes that leadership cannot simply delegate management. Instead of distinguishing managers from leaders he sees "managers as leaders, and leadership as management practiced well" (p. 28). As a role, leader refers to the actions one takes related to his subordinates and their work, including hiring and training staff. The role of leader also includes motivation, encouragement, and aligning the needs of employees with the goals and vision of the organization. Mintzberg understands that the role of leader is what provides managers with influence. The degree

to which a manager exhibits leadership determines how much formal authority and power the manager will have, therefore increasing the potential for impact on the organization (Mintzberg, 2011).

Table 2.1

*Mintzberg's 10 Managerial Roles*

Categories	Roles
Interpersonal	A. Figurehead
	B. Leader
	C. Liaison
Informational	D. Monitor
	E. Disseminator
	F. Spokesperson
Decisional	G. Entrepreneur
	H. Disturbance Handler
	I. Resource Allocator
	J. Negotiator

*Note.* Adapted from Mintzberg (1973).

**Liaison.** In a study of 160 British middle and top managers, Stewart (1968) found that CEOs spent 41% of their time with people outside of their organizations. Mintzberg understands the role of a manager as one who builds relationships and makes connections with managers in similar organizations, with clients, and with independents that have no relevant organizational affiliation.

The relationship between the interpersonal roles and the informational roles

allows the manager to know more than anyone else in the organizational unit. Within the leader role the manager has access to each staff member and within the liaison role the manager has access to information that is readily accessible to subordinates. The manager becomes a type of powerful database of information for the organization as he or she realizes how the interpersonal roles interface with the informational. Mintzberg (2011) found that CEOs spent 40% of their time on activities devoted to the transmission of information. What he determined is that communication is not a distraction from work but is, in fact, one of the most important aspects of the work as it informs and assists in his or her informational roles as manager. The three informational roles demonstrated by a manager include monitor, disseminator, and spokesperson.

**Monitor.** The manager spends time scanning the environment for information and gathering valuable information from liaison connections. This verbal data is often collected through monitoring gossip, hearsay, and speculation. The manager then creates a network of personal contacts and an information storehouse to use in promoting organization success (Mintzberg, 2011).

**Disseminator.** Once information is acquired, it is filtered and shared. The manager shares privileged information with subordinates and determines how best it can be used to promote the success of the organization and the accomplishing of its mission.

**Spokesperson.** Managers hold positions that give them unique access to individuals and organizations outside the unit. The manager uses this role to inform and satisfy influential people connected to the organization and essential to the sustainability of the unit. Examples of actions within the spokesperson role may include speeches to lobby for an organizational cause or advising shareholders and consumer groups about

important organizational issues (Mintzberg, 2011).

The first six roles are involved with building relationships and gathering and sharing information. Information, however, is not an end in itself. Accumulating and interpreting information allows the manager to commit the organization to relevant and new courses of action manifested in the four decisional managerial roles. The four decisional roles demonstrated by a manager include entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator, and negotiator.

**Entrepreneur.** Mintzberg (2011) understands the need for a leader to plan, but he also found that organizations are always in a state of flux. Organizations need to be able to adapt to the changing conditions in the environment. As monitor, the manager is always looking for new ideas and, as entrepreneur, the manager is using these ideas to improve the organization and to promote innovation. As entrepreneur, the manager initiates the development of projects and approves and delegates for project completion. Senior management often is handling many decisions at once. Mintzberg (2011) found that managers were often managing as many as 50 projects at one time. As entrepreneur, the manager is making sure that these projects are moving forward, and he or she is providing a needed energy boost when one of these projects starts to falter.

**Disturbance handler.** Sometimes disturbances are part of ineffective management, but other times disturbances are beyond the manager's control. When pressures on the organization are too severe to be ignored, the manager needs to intervene. Disturbances often need immediate attention and may be impossible to anticipate. Mediating disputes, the loss of a major client, moral failure within the organization, or an impending strike are all examples of disturbances that a manager

might need to respond within this role (Mintzberg, 2011).

**Resource allocator.** Senior management has the responsibility of deciding on who will get what. Resources may include funding, personnel, and time. As the nerve center for the organization, one resource that a manager has to allocate is his or her own time. To correctly manage the resources of time and personnel, the manager is responsible for designing the organizational structure for how work will be divided and how decisions are made. Mintzberg (2011) found that CEOs faced incredibly complex choices in which decisions often had an impact on multiple individuals, projects, and the direction of the organization. The manager has to provide adequate resources while not overextending personnel or financial means. He or she makes these decisions while simultaneously balancing costs, benefits, and feasibility.

**Negotiator.** As a negotiator the manager is involved in defending the organization's business interests. The role of negotiator often occurs behind the scenes to ensure that deals materialize. Negotiation may occur externally with clients, donors, or government officials, but also may occur internally within departments and teams (Mintzberg, 1973).

Mintzberg found that the three managerial categories, interpersonal, informational, and decisional, and the 10 associated managerial roles do not occur in isolation. Instead, he found that they should be taken as a unified whole, working interchangeably and symbiotically. Understanding the significant burden these 10 roles have on a manager and his or her organization Mintzberg states:

He must oversee his organization's status system, he must serve as a crucial informational link between it and its environment, he must interpret and reflect its

core values, he must maintain the stability of its operations, and he must adapt it in a controlled and balanced way to a changing environment (Mintzberg, 1971, p. 107).

The model proposed by Mintzberg has been applied in a variety of settings. As noted by Quarterman (1994), study settings have included college administrators (Anderson, Murray, & Olivarez, 2002; Burke, 1985; Fain, 1987), and business settings (Alexander, 1979; Chow, 1992; Kurke & Aldrich, 1983; Lau, Newman, & Broedling, 1980; Lau & Pavett, 1980; McCall & Segrist, 1980; Paolillo, 1987; Pavett & Lau, 1983; Snyder & Wheelan, 1978). Additional studies in which the model was used have focused on school principals (Alben, 1984; Bloom, 1983; Martin & Willower, 1981; Mayo, 1982), librarians (Albitz, 2013), and government officials (Hale, 1983; Mayo, 1983).

Martin and Willower (1981) used the structural observation technique employed by Mintzberg to study the managerial practices of five school principals. They found a strong, nearly identical pattern of task performance among the participants. The six characteristics identified by Mintzberg's executive leaders, mentioned earlier, were predominately present with the five principals studied.

Related to volume and pace, the principals exceeded 50 hours of work per week. The number of tasks performed was many and varied averaging 17.7 different tasks per hour. Related to variety, brevity, and fragmentation, Martin and Willower (1981) found that principals participated in a wide variety of tasks with a modal time of less than one minute when considering the 3,370 tasks observed over the 25 days of observation. Mintzberg (1971) found that 50% of activities by senior executives lasted less than 9 minutes. Consistent with senior executives preferring verbal communication over print

or media, the research showed that 84.8% of activities involved purely verbal interaction. Demonstrating a proclivity for live action, Martin's principals spent little time in thoughtful planning. They showed an affinity for the action components of their roles and liked to bring closure to tasks as quickly as possible.

Martin and Willower (1981) did see some differences with the principals that were interviewed when comparing them to Mintzberg's executive managers. Related to their contact network, Martin found that principals were mainly preoccupied with the internal components of the organization, capturing 92.7% of the participants' time. Focusing interests primarily internally is in stark contrast to Mintzberg's findings that showed leaders as spending a considerable amount of time and energy on external communication and information gathering. Martin believes that this variance from Mintzberg's findings is due to the role principals have. Principals are subordinate to the school district's senior executive, the superintendent.

Bloom (1983) replicated Martin and Willower's (1981) study through structured observation of five principals over 5 days. Bloom's study found nearly identical results to that of Martin. Similarly, Bloom's research showed that the majority of tasks for principals focused internally. Again, the finding that principals focused their efforts internally within the organization supports the idea that the roles of principals and superintendent may vary significantly as it relates to valuing and participating in external activities.

There is a gap in the literature as there were no research findings of Mintzberg's managerial roles applied to K-12 superintendents who act as the CEOs of their educational organizations. There are, however, a number of studies that look at leaders

within higher education and within non-profit organizations. Hammons and Ivery (1988) used the Mintzberg managerial model of roles to compare the activities of college administrators to the CEOs in Mintzberg's (1973) empirical study. Five sites were selected from a representative sampling of community colleges across the U.S. Using Mintzberg's structural observation method, they sought to determine if the work activities of community college presidents could be categorized using the 10 roles and to determine if there were differences between these roles and the roles of Mintzberg's CEOs. They also were looking specifically at possible differences in roles between chief information officers (CIOs) and chief business officers (CBOs) within the organizations. The researchers determined that the Mintzberg managerial model was accurate in defining the responsibilities of the administrators. However, there were measurable differences in the managerial tasks of the two groups in the way they spent their time, specifically related to the strategic planning process. They found that CIOs perceived the strategic planning process to be more collaborative, less rigid, and more valuable in connection with aligning outcomes with the vision of the college.

Mace (2013) used Mintzberg's model to distinguish what current successful community college CEOs did in their roles and compare the results to the roles of college leaders in the original 1982 study by Curtis Ivery. Anticipating a significant loss of community college CEOs to retirement shortly, and wanting to capture an accurate picture of the current CEO's role, the Mintzberg model was effectively applied to identify the complexities of the responsibilities specific to the successful community college leader. The study duplicated Ivery's initial research, which involved shadowing five leaders, documenting their daily tasks, and categorizing them according to Mintzberg's 10

management roles. The study revealed several major differences in the roles that college presidents perform now compared to what they did in Ivery's initial study. First, each community college president's activities fit within Mintzberg's 10 managerial roles. Second, Mace found that the presidents engaged in four times as many managerial activities than did those Ivery studied almost 30 years earlier. Thirdly, presidents relied more greatly on technology for communication, decreasing the percentage of time spent on verbal communication. Lastly, college presidents participated in five times as many scheduled meetings over the same number of workdays.

There have been recent studies involving senior executive leaders in business settings. Ruzgar and Kurt (2013), for example, studied the managers of Iranian Sports Federations using the 10 managerial roles of Mintzberg. Where previous research focused on corporate and academic settings, the researchers in this study posited that knowing the details of the sports managerial role would help other federation managers gain more information about their roles and provide information needed for leadership training. The researchers felt that the results of the study addressed a research gap that existed in the application of the model to corporate and academic settings. The study involved 129 managers of 49 international sports federations who were given two sets of surveys, one that queried them about personal information and one that focused on their managerial roles. The study revealed that sports managers performed in all 10 roles of the Mintzberg model while the participants placed most emphasis on resource allocation followed by disseminator, disturbance handler leader, entrepreneur, monitor, figurehead, liaison, spokesperson, and negotiator. In this study, application of Mintzberg's model allowed for accurate interpretation of managerial roles despite variables associated with

differences in job responsibilities of corporate and academic settings. Valuable new information was gained that informed managers about their roles, the need for access to obtain and share information, to be reflective to enhance their responses as disturbance handler, implications for improved budget designs, and help for institutions to function better.

Absent from the literature are studies related to Mintzberg's managerial roles model applied to leaders of independent schools or K-12 Christian schools. Additionally, little literature was available of Mintzberg's model applied to non-profit organizations.

**Leadership and sustainability.** There are several studies related to leadership and declining enrollment in K-12 Christian schools (Baldwin, 2010; Heath, 2006; Mainda, 2002; Ramirez, 2010). Sammons, Gu, Day, and Koy (2011) studied the impact of the leadership of the school leader on school improvement in England. The researchers used a mixed method, 3-year longitudinal design, to look at the impact of school leadership on assessment scores in 378 primary schools and 362 secondary schools. Through using factor analysis and structural equation models, they were able to find both the direct and indirect impact of leadership on school improvement. They found a strong, positive correlation ( $r = 0.70$ ) between leaders that set direction and the redesigning of the organization, resulting in improved student performance.

Effective leadership is necessary for the success of K-12 institutions. Educational leaders have a direct impact on the behaviors, self-efficacy, and teaching practices of faculty and staff members (Marzano, 2007; Sergiovanni, 2006; Snowden & Gorton, 2002). Northouse (2013) defines leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 3). Many theories exist

related to leadership. These theories range from effective leaders having innate leadership traits to understanding leadership as a process by which it is accessible to all (Northouse, 2013). The wealth of literature regarding leadership demonstrates the importance for leaders in education to understand what kinds of leadership styles and leadership practices have the greatest impact on the success of schools.

Kouzes & Posner (2012) would suggest that transformational leadership is connected to making organizations stronger and more sustainable. Transformational leadership for K-12 Christian schools involves leaders seeing the need for adapting to change, identifying the needed changes, creating a vision for the desired state, and executing strategic change by motivating others to be active, committed co-owners in the process. Yang (2014) studied the impact of transformational leadership on school improvement with a primary school in China. Yang found that helping a school leader to develop the skills of transformational leadership was the key that prompted school improvement. They confirmed that leaders can solve problems and move a school forward through "modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart" (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

Onorato (2013) looked at several leadership styles including transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and passive avoidance styles of leadership. Onorato studied 45 principals in New York State and found that 68.9% of his sample group were transformational leaders. The researcher concluded that transformational leadership is necessary for schools to adapt to change so that leaders can realize effective results.

What we know about leading people has changed over the past 50 years, and it is important that schools be aware of how best to lead their organizations and motivate their

staff. Drucker (1999) suggests that motivating people and getting them to perform at their best involves intrinsic motivators. Employees must see their work as meaningful. Servant leaders invest in individuals through awareness, concern, and listening. Transformational leadership, as described in the literature, can help leaders and followers achieve better school climates. Also, transformational leadership may improve job satisfaction, resulting in behaviors that positively impact student performance.

Despite transformational leadership becoming a more popular theory through which to study organizational sustainability, additional research needs to be done to substantiate the effectiveness of transformational leadership theory in varying learning environments. Specifically, there is not much research in the area of transformational leadership within faith-based K-12 schools.

One of the few empirical research studies on Christian school sustainability was a doctoral dissertation completed by Baldwin (2012). Baldwin used the Delphi Technique to study 31 leaders in ACSI-accredited K-12 Christian schools in the United States. The Delphi Technique is a process used to collect responses anonymously and to categorize responses from experts using a combination of questionnaires and feedback. Baldwin identified a set of 28 skills that were essential for Christian school leaders to demonstrate. These skills and traits included honesty, humility, integrity, interpersonal skills, mission-driven, and strategic planning. Of the 28 skills, the highest rating was for the trait of trustworthiness. Establishing trustworthiness is consistent with Fullan (2003) who believes that leaders must set the bar high for honesty, caring, and putting others' needs above themselves. Fullan added that leaders need to lead with moral purpose as they understand the impact of leadership on the larger school community.

Humility and putting the needs of followers above oneself are traits that are consistent with a popular leadership theory called servant leadership. Servant leadership originates from the writings of Robert Greenleaf and was developed in the early 1970s (Northouse, 2013). The literature shows several studies that connect servant leadership and K-12 Christian school sustainability (Anderson, 2005; Furrow, 2015; Harrison, 2014; Stephen, 2007). Greenleaf described servant leadership as;

Servant leadership begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. . . .The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? Moreover, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, will they not be further deprived? (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 15)

Spears and Lawrence (2004) brought some definition to Greenleaf's theory by listing 10 characteristics that describe servant leadership for the practitioner. Spears identified these 10 as (a) listening, (b) empathy, (c) healing, (d) awareness, (e) persuasion, (f) conceptualization, (g) foresight, (h) stewardship, (i) commitment to the growth of people, and (j) building community.

Building trust is an important aspect of servant leadership. Servant leaders need to look outside themselves and learn to trust others. A servant leadership culture begins to form once leaders put the individuals of the organization above themselves. Through modeling servant leadership, the followers also begin to exhibit servant leadership

qualities (Greenleaf, 1977).

Servant leadership awareness has grown, especially over the past 10 years, in the number of publications aimed at clarifying and developing empirical evidence to substantiate the basic assumptions of the theory (Northouse, 2013). As servant leadership becomes increasingly known and accepted as an effective model, additional research will help organizations better understand the theory and how they might benefit from its principles.

Linking the attributes of the school leader and its impact on K-12 Christian school culture is significant as it relates to sustainability (Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996; Hoy, Tarter, & Bliss, 1999). Heck and Hallinger (2014) found that both school quality and student achievement were directly and positively influenced by school environment. They used a quantitative modeling approach for evaluating multilevel longitudinal data from 60 schools in the United States to look at the effect that classroom practices had on student learning. Heck and Hallinger (2010) measured organizational change and the impact of distributed leadership on student achievement in math and reading.

Distributed leadership, also understood as collaborative leadership, involves distributing leadership across all levels of the organization (Ritchie, & Woods, 2007). In a school setting, for example, distributed leadership might look like an administrator sharing decision-making responsibilities with teachers as the teachers take on a variety of coaching roles. This empirical study was broad in scope and looked at how distributed leadership leads to school improvement. Survey data from teachers and achievement data was collected over a 4-year period from 197 elementary schools totaling 13,391 students. The researchers defined a school's improvement capacity using seven indicators,

including "1) the school's implementation of the state's curricular standards, 2) academic expectations for students, 3) sustained focus on academic improvement, 4) resource support that enables action, 5) continuous professional learning, 6) open communication, and 7) parent support for student learning" (Heck & Hallinger, 2010, p. 871). They found that the impact of a school's improvement capacity and learning outcomes increased each year over 3 years.

Independent School Management (ISM) looked at this idea of school culture and its connection to school leadership in four medium-to-large independent schools. They chose schools in which the school leader had served in that role for at least 5 years. Additional selection criteria included organizational maturity, evidence of second-level academic administration, and schools that had experience with the Faculty Culture Profile research instrument used by ISM.

ISM conducted 48 interviews of the faculty at these four schools. In addition to the interviews, they had each participant take the 12-item Faculty Culture Profile survey as well as responding to 25 leadership statements. Using Pearson product-moment correlation statistics they paired items from the Faculty Culture Profile with items from the leadership statements survey. They found that 16 of the leadership statements paired with teacher responses to the culture survey with significance beyond the .001 level (ISM, 2004). They then divided the statements into two equal-sized groups, eight related to school leadership points of emphasis and eight related to head of school leadership traits. Four of the top eight leadership points of emphasis included: (a) the school head vigorously seeks a professional development-focused faculty culture; (b) the school head gives public, positive reinforcement to deserving employees and students; (c) the school

head actively promotes an ongoing faculty conversation regarding high expectations and support for students; and (d) the school head seeks to establish a faculty-wide conversation regarding professional development. These four are primarily related to creating a positive culture related to growth and professional development. Five of the top eight head of school leadership traits included: (a) the school head is respectful of others, regardless of their position in the organization; (b) the school head is a charismatic person; (c) the school head displays great flexibility; (d) the school head is a supportive person; and (e) the school head is steeped in moral purpose, moral clarity, moral conviction, and integrity.

ISMs research is consistent with the literature as it relates to effective educational leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The leader has many defined roles as it relates to managing a K-12 school district; these roles can be categorized as actions that are interpersonal, informational, and decisional in nature. Related to transformational leadership practices, effective leaders model the way as they create a culture where subordinates share a vision of excellence and are enabled to act. As servant leaders, leaders demonstrate authenticity, integrity, humility, trustworthiness, and an “others first” mindset. As collaborative leaders, leaders value their faculty and staff in such a way that they grow them and empower them so that leaders can trust the important work of the organization to their hands.

Leadership is needed for K-12 sustainability as unique challenges face private schools in the United States. Enrollment in private schools has been steadily declining over the past 25 years. Ewert (2013) explores several reasons for the decline in enrollment including: (a) a rise in the popularity of homeschooling, (b) an increase in

charter school enrollment, (c) virtual and online options for education, and (d) the increasing costs of private education.

Faith-based schools have an additional challenge as it relates to the spiritual state of the church in the United States (McDowell, 2006). In a 2014 study, Rodriguez (2014) sought to understand why caregivers were choosing ACSI-accredited Christian schools in California. Rodriguez replicated a study by Rumbaugh (2009) that studied the reasons why families were choosing evangelical Christian schools. A survey was used to collect data, including a section that asked participants to rank 16 factors for choosing to enroll their child in the school. The respondents ranked "the teaching of biblical values" as the number one factor for enrollment with 40.4% of the 297 respondents listing it as the primary reason for enrollment. Ranking second and third were "quality of academics" at 24.9% and a safe environment at 10.1%.

The research by Rumbaugh (2009) and Rodriguez (2014) indicates that while the desired outcomes for K-12 Christian education are in one way very similar to that of K-12 public schools, there also may be some unique differences. Understanding the history of K-12 Christian education and its place within K-12 education in the United States may help to provide a more complete picture of the type of leadership required to promote sustainability.

**History of Christian school leadership in the United States.** Faith-based schooling has been a part of the rich history of education in the United States dating back to 1606 when the first Catholic school was founded by the Franciscan order in present-day St. Augustine, Florida (Burns, 1969). For much of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries in the United States public schooling was centered on religious faith

and, specifically, the Christian faith. Some of the first European settlers in America were the Puritans who traveled to the New Land to flee religious persecution (McClellan, 1999). The beginning educational institutions in America were religious schools created to support the biblical values taught in the home. During this period many Americans believed a lack of education as a tool of the devil who would use ignorance to keep people biblically illiterate (Slater, 2012).

While education across the colonies varied in its earliest forms, the purpose in their formation was primarily religious (Rury, 2013). According to Greenawalt (2005), the religious nature of education extended into higher education as 106 of the first 108 colleges and universities were started as religious institutions. The founders of the first American college, Harvard, identified the reason for establishing their center to "advance learning and perpetuate it to prosperity; dreading to leave an illiterate ministry to the churches, when our present ministers shall lie in the dust" (History and Mission). Early colonization in America occurred approximately 100 years after the Protestant Reformation in England. McClellan (1999) notes that leaders of early primary and secondary schools were often religious leaders from various religious sects such as the Puritans, Anabaptists, Huguenots, and Quakers.

Schools in the early 1800s often had masters, or single teachers responsible for a wide age range of students (Kafka, 2009). During this period for schools the school leader, predominately male, often acted as teacher, carpenter, and custodian, leaving administrative decisions to a local school board (Beck & Murphy, 1993). As schools grew during the early 1800s, leaders of schools became known as "teacher principals," gaining increased levels of both authority and respect (Goodwin, Cunningham, & Eagle,

2005; Kafka, 2009). The first teacher principals were described by the Cincinnati Board of Education in 1839:

The principal teacher was: (a) to function as the head of the school charged to his care; (b) to regulate the classes and course of instruction of all the pupils, whether they occupied his room or the room of other teachers; (c) to discover any defects in the school and apply remedies; (d) to make the defects known to the visitor or trustee of ward, or district, if he were unable to remedy conditions; (e) to give necessary instruction to his assistants; (f) to classify pupils; (g) to safeguard school houses and furniture; (h) to keep the school clean; (i) to instruct assistants; (j) to refrain from impairing the standing of assistants, especially in the eyes of their pupils; and (k) to require the co-operation of his assistants (Ballenger, 1936).

As schools grew larger during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Goodwin, Cunningham, & Eagle (2005) indicate that a bureaucratic structure developed that resulted in a principal teacher that reported to a superintendent. This superintendent would oversee the principal, whose duties increased to include finances, instructional leadership, and facilities management.

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Horace Mann began to enact major educational reform as he led what is known as the common school Movement. These common schools would provide an education for every child and they received funding from local taxes (Messerli, 1972). Hunt (2012) explains that part of the reasoning for moving from plural funding of schools to a publicly funded common school model was a result of the influx of Catholic immigrants. This move to public schooling would provide more uniformity and protect the predominately Protestant, common schools from Catholic

influence. The resulting common schools curriculum continued to use the Protestant Bible for scriptural readings and prayers through the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. In response to the Protestant public school influence, private Catholic schools began to emerge in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, peaking in attendance in 1960 at 5.25 million students (Hunt, 2012).

Private Catholic education began to emerge in the middle 19<sup>th</sup> century due to immigration and in response to Protestant teaching in public schools. K-12 Christian education is a relatively new schooling option in the United States (Finn, Swezey, & Warren, 2010). It was not until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that private, Protestant Christian education came onto the scene, primarily as a response to changes in public schooling and a move away from foundational Protestant teachings. Parents desiring a distinctively Christian education for their children began to choose Protestant Christian schooling (Pennings et al., 2011).

Protestant Christian education experienced increased growth in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Baldwin (2012) reports that nearly 10,000 Christian K-12 schools came into existence as Christian families began to perceive public schools as becoming increasingly secularized and hostile toward conservative Judeo-Christian beliefs. Leadership in early private Protestant schools focused on providing a Christian alternative to public schools. Factors that parents considered when removing their children from public schools during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century included quality of education, religious values, safety, discipline, class size, and school climate (Nichols, 2006; Wolf, Howell, & Peterson, 2000).

With tuition and fundraising as the primary revenue streams for K-12 Christian schools, strong enrollment and fund development became the primary goals of Christian

school leaders. K-12 Christian schools, however, have experienced decreasing enrollments and increasing closures since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Sustainability concerns have coincided with changes in the educational landscape in the United States. Educational leaders in K-12 education have had to respond to higher expectations and increased accountability. In step, K-12 Christian school leaders are experiencing the challenge of providing competitive educational programs and academic quality while also providing a Christian school environment and experience.

Despite Christian K-12 schools experiencing a decline in the US, evidence indicates that K-12 Christian schools not only make up a large portion of the students in the United States but they are also having a significant impact in many ways. Pennings (2011) compared graduates of K-12 Christian schools with those of public schools, along with graduates of Catholic schools and non-religious private schools. He found that K-12 Christian school graduates were more generous, less self-focused, more committed to their families, churches, and to society as a whole. Matching the values of many families that choose K-12 Christian education, these graduates highly outperformed their peers in spiritual areas including personal prayer, reading the Bible, commitment to marriage, and in charitable giving.

Conversely, Pennings (2011) also found that, while an extremely high percentage of K-12 Christian school graduates graduated and enrolled in college, these students were less likely to pursue higher degrees than their sectarian private school counterparts, with advanced college degrees more closely aligned with graduates from K-12 public schools. While creating a culture of a college thinking mindset is not foreign to K-12 Christian schools, Pennings (2011) found that the top priority for Protestant Christian schools was a

student's relationship with God. Many Catholic schools also identify a relationship with God as a priority but alternatively chose character, school community, and math and science as primary goals.

While 270 Christian schools have closed in the Northeast since 2008, only a small handful have been ACSI-accredited schools. Accredited schools are required to maintain academic, financial, and governing standards. Studying the leaders of ACSI-accredited schools to help identify leadership practices may add value to understanding Christian school sustainability.

**Christian school sustainability.** Decreasing enrollments and an increase in closures indicate that something needs to be done to increase the sustainability of Christian schools. Barfell (2014), ACSI Vice President of Professional Development, reported that: "The establishment/founding of Christian schools was a phenomenon that took place in the U.S. during the 70s and 80s. It has slowed in the U.S. so significantly that we stopped tracking the data more than a decade ago."

ACSI is the largest association of evangelical Protestant schools in the world (Hunt, 2012). As an accreditation agency, ACSI has evaluation standards that it uses to assess every one of its members (Table 2.2).

A review of the literature includes studies related to K-12 Christian schools and sustainability (Fitzpatrick, 2002; Harden, 1988; Nichols, 2006). Studying the phenomena of Christian school closures, Fellers (2013) found that these studies identified several factors contributing to sustainability. He examined the warning sign conditions in K-12 Christian schools by studying schools labeled as strong, declining, or closed. Fellers used 26 K-12 Christian school closure warning signs compiled by Fitzpatrick (2002) and

Nichols (2006), along with warning signs for private school closure organized by Province (2009). The 26 warning signs were used to create a survey that was given to 58 individuals from 24 K-12 Christian schools. Fellers found 14 significant relationships among the categories, school types, and questions. The most significant relationships included financial practices, marketing, responding to competition, vision, culture, and leadership.

Table 2.2

*ACSI Reach 2.0 Accreditation Standards*

Standard	Standard Description
1	Philosophy and Foundations
2	Governance and Executive Leadership
3	Home and Community Services and Student
4	Personnel
5	Instructional Program and Resources
6	Student Care
7	Character, Values, and Spiritual Formation of
8	Continuous School Improvement Plan

*Note.* Adapted from Keenan (2015).

Related to financial practices, Fellers (2013) found the level of debts service, the trend of using short-term bridge financing to subsidize the final quarter, excessive tuition discounting, and decreasing fund development to be statistically different when comparing schools. Strong schools performed much better in these areas compared to declining or closed schools. Related to mission, Fellers found that homogeneity of

mission and culture was essential. The mission of the organization should be at the center of every strategic decision, including financial and marketing decisions. Fellers found that declining schools tended to lessen their focus and financial commitment to marketing when cash flow was low. Lastly, Fellers found that poor campus appearance was a significant factor for the sustainability of K-12 Christian schools. Keeping the facilities updated and the campus attractive, especially during hard economic times, was important.

Harden (1998), Fitzpatrick (2002), and Nichols (2006) compared K-12 Christian school closures to reasons why businesses close. Each of the studies involved case studies with slightly different participants. Harden looked at eight Christian schools connected with the Assemblies of God church, Fitzpatrick looked at five Christian schools with membership in various accrediting agencies, and Nichols replicated the Fitzpatrick study by focusing on Evangelical Protestant Christian schools from one geographical location, southern California.

In ranked order, Fitzpatrick (2002) found that leadership was the most critical factor related to K-12 Christian school closures. Compounding the critical component of leadership is that leaders have a significant influence over and impact on all eight of the factors. Additional factors in order of impact from greatest to least included homogeneity of vision and culture, relationships between the school and stakeholders, failed finances, personnel turnover, competition, and the scope and quality of educational programs.

Realizing that leadership was so highly connected to school closure, Fitzpatrick (2002) further found that leaders need to be aware of warning signs and be prepared to respond during difficult times. Fitzpatrick found several warning signs that leaders

should keep in mind, including the lowering of enrollment standards to increase enrollment, loss of a spiritual focus within the school, and leader burnout. These indicators were determined through a heuristic research approach involving case studies of five K-12 Christian schools that had recently closed. Data was collected and analyzed from 43 interviews of stakeholders that included heads of school, board members, parents, pastors, and teachers. Leader longevity and attrition also show up in research done by Independent School Management. ISM (2016) studied longevity at 1,700 private schools in the United States and discovered turnover of one in five leaders each year with an average longevity in the position of fewer than 4 years.

Nichols (2006) used similar ranking methods to Fitzpatrick (2002) and found that leadership failure was the number one indicator of K-12 Christian school closure. Nichols further ranked the position of the leaders that impacted school closure and discovered that school board leadership ranked just above school principals and administrators. School board governance models vary in K-12 Christian schools. Some are self-perpetuating boards that have one employee, the school leader, and are only involved in strategic operations. Other school boards are elected for set terms by school stakeholders and are more involved in the day-to-day operations. In every K-12 Christian school, however, the school board has ultimate fiscal responsibility, oversight of the school mission, and the hiring and evaluation of the school leader.

Independent School Management conducts some of the most extensive research in the area of sustainability for K-12 independent schools. In their fourth iteration of research on stability markers for independent schools, they identified six ranked first-tier markers and 12 unranked second-tier markers (Table 2.3). These stability marker

categories are consistent with the closure warning signs shown in the research by Harden (1998), Fitzpatrick (2002), and Nichols (2006), identifying financial practices, executive leadership, and school culture among the top areas for K-12 Christian schools to focus on to increase sustainability.

Table 2.3

*ISM Stability Markers*

Tier 1 Stability Markers	Tier 2 Stability Markers
1. Cash reserve and debt/endowment mix	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Profiled board</li> <li>• Board leadership</li> </ul>
2. Strategic planning, strategic financial planning, and strategic plan-based budgeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trustee education</li> <li>• Strategic board</li> <li>• Consistent donor cultivation</li> </ul>
3. Executive Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development office management</li> </ul>
4. Hard-income driven	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal Marketing</li> </ul>
5. Faculty culture and student experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty salaries</li> <li>• Employee benefits</li> </ul>
6. Enrollment demand in excess of supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Budget support for Professional Development</li> <li>• Quality of facilities</li> <li>• Master property/facilities plan</li> </ul>

*Note.* Adapted from Independent School Management (2015).

It is significant as it relates to this study on K-12 Christian school leadership and K-12 Christian school sustainability that ISM identifies the third-ranked first-tier marker

as executive leadership. Also, four of the first-tier markers relate to financial health, a direct responsibility of the school leader. The sixth stability marker relates to school culture and it is positively correlated with effective school leadership (Black, 2010). It is interesting to note that facilities and salaries fall to second-tier markers.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 2 was a review of the literature that started with a closer look at the history of management leading up to Mintzberg (1973) and his model of managerial roles. The literature showed how Mintzberg's model for management has been applied in educational settings. Secondly, literature related to leadership and sustainability was discussed. A number of studies showed organizational sustainability related to several leadership theories, including transformational leadership, servant leadership, and collaborative leadership. Next, a history of K-12 Christian education leadership in the United States was given to provide a context for Christian school leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Chapter 2 concluded with a review of research specific to leadership and sustainability in the K-12 Christian school setting.

K-12 Christian schools in the United States are experiencing a decrease in enrollment and an increasing rate of closure. The literature shows that there is a connection between organizational sustainability and effective leadership. Additionally, the research indicates that Mintzberg's model for managerial roles has been widely used and can be an effective model to help understand the practices of K-12 Christian school leaders and the leader's impact on sustainability.

Chapter 3 will describe the research context, research participants, research design, and research methodology for this study. Also discussed in Chapter 3 will be the

plan for collecting and analyzing the data.

## **Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology**

### **Introduction**

Private K-12 Christian schools in the United States are finding it difficult to survive in a competitive educational environment. When compared to all K-12 students in the United States, the number of students in private schools has dropped from 12% in the 1996 school year to 10% in the 2012 school year. This same study showed that conservative Christian schools decreased by 7.6% over the same period (The Condition of Education, 2015).

This study looked at the leadership qualities of school leaders from the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) accredited schools who have demonstrated leadership in schools identified as sustainable amid a K-12 Christian school environment that is experiencing declining enrollments and increased closures. The researcher purposed to understand the leadership practices that the school leader position requires to promote sustainability.

The first question that the researcher proposed to answer was: what are the leadership practices of K-12 Christian school leaders that promote sustainability? The second question the research answered was: from the perspective of the K-12 Christian school leader, which managerial roles are most important to the sustainability of their school? The study used qualitative research methods. Specifically, phone interviews were conducted with leaders of K-12 Christian schools through convenience and purposeful sampling. Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research in the following way:

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (p. 15).

This study is phenomenological because it seeks to understand the leadership experiences of Christian K-12 school leaders. Through a phenomenological study, researchers search for the essential or underlying meaning of an experience (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). Creswell (1998) states that phenomenological data analysis proceeds through "the methodology of reduction, analysis of specific statements and themes, and a search for all possible meanings" (p. 52). Additionally, Moustakas (1994) defines phenomenological data analysis as the recording of significant statements and meanings and the development of descriptions to arrive at the essences of the experiences.

The primary goal of this study was to capture the experiences and expertise of school leaders who have demonstrated a level of success in their headship. The leaders' responses were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed through coding methods that helped to uncover themes that can provide knowledge of successful practices of K-12 Christian school leaders.

### **Research Context**

The study included six leaders of K-12 Christian schools accredited by the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI). ACSI is an international accrediting body made up primarily of K-12 Christian schools. ACSI represents over 23,000 K-12 schools from 100 countries totaling approximately 1.2 million students

("ACSI FAQ," 2015). There are over 3,000 ACSI schools in the United States.

### **Research Participants**

In a phenomenological study, the primary method of collecting data is through in-depth interviews (Creswell, 1998). A purposeful sample for this study resulted in the selection of six leaders of K-12 ACSI-accredited Christian schools. Johnson and Christensen (2010) explain that purposeful sampling may rely on a criterion-based strategy for the selection of participants. Miles and Huberman (1994) define a criterion-based strategy for selecting participants as sampling where cases meet some criterion.

Creswell (1998) suggests that criterion-based selection works well for phenomenological studies when all individuals studied are representative of people who have experienced the phenomenon. Criterion sampling was chosen for this study because the researcher wanted to isolate the phenomenon to those school leaders that have been met with a level of success at their institutions. Setting the criteria of participants serving as leaders of ACSI-accredited schools allowed for a sampling of schools with similar financial, academic, and spiritual characteristics. Every ACSI school is required to comply with detailed and comprehensive standards (Table 2.2).

The specific criteria used to select the K-12 school leaders included: (a) leader with at least 5 years serving in this position at the school (Waters & Marzano, 2006), (b) school is accredited through ACSI; (c) recommendation of school and school leader by ACSI; (d) enrollment trend that is static or increasing over 5 years; and (e) the leader is willing to participate in the study. Research participants varied in age, geographic location, and school demographics. A summary of the research participants and their schools can be found in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

*Participant Demographics*

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Participant Age	Average: 56
	Median: 58
Participant (Years as School Leader)	Average: 13
	Median: 13
Participant Gender	Male: 6
	Female: 0
School Type (Affiliation)	Independent: 5
	Church Affiliated: 1
School Type (Admissions)	Covenant: 4
	Non-covenant: 2
School Location (Region)	Northeast: 1
	Southeast: 1
	Midwest: 2
	South: 1
	West: 1
Enrollment	Average: 1,379
	Median: 1,050
Tuition (Highest)	Average: \$13,675
	Median: \$10,300

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## **Instruments used in Data Collection**

The researcher utilized semi-structured interview questions to collect data from the participants. Interviews do not follow specific steps governed by rules, but rather the quality of an interview is ultimately judged by the strength and value of the knowledge produced (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Semi-structured interviews are interviews where the researcher knows what they want to find out, and questions are created to obtain this information. Miles and Gilbert (2005) point out that the flexibility of semi-structured interviews allows the researcher to determine the *why* rather than *how many* or *how much*. They also indicate that semi-structured interviews allow for developing a deeper understanding as well as providing a format for discussing sensitive topics. The purpose of the qualitative interview was to understand and uncover themes of the lived experiences of K-12 Christian school leaders from the subjects' perspectives.

The researcher used two recording devices to capture the data from phone interviews with the participants. The second recording device functioned as a backup in case the first recording device malfunctioned or became corrupted in some way. Time-stamped field notes were kept by the researcher during the interview to denote any events during the interview that could not be captured through audio recording. Both digital recordings and the field notes are stored in a locked container at the researcher's home.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted individually through scheduled phone calls in which the participant could be free from interruptions and distractions. Phone interviews were used because of the distance that the schools are from each other and to ensure that the time of the school leader was respected. The interview questions were open-ended so that participants' attitudes and knowledge could emerge as part of

the interview, not being constrained by fixed interview questions. The researcher acquired informed consent from each participant and fully explained the purpose of the study to each participant. Additionally, the researcher explained that confidentiality would be maintained and that pseudonyms would be used in the research for each participant to assure further confidentiality.

The researcher followed the seven stages suggested by Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) in planning the interview study. These seven stages include: (a) thematizing to formulate the purpose of the investigation; (b) designing a plan for the interview so that the intended knowledge is obtained; (c) conducting the interviews using an interview guide with a reflective approach; (d) transcribing the interview material for analysis; (e) analyzing the data using predetermined coding methods appropriate for the study; (f) verifying the data to ascertain trustworthiness; and (g) reporting the findings of the study and the methods used in such a way that it stands up to scientific criteria, ethical standards, and readability.

The interview protocol employed by the researcher included five parts: (a) basic information about the interview; (b) introductions to familiarize the participant with the study and to confirm consent; (c) demographic questions related to the participant, the school setting, and the community; (d) interview content questions; and (e) closing instructions (Creswell, 2016). Appendix A shows these five parts to the interview protocol in greater detail.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Data analysis took place using three phases. During the first phase, the researcher read and become familiar with the transcripts of the interviews. The researcher then used

in vivo coding during this first phase. For exploratory coding, Saldaña (2013) suggests in vivo coding as a first phase coding for beginning qualitative researchers learning how to code data and he suggests that it is a method that is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies. In vivo's root meaning is "in that which is alive," and is a method that prioritizes and honors the participant's voice, becoming attuned to "participant language, perspectives, and worldviews" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 91).

The second phase of data analysis utilized pattern coding. The researcher was able to stay open and curious during the first cycle of coding while pattern coding allowed the researcher to analyze the qualitative data by categorizing and identifying emerging themes.

The third phase of data analysis utilized a method of coding called code weaving. Saldaña (2013) identifies code weaving as a critical component of qualitative data analysis. This process involves the synthesis of key code words and phrases gleaned from the first two phases of coding and allows for a narrative to develop. This phase helped bring together the pieces of the puzzle and to expose interrelated concepts, suggested causations, and broader themes.

Establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research is critical for ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln, & Guba, 1985). There are several methods suggested by Creswell and Miller (2003) that qualitative researchers use to advance trustworthiness. For this study, the researcher employed researcher reflexivity, member checking, and peer debriefing.

**Researcher reflexivity.** Despite purposing to understand the phenomena with an open mind, every researcher has a degree of bias as they approach their study. This

trustworthiness procedure involved the researcher self-disclosing his assumptions, biases, and beliefs that have the potential of shaping and biasing inquiry. The researcher identified these biases early in the study and used bracketing techniques to suspend suspected biases throughout the three research phases. To adequately communicate researcher reflexivity, the researcher created a separate Chapter 5 section titled "The role of the researcher" in which potential biases and bracketing are shared (Creswell & Miller, 2003).

**Member checking.** Considered the most important trustworthiness technique by Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking involves the participants verifying the accuracy of the data collected and adding additional narrative as necessary. For this study, the researcher requested that the participants view and respond to the raw data transcriptions and field notes.

**Peer debriefing.** The researcher involved a peer with whom to share the data analysis who is familiar with the phenomena of K-12 Christian school leadership. This peer acted as a reviewer and was able to challenge the researcher's assumptions by asking difficult questions about both methods and interpretations (Creswell & Miller, 2003).

**Data confidentiality and storage.** The invitation letters (Appendix B) provided the participants with the details of the study, including purpose, college affiliation, participation requirements, informed consent form, and directions for setting up the phone interview. The letter also communicated a clear assurance of confidentiality. Confidentiality has been maintained after the completion of the study. Each participant will be provided with the results of the study upon request and the pseudonym used to

protect their identity. All interview data will be held in a secure, locked cabinet for no less than 3 years at the home of the researcher.

### **Summary**

This qualitative phenomenological study used semi-structured phone interviews to gain an understanding of the leadership practices of K-12 Christian school leaders in the United States. The researcher used purposeful, criteria-based sampling to choose six participants. The school leaders were interviewed and the interviews were transcribed. The transcripts of the interviews were coded and then analyzed using three coding phases.

Chapter 3 defined the methodology for the study, the research context, the research participants, and the research design. Additionally, Chapter 3 laid out a research structure that will allow future researchers to follow should they wish to replicate the study. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the results of the research, analysis of the data, and considerations for further study.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the leadership practices of K-12 Christian school leaders that lead to K-12 Christian school sustainability. A criterion-based sampling method was employed and the researcher identified 14 possible participants from schools across the United States that met researcher defined metrics for sustainability. Six participants agreed to participate in the study. Each participant was the leader of their school and reported directly to the school board. The participants were all White males and ranged in age from 38 to 69 with an average age of 56. Each leader demonstrated longevity with an average of 19 years at their respective schools and an average of 13 years serving in the head of school position. The location of the schools included two schools from the South, two from the Midwest, one from the West, and one from the Southeast. Table 3.1 displays a summary of the background of the leaders and a description of their schools. Semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions were the sole instrument for the data collection. Each participant engaged in an individual phone interview with the researcher. Understanding the leadership practices that lead to K-12 Christian school sustainability will assist K-12 Christian schools around the world to address a trend of decreasing enrollments and increasing school closures.

Data analysis took place using three phases. The first phase involved in vivo coding where the researcher became familiar with the data and initially coded the data

using words or short phrases to describe sections of the data. The researcher used pattern coding during the second phase of data analysis. During this phase the researcher categorized codes and began to identify emerging themes. The third phase of data analysis involved code weaving. It was during this phase that key code words, phrases, and themes were gleaned from the first two phases to create a narrative, exposing interrelated concepts, suggested causations, and broader themes.

The researcher established data trustworthiness by employing researcher reflexivity, member checking, and peer debriefing. These methods were used to increase data credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln, & Guba, 1985). Researcher reflexivity was accomplished through bracketing. This is discussed further in Chapter 5. Member checking was accomplished by sending the raw transcript data to participants, giving them the opportunity to check for accuracy and add additional comments. Finally, peer debriefing was accomplished by inviting two education administrators to review the data analysis and challenge the researcher's assumptions.

### **Study Findings**

Chapter 4 reports the findings of the study derived from the guiding research questions:

1. What are the leadership practices of K-12 Christian school leaders that promote sustainability?
2. From the perspective of the K-12 Christian school leader, which leadership practices are most important to the sustainability of their school?

This chapter is organized into four leadership practice categories and 13 leadership practice themes that emerged from the research questions. The first leadership

practice category, *financial stewardship*, incorporates the four leadership practice themes of (a) *strategic planning*, (b) *sound fiscal practices*, (c) *mission-focused*, and (d) *forecasting*. The second leadership practice category, *managing school culture*, incorporates the three leadership practice themes of (a) *spiritual focus*, (b) *authentic relationships*, and (c) *telling the story*. The third leadership practice category, *striving for excellence*, incorporates the three leadership practice themes of (a) *excellent programs*, (b) *excellent people*, and (c) *innovation*. The fourth and final leadership practice category, *leading collaboratively*, incorporates the three leadership practice themes of (a) *leading the process*, (b) *inspiring others*, and (c) *shared decision-making*. These four leadership practice categories and 13 leadership practice themes are interrelated, often interdependent, and stem from a strong relationship between the board and the head of school. Board governance is an essential foundation for sustainability in supporting the head of school and partnering in the financial stewardship of the school.

**Board governance.** Board governance is the foundation upon which the sustainable K-12 Christian school is built. When the school leaders speak of sustainability and their ability to lead the school, each leader references the importance of a school board that both understands their role and understands the nuanced and unique job description of the school leader. Participant 1 notes of an ineffective board: "They have no idea just the emotional or spiritual responsibilities. It is no offense against them. That is just not the world they live in, balancing work and tasks." Illustrating the importance of the board understanding the position of the school leader, Participant 3 shares:

I think that . . . probably half of them that either were in a senior leadership role or were in the number one chair, or had been in the number one chair. So, they understood leadership. They really understood my position. So I think that part of board is really critical. You have got to get people that know what it is like to sit in the number one chair or are wise enough to at least figure it out.

Participants indicate that it is important for the board to understand the leader's job while at the same time understanding their board-specific responsibilities. Boards acting as governing bodies with the leader as their one employee is a consistent theme. Participant 5 illustrates this point:

To be understanding that the school only has one employee and that is the president/superintendent. If they don't have the right superintendent or head of school, whatever term you use, then they should get another one. But that person is responsible to the board and for the school. Those are important factors, I think. For the most part, most of the problems, many of the problems that are in our Christian schools come from boards not understanding the principles of policy governance.

Participant 2 also has strong opinions about the importance of boards understanding how to govern:

The average tenure of a Christian school leader is about 3 years. It is because of that board relationship, lack of board training, boards that are trying to micromanage the school, just a whole host of problems that occur when boards don't know how to be boards. I think that it is one of the largest reasons that have held back Christian schools in terms of them becoming excellent and being

leaders in education.

Participant 4 describes the importance of boards governing and develops further what policy governance should look like:

Our relationship with our school board is very healthy. I really think that is one of the constants especially as it relates to sustainability, one of the key factors is the school board, the trustee, the steward of the vision and sustainability. I think that headmasters are going to come and go but hopefully, the consistency, health, and viability of the board is just vital.

While Participant 4 mentions stewardship of the vision, there are several instances where leaders also reference strategic planning and financial oversight: "The board has been very involved in not only developing the strategic plan but executing it." Participant 3 expands on these roles:

The head of school role, you really are the chief executive for the company. The board is really responsible for long-term strategic oversight. They have nothing to do with personnel. They have nothing to do with programs. They have everything to do with supervision of the head, financial stability and strategic planning.

Participant 6 believes that the board should take their financial responsibilities and their governance role seriously: "They bring enough expertise to the table to keep the school from doing anything on the financial side that would jeopardize its sustainability."

The school leader is able to exert influence on the organization while firmly standing on the foundation of effective board governance. Effectiveness in the leadership practice category of financial stewardship relies strongly on the existence of a school

board that supports the school leader in this area of governance. Participant 4 describes this relationship in the following way:

We have three committees in our school board and they surround me. They have very specific job descriptions, the Finance Committee, Development Committee and a Culture Committee. I just can't say enough of how important it is. They do not get involved with the day-to-day stuff but they are highly, highly, essential in our sustainability.

Financial stewardship, therefore, is a sustainable leadership practice category that is also directly related to a healthy, functioning school board that understands its job and its relationship to the school leader.

**Category 1: financial stewardship.** In collaboration with a supportive school board, the school leader is responsible for the financial well-being of the organization. From a strong financial footing a school leader can manage the school culture, lead collaboratively, and strive for excellence. The six leaders all speak specifically and confidently about their responsibility in stewarding the financial health of their schools. The four leadership practice themes that developed related to sustainability and financial stewardship include (a) *strategic planning*, (b) *sound fiscal practices*, (c) *mission-focused*, and (d) *forecasting*.

**Strategic planning:** Each participant speaks with resolute sincerity and specificity regarding the importance of strategic financial planning. Participant 2 ranks it as the second most important leadership practice for promoting sustainability: "The second piece of sustainability is a healthy financial plan." Participants noted that they spent a considerable amount of their time developing, executing, and monitoring their

strategic plans. "I will be trying to shepherd some teams through implementation of our strategic plan that we developed last year. Last year, I was involved a lot with the mechanics of that strategic plan cycle" (Participant 6). Participant 6 continues on by identifying the four elements of their strategic plan: "One - spiritual, two - instructional, three - financial sustainability, and the fourth is related to facilities." Strategic planning was something that participants both valued and focused a considerable amount of their time on. Participant 2 interacts with their strategic plan on a regular basis:

So on a regular basis, we come back to the board with a report and it is a 5-year plan. We set up how we are going to accomplish this, who is going to be responsible for it and what is the time line. There is a high level of accountability to execute that strategic plan.

Financial strategic plans are only one part of the strategic planning process.

Strategic planning, tracking metrics, and reporting to the board were things that

Participant 2 speaks of:

Our strategic plan has five different planks surrounding finances, academics, and spiritual life of the school. There is a committee for each one of those planks. So on a regular basis, we come back to the board with a report and it is a 5-year plan. We set up how we are going to accomplish this, who is going to be responsible for it and what is the time line. There is a high level of accountability to execute that strategic plan.

Participant 4 reiterates the breadth of the strategic planning: ". . . a strategic plan that connects with the school's philosophy, every component that drives the culture of a school. For example, we have multiple components and each of those components are

based on best practices." Participant 4 shares that he has: ". . . 8 or 9 quality control parameters" that he tracks related to his strategic financial plan. Participant 3 shows how strategic planning can help meet goals such as increasing salaries and benefits: ". . . we did set some benchmarks in our Strategic Financial Plan to be 90% of the public schools, in terms of salary."

It was clear that the leaders interviewed do not just give lip service to strategic planning. Participant 2 views an active plan as vital to their school's sustainability: "You cannot just make a strategic plan for accreditation purposes and then stick it in a folder somewhere and then revisit it 5 years later."

**Sound fiscal practices.** There is a consistent message from the participants regarding maintaining sound fiscal practices. Three common leadership practice themes included (a) being debt-free, (b) not relying on fund-raising to meet expenses, and (c) maintaining a healthy cash reserve.

Of the six schools represented in this study, five are free of debt. Participant 1 adamantly proclaims this principle:

We have close to \$20,000,000 worth buildings and assets. We are a debt-free school . . . I would say that it was a core value that we would never be a school that was in debt. So, we have never taken out a loan on getting anything that we have done . . . We have a no debt policy . . . the number one thing that is going to keep schools from being sustainable.

Independent School Management (2015) identifies sustainable schools as being hard-income driven. Relying on tuition to cover expenses is widely true of the six schools represented and denotes the second sound fiscal practice. These schools, on

average, are 95% hard-income driven. This means that the schools rely on fund-raising for just 5% of their budgetary expenses. Participant 3 had purposed to increase his percentage and succeeded: "Ninety-seven percent. We have moved from 86% 5 years earlier . . . so we had made a lot of movement." Participant 4 states: "We would always remain 95% or higher part hard-income. Right now, we are at about 96% hard-income." Participant 5 goes into greater detail explaining this sound fiscal practice:

I have been very focused over the years in making certain that we can run our operational budget on tuition . . . I know that I have probably been a little bit slow in developing that, and we are really working on it now. I have always been nervous about relying on donated income for paying the bills.

A third sound fiscal practice is the discipline of maintaining a cash reserve.

Participant 5 explains:

I don't want to be vulnerable . . . saving cash, being able to set enough cash aside makes me comfortable . . . We have a lot of cash reserves that we have set aside. We try growing at least a million dollars a year in cash reserves . . . I guess some people call it the black swan years, if something were to be wrong you would be able to have enough cash reserve to be sustainable.

Participant 1 explains how they build their budget to allow for a cash reserve:

. . . budgeting in such a way that the revenue actually exceeds what your expenses are going to be. One of the things that we are trying to do is build surplus and have a certain percentage of our budget reserved in surplus. I think that is critical to budget that way.

In addition to these three fiscal practices, several participants mention establishing

enrollment and tuition-setting practices such that schools demonstrates wisdom in considering students to accept and that tuition is high enough to provide for an excellent program. Participant 3 wonders about mistakes Christian schools have made in this regard: "I think that one of the mistakes that I have made that harms sustainability is that, I think, that we have been very reluctant to have anybody on the outside looking in, as far as, waiting lists and stuff like that." Participant 5 illustrates the importance of remaining disciplined when accepting students: "So, this past year, we had something like 1,200 applicants and we can't admit all the students. We don't just say the top students are going to be admitted, we say, let's match God-given talent with extraordinary opportunities." Participant 5 also suggests that schools should not lower tuition which could result in not being able to fund the program sufficiently:

I think that any school that talks a lot about keeping tuition at a lower rate to attract students, rather than charging what is necessary to provide quality education, I think that they are in danger of problems. Because unless we charge enough to deliver a quality product, you do not have a basis for existence.

**Mission-focused.** The leaders that contributed to this research are all commonly directed by their school mission and vision. As Participant 5 shares:

Every area of the school that you can imagine, our goal for sustainability is that when I leave or when a principal leaves or an athletic director leaves, what doesn't leave is that connection, that bridge from our philosophy to our culture-driving areas.

The leaders evaluate every decision and every direction they make against the mission. Participant 2 explains it this way:

Part of a strategic plan is making sure that you are sticking with your core values. Everything that you do as a school should emanate from your mission statement. So, if that isn't actively managed, it is very easy for you to start doing things that stray from your mission. Whenever somebody comes up with an idea or a new program . . . there are lots of great new ideas and programs out there, but one of my responsibilities is to point back whenever that kind of thing comes up, point back to the mission's statement, and say okay, does this fit with our mission. Because if it does not fit with our mission, I don't care how good of an idea it is, we are not doing it.

Participant 4 considers adhering to the vision of the school as the third most important leadership practice related to sustainability: "The third leadership practice, in that order, is developing the practices and the principles that take the vision, the inspiration and build it into the culture." Participant 2 also mentions vision as a valuable aspect of sustainability: ". . . it's our vision, and just creating unity within the system." Participant 6 claims that "15% of my time is spent handling a variety of disturbances but, I think that 85% would be keeping the Christian focus, and innovation, and vision moving forward."

**Forecasting.** Each of the participants demonstrate occupation with both understanding the current terrain and forecasting the future landscape. Part of sustainability and the ability that their schools have had to sustain through economic downturns and be successful over time has been the ability to predict and respond to changes. Participant 5 discusses this concept related to educational fads and technology:

The whole educational paradigm shift, as it relates to technology. We are trying

to make sure that we are not chasing the latest and greatest gadgets but that we are also really preparing our kids for the 21<sup>st</sup> century in skills. I would say that there is a huge paradigm shift happening at the university and K-12. That is perplexing to me, because it really changes the whole paradigm, the whole business model, when you look at what is happening with virtual, technology-based education.

Two areas that school leaders see as being on the horizon and possibly impacting their sustainability are leader succession planning and responding to the loss of their tax-exempt status. Understanding that there is a need to develop leadership and work to prepare the school for changes in leadership is a consistent finding. Participant 2 lists succession planning as one of the top three sustainability practices:

One is a succession plan. So, one of the things that we do actively with our board is once a year, they make us put together a chart of all the key positions. That would be my position, the Executive Director, the principals, the Athletic Director, and we have to talk through, okay, when that person retires or goes away, who's going to replace them? And, what is your plan to do that?

Transition in leadership is also one of the prominent sustainability factors for Participant 6: "Transition in leadership. We need to have succession planning that sustains the mission and culture of the school without a huge seismic event, so to speak, culturally."

What leaders forecast most cautiously about is their ability to accept government funds, and ultimately the loss of their tax exempt status. Participant 1 sees this as a primary concern:

The big thing that they are looking for is they want to take away our tax exempt

status. As we look at the financial sustainability of our school, as we look 5-10 years down the road, those are some of the things that we are looking at . . . that we may lose our tax exempt status at some point.

Participant 2 mentions the financial impact of: ". . . losing tax deductions for giving to non-profit organizations." He also is planning currently to make financial adjustments so that such an impact would not keep the school from continuing to be successful:

One of the things that we see coming is if you are taking federal money as a school, you will eventually have to sign off on a non-discrimination policy. So about 7 or 8 years ago, we divested ourselves of taking any federal money.

Participant 6 also speaks as if the loss of his school's tax exempt status is a foregone conclusion and an opportunity to test the viability of the school: "If you lose your tax exempt status, then you just kind of find out how serious people are about their commitment to you."

**Category 2: managing school culture.** The data reveals that school leaders see themselves as caretakers of the school culture. They act as figurehead, spokesperson, and champion as they manage the faculty, student, and school community culture. The participants are intentional in paying close attention to how every decision and interaction impacts culture. Participant 1 says: "Anything to create an environment where it is like, it is fun and they want to be there. They go out and say that they work at the greatest place ever." The leaders identify a connection between the faculty culture, faculty retention, student experience, and the overall quality of the program. Participant 2 identifies the prominence of culture as it relates to sustainability: ". . . the number one

predictor of enrollment is faculty culture." Three leadership practice themes that surfaced related to managing the culture included (a) attention to creating a spiritual focus, (b) a dedication to truth, and (c) the importance of telling the story of what is happening at the school and why the school exists.

**Spiritual focus.** Spiritual focus is coded 27 times across the six interviews. Consistently leaders come back to the importance of setting the spiritual tone of the school. In describing his job responsibilities, Participant 2 says, "I am the superintendent and I am responsible for the academic and spiritual direction of the school." He additionally stresses the importance of caring for his own spiritual condition:

One, have your own spiritual house in order. You have to be the spiritual leader of your school, and if you are not, then that is going to cause a whole trickle-down effect from that. So, having your own spiritual life in order is number one.

Four of the six schools describe themselves as covenant schools with the primary mission of discipling students in their faith. These schools require families to covenant with the school around specific doctrines of faith. Participant 1 explains how this impacts their admissions process: "We are a discipleship school where parent and student give a testimony of faith during the interview process." Two schools identify themselves as evangelistic. These schools accept students regardless of their faith background. Participant 6 describes their student body in this way: "We find that there are some people that we can't really distinguish if they really know the Lord or not based on either their inability to understand the faith or their inability to articulate it." Despite slightly different admissions requirements, spiritual focus was consistent across the schools. Participant 5 describes how he values the spiritual aspect of his school: "I am

passionate about making this a Christian school . . . I feel like God gives us a vision and that vision is, we think of it as being a light on the hill." Participant 5 also connects spiritual focus with their school mission:

It has to do with preparing young people to be well equipped to serve their families, their churches, their community and the world. Being Christian in every way that we possibly can, knowing that it is only a work that God can do, that just, just humbly asking God to help us to do that, is the number one priority. Otherwise, we have no reason to exist.

Participant 4 explains how important a spiritual focus is to his school: "We really elevate Kingdom education, just the whole philosophy in Kingdom education. We really do that as a distinguishing factor." Participant 1 believes that great leadership and overseeing the spiritual culture go hand in hand: "You can get a great academic leader of the school but could lose the spiritual culture of the school very quickly."

One distinction about the K-12 Christian schools studied is that the spiritual culture and the program cannot be separated. Participant 1 describes how spiritual focus impacts all aspects of their program: "One of the very first things that was said in our exemplary report is that it is evident that the Spirit of Christ permeates all aspects of the school. That is the school culture." Establishing this culture is accomplished partly through hiring faculty that demonstrates a personal relationship with Christ. Participant 6 speaks of how this is a major consideration for the hiring process: "They have to give a clear testimony of faith in Christ." Spiritual focus is exemplified in how the Participant 6 designs programs and prioritizes his time:

"Faculty devotions are every day before school at 7:20 a.m. for 15 minutes that

we require faculty to be at. I have a Tuesday morning 45-minute prayer time with parents that is pretty much untouchable."

A culture that focuses on spiritual things is also seen in the students. Participant 1 shares how this shows up in student preferences: "Bible class is their favorite class. That's why chapel is their favorite time of the week."

The school leaders gain job satisfaction from effectively establishing a Christ-centered culture. Participant 1 shares from personal experience how job satisfaction is connected to the spiritual aspect of school culture: "God's grace and hand built that school. One of the reasons I stayed here for 10 years is I am in a place where I know that God has His hands on it." Participant 1 continues to drive home this point as he describes the mission of his school in preparing young people for their eternal home in heaven: ". . . but getting our kids safely home is what is the most important thing to us. You will hear me say that all of the time. Getting our kids safely home is what we are focusing on."

**Authentic relationships.** It is clear that each school leader interviewed values relationships. The leaders purpose to build authentic relationships with faculty, the school community, and the board. They also encourage building a culture in which a strong relationship of caring exists between students and faculty. Participant 1 defines his leadership style as relational:

My personal leadership style is that it is all about relationships. Let me define that, I guess. I think that it is important to connect with people. Connectivity is crucial to all aspects of leadership. Whether it is with my leadership team, my faculty, the parents in our community, or our students.

The importance of developing a close relationship with the board and specifically

the board chair is a strong theme. Participant 2 shares how important the board relationship is to sustainability:

My relationship with the board chair is critical. It is imperative to have that good relationship. It is incumbent upon me to develop that relationship. So, I have learned to do that and I think it has helped the school not only to be successful but to move forward. I knew going into the board meeting where he was going to stand. I knew that he was going to have my back. That just gives you a whole different level of confidence when you are going into a board meeting knowing that you have the chair's support or not. At least you know.

Participant 6 describes how a relationship with the board chair can be helpful during critical times for the school:

I think a high level of trust between the board chair and the head of school is critical in terms of working through difficulties when they come up . . . We kind of know where our strengths and weaknesses are and we can work with those.

Mintzberg (2011) identifies the importance of interpersonal management roles for the purpose of gathering and disseminating information. Mintzberg illustrates this by describing the manager as a type of nerve center but using relationships and the information gained to help make informed decisions. Participant 2 reveals how interpersonal interactions are a large part of the school leader's job: "Most of my day is taken up in people management." Participant 1 shares how connecting and building relationships is intentional and significant:

Every morning I make it a point to be out in the school culture/community. When the weather is nice, I stand outside and I greet the students every morning. Just

connecting, letting them know that I am interested in who they are . . . I spend my first 30 minutes of every day just walking the building and connecting with people, teachers and students.

Participant 3 uses his morning to accomplish office tasks while leaving white space in the afternoon for interpersonal interactions: ". . . then a lot of people stuff or meetings where I just have to be engaged or involved, you know, I can do some of those things in the afternoon." Participant 6 reinforces that relationship building is important for the school culture: "Teachers teach through positive relationships. Christian teachers need to teach through positive relationships, that's really important."

The leaders discuss how essential it is to foster relationships amongst staff and students while, as a leader, managing relationships within the community. Participant 1 explains how relationships are a vital part of his leadership: "It is about doing life with these people. We talk a lot about, with our teachers, a living curriculum as faculty do life-on-life with our students. But as a leader, I have to do life-on-life with our community." Participant 4 shares how authentic relationships with the larger community is a priority: "We build relationships with our local pastors and churches . . . We are trying to keep them connected to our philosophy."

Participant 5 describes the level and scope of relationships: ". . . quality, kind of interpersonal relationships between the faculty and the students; everybody in the school." Participant 3 believes that "leaders are listeners," and talks about the importance of interacting and actively listening:

Am I really listening to what my team is saying? Am I really hearing them? Am I mining for conflict? Am I really understanding where they are coming from?

Do we have mechanisms so that we really understand the faculty and their needs, and what their concerns are, and their issues? And our customers, you know, do we really understand, do we really hear our customers or do we just address complaints, or are we hearing, or providing, again, mechanisms for them to communicate with us clearly.

Mechanisms used by all of the leaders includes regular meetings with their leadership team and key personnel. These are times to foster communication and to build relationships. Participant 1 describes how investing in people is important:

I am very intentional about meeting with my people. And honestly, some of them I really don't even need to meet with, but it is important to them, that I give them time and then I usually pray for that individual every week. I am investing in their life.

Authentic relationships can allow a leader to manage people better, to monitor, and to gather information, but these relationships also help to provide a caring culture and an enjoyable culture to both work and learn in. It may be hard to quantify or plan interpersonal interactions, but the consensus among the leaders is that building authentic relationships is an essential part of their leadership and the sustainability of their schools.

**Telling the story.** The theme of storytelling developed as leaders shared the importance of communicating the mission of the school to stakeholders and prospective families. The leaders emphasize the importance of managing a culture so that the story of the school is something that is shared by students, parents, faculty, staff, churches, and the larger community. Participant 3 describes how intentional he is about making sure the right story is told about his organization:

I think that your best marketing comes from your people and so I feel like we've got to market our program and our success all the time. Our kids are not going to go home and tell their parents every night how wonderful their education is. I hope that they do that some, but we have to be telling them what is going on here and how we are delivering on mission. Through that, we hopefully build confidence within our own parent group, but then the hope is that they go out and tell other people that this is a great place to be. I think schools in general have to get very, very focused on telling their story, demonstrating impact, because I think that's the sustainability issue.

Participant 4 talks about how important it is to develop a message and communicate it to a variety of stakeholders:

So when we develop a message and market to the community, we will kind of do it in two groups. We do it to our church community and right now about 58% of our enrollment comes from our church. Then the other target group is the outside community. We do our best to build relationships with our local pastors and churches.

Participant 4 builds daily time into his schedule to develop presentations so that he can effectively communicate the story of the school to constituents: "What I try to do is to think and develop upcoming presentations . . . looking ahead and preparing for key presentations, whether it is with the board or a merit body or faculty." Participant 6 discusses how his school improved over time to become more sustainable: "Just telling our story better. We have a great story; we just weren't telling it very well." Participant 6 also shares how easy it is for the story to become damaged and the impact that can have

on the culture: "In this culture, frankly, you know, avoiding the big scandal! It is kind of a negative thing but I mean, you see it in the culture, any kind of scandal makes big headlines."

**Category 3: striving for excellence.** Despite being identified as K-12 Christian schools that were both successful and sustainable, the leaders seem to have a nervous unrest about becoming stagnant. Participant 5 demonstrates how uncertainty about the future is a catalyst for achieving excellence: "A quality school with excellence is the closest thing to being recession-proof . . . The way to weather that storm is to just have such quality that people who can afford it will be here despite the struggles." The leaders communicate a relentless desire to be the very best by having excellent programs, excellent people, and an innovative mindset.

**Excellent programs.** The leaders talk consistently about being the best –the best leaders, the best educators, and the very best at delivering their mission. Participant 5 sees this pursuit of excellence as a business model, but also a calling:

We think of excellence as the nature, character and works of God and we would like to see that realized in all our lives. It's not something we arrive at in this life but it is a quest. We focused on excellence and commitment to an exemplary school that makes God look good.

The participants believe that, for a K-12 Christian school to be sustainable, the school needs to be strong both academically and spiritually. Participant 2 feels strongly that both academics and the spiritual component need to excel:

One of the things that I am consistently looking for is how can we be leaders in education? I think that for far too long Christian education has suffered under the

guise of, well you can go there to get what you need spiritually, but we recognize that academically they may be sub-par. I don't think that there is any excuse for that. I think biblically that is a wrong model. I think that biblically we have a responsibility to be outstanding both spiritually and academically. In fact, in everything that we do, whether it is our extra-curriculars, sports, or fine arts program we should be the model.

Participant 1 believes that a school is in danger of failing if the school leader does not focus on excelling in both the spiritual and the academics: "You can get a great pastor to be the next leader but if he is not intentional about the academic side of the school the academics are going to collapse. You are always one leader away from collapse."

Participant 6 believes being a predictably high quality program and striving to improve helped them to become a sustainable institution: "So, I think that we have been a pretty predictable institution in terms of quality and continued to try to improve our academic program."

Participant 5 believes that focusing on having the best programs will attract the best students and grow the school in a positive way:

One of our goals was to, and it has actually happened, that people with the greatest resources that really are focused on excellence that we would be in the running for attracting those students . . . People that have no barriers other than enrolling in what they believe to be the very best school for their students, and they are very, very wealthy people, they want to be at our school.

Participant 5 continues to make a connection between excellence and sustainability:

“There are quite a few factors that go into sustainability. One of them is, I think, to be a

school that is in demand, being highly respected in the community. If that is not there you are in trouble.”

**Excellent people.** The leaders that were interviewed all consider themselves relational and collaborative. They also naturally value having excellent employees. Participant 2 emphasizes the need to acquire and develop the very best people: "You have to make sure that you maintain and hire great people." Participant 1 believes that teacher recruitment is important and something to be aggressive in doing right: "I identify the best people and try to get them to be on your team." Participant 4 recognizes that people are the heart of a school and the leader must financially commit to attracting and retaining the very best:

It is getting the right people, having a financial model that will attract the right people, and that will keep the right people. I think that's really key, because your people are your mission. They are your delivery. They are the people that are in front of your customers directly 7 hours a day.

All six schools are proud that they either pay close to what public school teachers are earning or they have a plan to get to that point. Investing financially in teachers that are strong educators and who can advance the mission of the school is vital. Participant 3 references Collins (2001) and level 5 leaders when relaying the importance of getting the right people on the bus and in the right seats: "When we have people that aren't a fit for the culture, we gotta either get them in a different seat or move them out." Participant 6 believes that without an excellent faculty you risk losing credibility as an educational institution: ". . . being able to continually strengthen your faculty so that people believe in your product. Having a credible product over time."

Participant 6 looks to hire teachers that are professionally and spiritually qualified:

They have to give a clear testimony of faith in Christ. They have to have ACSI certification in the state of Florida. They have to have teaching certification. As far as just on paper credentials, I am looking for people that are emotionally whole, professionally qualified, love kids, can communicate well with parents, and all those kinds of attributes.

Participant 5 shares how important it is to hire individuals that are mission appropriate:

"We look to hire Christian role models. Though we cannot see the heart, we do believe that we have to go based on their testimony and Jesus said, that 'you will know them by their fruits.'"

**Innovation:** A similarity between the six leaders interviewed is creativity and an ability to innovate in ways that make their schools more sustainable. Participant 3 claims that one of his strengths is creativity: "So like my top five strengths, belief, responsibility, individualization, strategic, and ideation. So, I am an idea person. I like ideas." He uses his creativity to make sure that he stays ahead of his competition and in step with the desires of his school families:

Rent is due every month, I think in the mind of the consumer. You have to be delivering on mission every month. You have to have a vision that gives them a hope for better mission delivery in the future. I think that if you fail at either one of those then you start to become at risk.

Examples of innovation include programs for homeschoolers, international student programs, expanding college credit class offerings, and the delivery of cutting

edge programs that attract high quality families. Participant 6 describes how innovation is an important part of sustainability:

So, we are trying to do some new innovative things this year. We will try to use that to boost attractiveness of our enrollment in the high school, as well as to try to open some things up to maybe homeschoolers or different people that would be here part-time and not be here as a traditional student, just trying to expand our sustainability.

Participant 5 shares an example of being innovative within his science and technology program:

We have programs such as putting experiments on the international space station, and that program is the only one of its kind among high schools, and even at junior high, so we have schools around the world that we serve. So, I am looking at how can we be innovative and how do we follow Jesus in doing great things that bring credibility to the cause of Christ in the marketplace of ideas. That's kind of what I did.

Innovation requires creativity and it requires a persistence to continually improve and grow. Participant 5 connects innovation with a spiritual imperative: "We don't think that we have arrived but we feel that it is so important to follow Christ and His example, so I began to really feel the need to develop great programs." It also requires an entrepreneurial bent. Participant 1 explains how he values innovation and a colleague who is more gifted in this way of thinking:

We discuss and dialog over what is going on in the school. He is an entrepreneur. He has several businesses. It really works really well to have an entrepreneur and

an educator. An entrepreneur is really good at seeing how things can be, but they are not really good at evaluating how things are, but as an educator, what I bring is I am very good at evaluating how things are and I can learn from his ideas on how things can be.

**Category 4: leading collaboratively.** When asked to describe their leadership styles, five of the six leaders responded by saying that their leadership style was collaborative. Participant 1 says: "My leadership style is, I think, very strong on collaborative." Participant 2 describes his leadership style as "reflective and collaborative." Participant 6 perceives his leadership as collaborative with an emphasis on responsibility: "I would say that it is pretty collaborative but yet, from a Strengths Finder standpoint, I am very strong on responsibility. I take a lot of ownership for the decisions that we make." Participant 5 claims that his leadership style is relational and then describes a very collaborative style of leading his school.

Collaborative leadership is useful in settings where issues or problems are so complex and nuanced that one person does not have the information or power to solve them. According to Chrislip and Carl (1994), collaborative leadership starts from the premise that "if you bring the appropriate people together in constructive ways with good information, they will create authentic visions and strategies for addressing the shared concerns of the organization or community." Leading K-12 Christian schools is both complex and without simple solutions. The leaders interviewed demonstrate ways of leading a collaborative process, inspiring others to become their very best, and sharing decision-making.

**Leading the process.** Part of leading collaboratively is not leading people but

establishing structures and processes whereby employees can have a voice and take part in decision-making. Collaborative leadership involves the leader demonstrating patience and humility, recognizing that the collective knowledge is greater than that of the leader himself. Participant 3 demonstrates both humility and a trust as he describes his role in leading the collaborative process:

I am not the sharpest knife in the drawer but God has blessed me by being around some pretty sharp knives. So I am incredibly grateful to be in a role that I never dreamed I would be in, and that I didn't know that I was gifted for. The fact that He brought people alongside me to help me get started in this has been an incredible privilege and blessing.

Leading a collaborative process also involves creating a culture of trust, where subordinates are encouraged to take risks and to challenge the process without fear of retribution. A good example of trust building is from Participant 3:

So, we just really try to treat people well. This is not a union shop so we are going to break union rules. We don't having building hours. You are a professional get the job done. Here is when the kids are coming and here's when our meetings are. There are sometimes we are going to ask you to stay later, sometimes we are going to let you go earlier. You are a professional you get the job done.

Participant 4 similarly states: "There is accountability but there is also a lot of trust and delegation." Participant 5 shows a spirit of collaboration and an allowance for a collaborative process:

The goal would be more inclusion in terms of just . . . I look at people that I don't

have to tell them what to do and I don't have to check up on. We love to talk about it and we love to set goals, and we love from time to time assess how we are doing, and help each other along the way.

Participant 6 demonstrates leading a collaborative process by explaining how the complexity of the task requires him to hire and trust good people: "I think the complexity of the task has required me to be able to . . . to hire good people and to give them more of the decision-making."

In addition to building a culture of trust, the leaders in the study create structures in which others can be part of the process. They have full leadership teams that meet regularly as groups but also one on one with the leader. This is evident from the administrative structures at each school. In relation to leadership structure philosophy, Participant 4 describes how his leadership style has changed over time:

I hire a variety of leaders, make sure that they are trained very strategically and intentionally on Kingdom education. Then I give them a long rope and let them lead, let their personality and leadership style really be evident, but within the context of who we are.

Participant 5 likens his role in leading the collaborative process to that of a conductor:

I like to hire people that are stronger in their area than I could ever imagine to be myself. I consider myself something like a conductor of a great symphony. I hardly play any of the instruments as well as the players can, but I love to conduct.

Participant 1 describes the need to be patient while leading the collaborative

process:

I have become more patient. I realize that the process sometimes is even of greater value sometimes than the end. What I mean by that is I know in my heart and in my mind what I want us to look like as a Christian school, but I have learned getting the right people around you and having them take your ideas as if it was their ideas, and them having ownership of that to accomplish what the end is. This is a process that you have to be very patient with.

Participant 6 gives a great example of how he led the collaborative process while the school worked together on a strategic plan. This illustrates how the leader is leading the process, not the people:

We had finished a big capital campaign and we were about ready to be on the threshold of another one, and I said I want to make sure that we are chasing the right rabbits. So, I brought up a couple of proposals from consults that I knew personally. We selected one, so he met with the board in the late spring of 2015. Then we put together a group of 30 teachers, administrators, board members, and parents. Then we met at a retreat in August, and then we met monthly with the consultant. The last meeting with him was in January. In between those monthly meetings with him, we had work-teams that worked on different assignments in the process.

**Inspiring others.** A consistent theme across the data is that the leaders believe in the people they hire, they give them much responsibility, and they support them as they inspire them to become their very best. Participant 2 gives an example of how to inspire employees to become leaders in the collaborative process by coming beside them and

fostering communication:

Once you hire those great people, mentor and keep a great relationship with them. You've got to communicate. You can't just turn them loose. There is a certain amount of 'turn them loose and let them do their own thing' that I am a great proponent of, but you also need to know what is going on. So you can't just hire them and walk away and expect that they are going to do a great job and never know what their challenges are.

Participant 1 explains how meetings are not only times for sharing information but for learning together:

I meet every Thursday with my whole leadership team. We go through a book together. We really don't spend a lot of time discussing the school business . . . During the week, there are times that I meet individually with each of them for about an hour.

By inspiring others, Participant 1 was able to accomplish more for his school: Now, I can't touch every kid in our school, I can't even touch every teacher in our school, but I can touch people on my leadership team who then have impact on everyone else. This is the same model that Jesus used with the 12 disciples.

Participant 3 shows how he can accomplish more things and better things by inspiring others: "My role is to really create a very strong leadership team, so coaching them and investing in them, is something that is important." Participant 4 highlights the humility demonstrated by collaborative leaders as they inspire others to action:

My goal has been to decrease intentionally for a lot of reasons. Hopefully, one of the majors as far as sustainability has been that our school would not be addicted

to a person or personality, but that it would be united by varied fundamental practices.

Participant 4 reiterates the importance of promoting others and inspiring them around one vision, considering it the second most important leadership practice impacting sustainability: "The second leadership practice is inspiring the people, the stake-holders, around that vision to connect to that vision."

**Shared decision-making.** As part of leading collaboratively the leader surrenders his responsibility to decide what to do when confronted with a problem. An autocratic leader unilaterally informs the group of his edict. In contrast, the collaborative leader allows the group to consider the problems at hand and allows them to make a decision multilaterally. The group then relies on the leader to help them focus their efforts. Participant 2 describes how he supports his team in shared decision-making:

We have administrative meetings about every other week. Those meetings are very collaborative. It is a safe place to put out ideas, suggestions, and we have some really healthy robust discussions around the issues that face our school. No ideas are dumb ideas. So, people feel safe in bringing out opinions and ideas.

But, when we walk out, we are very unified in what we are doing.

The leaders consistently share that their goal is to create ownership. Participant 5 expresses how much better solutions are when the problem-solving process is shared: "I believe that we should always include people affected by the decisions in the decision making process." Participant 2 illustrates how decision-making is a norm across the entire school and includes the board: "I can count on a half a hand the number of times that we have not come to an agreement or consensus and been able to move forward as a

team."

## **Summary**

The purpose of the qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the leadership practices of K-12 Christian school leaders that lead to K-12 Christian school sustainability. The four categories and 13 themes that emerged from the data and discussed in Chapter 4 were, first, financial stewardship, incorporating the four themes of (a) strategic planning, (b) sound fiscal practices, (c) mission-focused, and (d) forecasting; the second category, managing school culture, incorporated the three themes of (a) spiritual focus, (b) authentic relationships, and (c) telling the story; the third category, striving for excellence, incorporated the three themes of (a) excellent programs, (b) excellent people, and (c) innovation; the fourth and final category, leading collaboratively, incorporated the three themes of (a) leading the process, (b) inspiring others, and (c) shared decision-making. The board, when demonstrating sound board governance, works with the school leader to assure the financial stewardship of the school. The financial health becomes a foundation for the leader to build off of as he leads through managing the culture, striving for excellence, and leading collaboratively.

The school leader is in the center, sitting on the foundation of strong board governance and insulated by the principles of financial stewardship. Board governance and financial stewardship allow for the school leader to have the freedom to lead and have a positive impact on the organization. From a position of effective strategic planning and financial strength, the leader is able to focus his or her energy on the elements of the organization that are required to keep it moving forward successfully while meeting the needs of the various constituents. The board defines expectations for

the school leader and works collaboratively with the school leader as it relates to accomplishing the mission of the school and following through with strategic initiatives. As part of governing, the school board understands that the school leader is their one employee and they keep the school leader accountable to predefined expectations.

Leading a K-12 educational organization is a multifaceted job requiring attention to numerous roles and responsibilities. Managing these responsibilities requires exceptional leadership skills. Mintzberg (2011) believes that leadership goes beyond the common leadership construct of planning, organizing, coordinating, and controlling. The leader has to function throughout the organizational network by relating, linking, supporting, and convincing. The school leader must be a skilled practitioner at prioritizing energy and influence. While all is ultimately under his or her control, the research participants emphasized managing the culture, the decision-making process, and continually supporting and inspiring others toward excellence. Mintzberg (1973) organized the 10 roles of the chief leader, illustrated in Table 2.1, within three categories, (a) interpersonal, (b) informational, and (c) decisional. The results of the current study support the roles that the K-12 Christian school leader plays within the organization. Through managing the school culture the leader helps develop the culture by giving attention to relationships, monitoring information, and championing the organization through making sure the correct story is being told, both internally and externally. Through leading collaboratively the school leader becomes the central nervous system as he or she supports, inspires, and leads the decision-making process. Through financial stewardship and striving for excellence the school leader allocates resources, stays ahead of the trends, and promotes excellence across the organization.

Enrollment was one metric used to choose sustainable K-12 Christian schools for this study. While enrollment is a key indicator of school sustainability it was not often mentioned by the participants. The leaders identified that their focus was to steward the finances, manage the culture, lead collaboratively, and strive for excellence. The leaders in this study focused on these practices and their schools have demonstrated sustainability, positive enrollment trends, consistent leadership, and recognition by ACSI as being successful and sustainable.

The following and final chapter of this study provides a further summary of the findings while also describing the limitations of the study, implications of the findings, and recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the leadership practices of K-12 Christian school leaders that lead to Christian school sustainability. Understanding the leadership practices that lead to sustainability will help K-12 Christian schools address a trend of decreasing enrollments and increasing school closures.

Chapter 5 identifies the leadership practices of K-12 Christian school leaders that were found to promote sustainability. The research findings are discussed and implications for Christian school leaders and K-12 Christian schools are explored. Recommendations are submitted along with limitations of the study.

**Research problem.** In the midst of increasing Christian school leader managerial demands, leader attrition, competition, and accountability, more than 500 ACSI accredited Christian schools in the Northeast alone have closed between 2009 and 2013 (Private School Enrollment Dips, 2013). Declining enrollments and increased K-12 Christian school closures are threatening the future of K-12 Christian schooling options for families in the United States. Since 2005, Christian schools have been closing at a rate of 150 per year (ACSI, 2007). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reveals that the top 11 evangelical Christian school associations in America for which data is collected and published have suffered some level of decline during the past decade (Nichols, 2016). The recent trending decline in private education enrollment, the decrease in evangelical Christian school accreditation affiliation, and the increase in school closures bring into question the sustainability of K-12 Christian education in the United States. As enrollments continue to decline over the past decade, many Christian

schools have been forced to close (Barna, 2003; Lopez, 2009). As enrollment decreases in Christian K-12 Schools, quality school leadership is in greater demand. The leadership of the school administrator has a direct impact on school success, including faculty and student behaviors, faculty and student self-efficacy, and teaching practices of faculty (Marzano, 2007; Sergiovanni, 2006; Snowden & Gorton, 2002). Conversely, there is a strong relationship between Christian school closure and failed leadership (Nichols, 2006). Leadership is a fundamental element of organizational sustainability. Lockerbie (2008) indicates that it is vital for researchers to focus their attention on leadership in Christian schools to ensure the future existence and success of the Christian school movement. Since the leader is essential to school sustainability, it is critical to study the practices of these leaders. The primary goal of this study is to identify the leadership practices of K-12 Christian school leaders that promote sustainability.

**Research questions.** The research questions were developed in response to the research problem. Given the decline in K-12 Christian schools and the impact of leadership on sustainability two questions emerged:

1. What are the leadership practices of K-12 Christian school leaders that promote sustainability?
2. From the perspective of the K-12 Christian school leader, which leadership practices are most important to the sustainability of their school?

Paramount in the development of the questions and the guiding of the research was the work of Mintzberg (1973, 2011) who studied the managerial roles of senior leaders in organizations. Mintzberg found that what leaders spent their time doing was engaging in 10 managerial roles that were organized into three non-linear, connected, and

fluid leadership practice categories, (a) interpersonal, (b) informational, and (c) decisional. Responding to K-12 Christian school sustainability involved answering the questions of what leaders of sustainable K-12 Christian schools do and what they most value as it relates to school success and sustainability. Managerial roles described by Mintzberg were reflected to a relatively high degree by the responses of the participants. As the nerve-center and hub of information for the organization, Christian school leaders focused on relationships, information, and sound decision-making. Additionally, it was found that the leadership practices and skills discussed in the literature review are consistent with the leadership practices of the participants in this study.

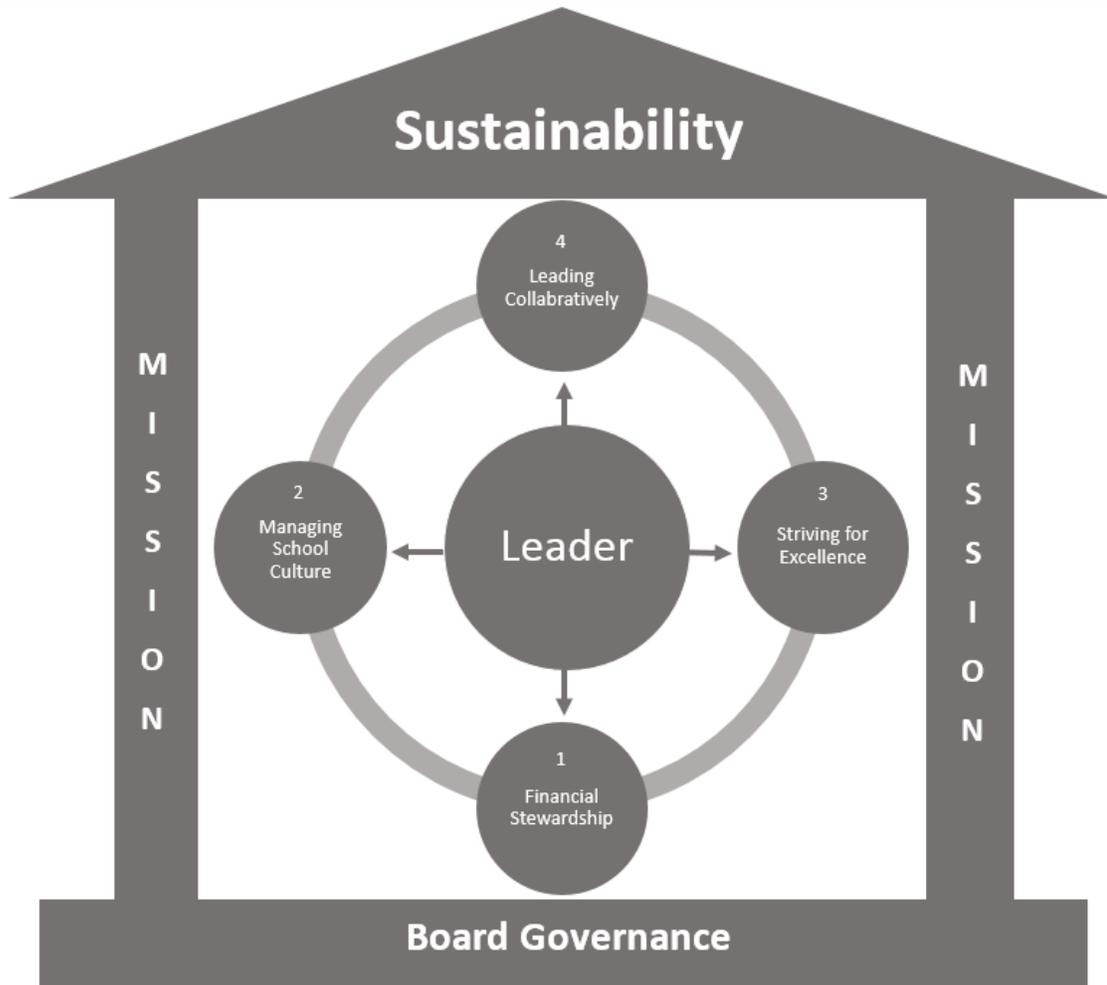
### **Implications of Findings**

Four leadership practice categories and 13 leadership themes that emerge from the data and discussed in Chapter 4 are first, financial stewardship, incorporating the four themes of (a) strategic planning, (b) sound fiscal practices, (c) mission-focused, and (d) forecasting. The second leadership practice category, managing school culture, incorporated the three themes of (a) spiritual focus, (b) authentic relationships, and (c) telling the story. The third leadership practice category, striving for excellence, incorporated the three themes of (a) excellent programs, (b) excellent people, and (c) innovation. The fourth and final leadership practice category, leading collaboratively, incorporated the three themes of (a) leading the process, (b) inspiring others, and (c) shared decision-making. The board, when demonstrating sound board governance, works with the school leader to assure the financial stewardship and overall fiduciary responsibility of the school. The financial health and attention to mission becomes a

foundation for the leader to build off of as the leader leads through managing the culture, striving for excellence, financial stewardship, and leading collaboratively.

Figure 5.1 shows the school leader in the center, with the four leadership practice categories surrounding the leader. These leadership practice categories are interdependent and interrelated, illustrated by the connecting arcs between them. For example, a leader cannot strive for excellence without attending to the financial stewardship practice of sound fiscal practices. Likewise, inspiring others through a collaborative process is essential to managing the culture and providing innovative and excellent programs.

Surrounding the leader is a structure of K-12 Christian school sustainability that has at its foundation a governing board and whose pillars are the mission of the school. A school board that governs effectively and takes its fiduciary responsibility seriously allows the school leader to have the freedom to lead and have a positive impact on the organization. From a position of effective strategic planning and financial strength the leader is able to focus energies on the elements of the organization that are required to keep it moving forward successfully while meeting the needs of the various constituents. The board defines expectations for the school leader and works collaboratively with the school leader as it relates to accomplishing the mission of the school and following through with strategic initiatives. This relationship is illustrated by the structure of K-12 sustainability that surrounds the school leader. As part of governing, the school board understands that the school leader is their one employee and they keep the school leader accountable to predefined expectations.



*Figure 5.1.* Leadership Sustainability Practices.

**Board governance.** Chait, Ryan, and Taylor (2005) discuss the effective governance of non-profit boards. They include three modes that comprise governance, (a) fiduciary mode, (b) strategic mode, and (c) generative mode. The fiduciary mode involves the stewardship of tangible assets. The strategic mode includes the boards' involvement in strategic partnerships with leadership. The generative mode refers to the involvement with the board and the leader in identifying both problems and opportunities. The school leaders that participated in the study highly valued partnering with an active school board. They recognize that a board that knows its role and takes

board governance seriously is essential to the sustainability of an organization. The participants agree that the board should give the school leader the support needed to carry out the mission of the school through partnering in strategic planning and financial stewardship. In addition, the participants considered it vital that the board understand the multifaceted duties of the school leader and that they allowed the leader the freedom to manage the leading of the organization by not getting involved in the day-to-day operation of the school.



*Figure 5.2.* Leadership Practice 1: Financial Stewardship.

**Financial stewardship.** As illustrated in Figure 5.2, the participants emphasize the importance of strategic planning, maintaining sound fiscal practices, staying mission-focused, and looking ahead as a way to forecast and stay ahead of change. The participants identify specific practices including working towards becoming completely hard-income driven, developing and utilizing a cash reserve, staying disciplined to become debt-free, and working with the board to track and respond to specific financial metrics connected to strategic goals. These financial practices are also identified in the literature, confirming that sound financial practices are an important part of sustainability.

**Managing school culture.** Collins (2001) found that effective leaders majored on the thing that made them unique. He called this the Hedgehog Principle, comparing the hedgehog who did one thing very well to the fox who did a decent job at a variety of things. The schools in this study demonstrate consensus in maintaining that a spiritual focus is essential. This one thing cannot be compromised and is the primary reason for the existence of Christian schools. It is evident that K-12 Christian school leaders must never lose sight of developing a culture in which Christ is the center of teaching, relationships, and decision-making.



*Figure 5.3.* Leadership Practice 2: Managing School Culture.

The participants believe it is also important to build and maintain authentic relationships. This includes relationships with the community, with the board, with families, with faculty, and with students. Developing relationships helps the leader build a culture of trust and caring. Additionally, these relationships foster ownership and allow for a flow of communication that informs the leader, the school, and its constituents. Mintzberg (1973) described the importance of information gathering through the interpersonal roles managers play. Building authentic relationships is also a component

of several prominent leadership theories including servant leadership, authentic leadership, and transformational leadership.

Mintzberg (1973) identifies that managers often take on the roles of figurehead and spokesperson for their organizations. They often represent the organization through giving speeches, attending community events, and using their position to perform ceremonial duties. Crow, Mathew, and McCleary (1996) discuss how the school leaders need to maintain school culture through using rituals, ceremonies, stories, and other artifacts to reinforce values, beliefs, and assumptions. Everything the leader does helps to shape the story of the school and the delivery of its mission. The participants in this study are keenly aware of this fact and how important their role is in managing the school's story. The story must be one that is framed positively and told with consistency among students, parents, faculty, and other stakeholders throughout the community.



*Figure 5.4.* Leadership Practice 3: Striving for Excellence.

**Striving for excellence.** While maintaining a spiritual focus is one of the leading leadership practices identified by the participants, closely connected with that is a relentless pursuit of excellence. Participants maintain that excellence and spiritual focus are both necessary for sustainability. Excellent teachers, excellent academic programs,

and excellent facilities must accompany the carrying out of the mission of the school. Families that are choosing K-12 Christian education today are considering the value of the school. They are expecting both the faith element of the education and the quality of the educational experience for their child. Striving for excellence has connections to both the financial stewardship of the school and managing the school culture. Schools must manage the finances and charge tuition in a way that allows the school to maintain the high quality desired. The high quality of the program also helps to create a culture of excellence and shape a story that will attract and retain great students and great faculty.

Innovation also plays an important part in striving for excellence. Porter-O'Grady and Malloch (2015) discuss how innovative organizations are known by their ease of access to information, individuals, and ideas. They also recognize the role of the board in working with the leader to make strategic and directional decisions that create an environment in which innovation and creativity are possible. The participants in this study demonstrate a palpable unrest with the current condition of the school. They want to be forward thinking, growth minded, and ahead of the curve. Despite being recognized as successful leaders in sustainable schools, they are always thinking of creative ways to remain sustainable in current and future environments.

**Leading collaboratively.** The participants in the study all identify their leadership style as collaborative. They value their employees and define their primary role as hiring the best people and making sure that they support them and give them the tools they need to lead effectively. The participants acknowledge that it takes time to develop a collaborative culture and that the leader must trust the decision of the group, even when it is contrary to what the leader might have initially thought was best.

Leading the process involves buy-in from employees as they all put their shoulder to a large, metaphorical flywheel, starting slow at first but eventually building the momentum needed to move the organization forward effectively (Collins, 2001).



*Figure 5.5.* Leadership Practice 4: Leading Collaboratively.

Part of leading collaboratively involves inspiring others. Kouzes and Posner (2012) describe transformational leadership in such a way that the leader inspires a shared vision, encourages the heart, and enables others to act. Each of these leadership traits is part of what the participants describe as collaborative leadership. They purpose to use their position of authority to influence others and inspire them to do great things. The participants all use words that imply humility and a desire to promote others above themselves. This type of invisible leadership involves inspiring others to take action on the school's behalf so that dedication to a compelling purpose propels them and the organization to accomplish great things (Hickman & Sorenson, 2013).

**Significance of findings.** Consistent with the findings of Mintzberg (1973), the Christian school leaders studied do not spend the majority of their time in the traditional roles of planning, organizing, coordinating, and controlling. While the leaders certainly participated in these roles, their leadership showed to be much more complex and nuanced. Leading collaboratively requires prioritizing interpersonal communications and

information gathering as part of a multifaceted decision-making process. Through regularly interacting with stakeholders inside and outside of the organization, Christian school leaders are able to gather information, develop relationships critical to organizational success, and empower subordinates to help navigate through, at times, turbulent and uncertain waters. This means that the leader is not only involved in planning, organizing, and coordinating, but also acts as a resource allocator, information disseminator, disturbance handler, entrepreneur, monitor, figurehead, liaison, spokesperson, and negotiator.

Just as the Christian school leaders balance a number of managerial roles, it is evident that the leaders also balance a mix of paradoxes. These leaders are visionaries but also practical, they are in the foreground by position but in the background by practice, they are teachers and learners, and they are unwavering in purpose while remaining open-minded and reflective. The leaders do not exhibit narrow-mindedness but instead are very aware of their own biases and their own way of understanding and interpreting their organizations. Bolman and Deal (2013) suggest that effective leaders consider four mental models to shape the way they think and act. They suggest that every leader widen their understanding of their organization by viewing their organizations and organizational problems through four frames, structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. The Christian school leaders in this study demonstrate an intrinsic awareness of their need to operate within these frames.

The leaders see their work as extremely meaningful and they have an understanding that the way they frame decisions has a significant impact on people and on outcomes. They demonstrate operating within the structural frame by acting as both

an analyst and an architect. Each leader is intentional and passionate about the organization of their departments and the distribution of power and decision-making. They appear to understand that strategy, implementation, and adaptation are elements within their organizations that are important. The ability to make decisions through the structural frame is possible when the goals are clear and when there is little ambiguity. There seems to be no confusion about the mission of their schools and how the mission clearly impacts all decision-making.

The human resource frame for decision-making is most evident as the Christian school leaders have a primary focus on people. Their collaborative spirit is palpable and evidenced through their desire to support and empower their subordinates, acting as both catalyst and servant. Certainly this frame for leadership and decision-making works best within an environment that is supportive and within a culture that is comfortable with conflict.

Bolman and Deal (2013) suggest that framing an organization using a political mental model is both a positive thing and a necessary thing. Pue (2012) highlights how sensitive the dynamic is between parents and school personnel in private schools. This tension exists because the schools have two things that parents value greatly, their children and their money. The K-12 Christian schools studied are funded almost entirely through tuition and giving. This reality brings stakeholders to the table with a vested interest in the success of the school and the decision-making process. This tension, in the hands of a framing artist, can keep the school from being stagnant. The ability to recognize, frame, and respond to the political aspects of school life can make or break a Christian school. Sinek (2009) speaks of how some organizations can be innovators of

change while other organizations act as a late majority or laggards in innovation. Schools that lack the political tension necessary to challenge the status quo become part of the late majority and laggard groups. The K-12 Christian school leaders studied, however, show the innovation and forward thinking necessary to be competitive in the private school marketplace.

The Christian school leaders are both storytellers and prophets. Through this symbolic frame the leaders demonstrated a relentless passion for managing the culture, promoting the importance of their organizations, and keeping the mission of the school at the center. They were pointedly aware of the need to have their employees believe in their work and to have their school families believe in the eternal value of their product.

The Christian school leaders communicate high levels of personal artistry responding to challenges, ambiguities, and paradoxes existent in K-12 Christian schools. Each leader identifies with a collaborative leadership style. While certainly demonstrating and valuing collaboration, the leaders display characteristics of several other leadership styles including authentic leadership, transformational leadership, and servant leadership.

The research related to servant leadership indicates that it is an effective leadership model for promoting successful organizations as it relates to performance and work culture (Cerit, 2009; Greenleaf, 1970; Herndon, 2007; Laub, 1999; Liden, Wayne, Zhao & Henderson, 2008; Parris & Peachey, 2013; Saleme, 2011; Spears & Lawrence, 2004; Zhang, Yin & Foo, 2012). The Christian school leaders studied demonstrate many of the traits true of a servant leader. Related to listening, the leaders consistently demonstrate a posture of listening first. Related to empathy, healing, and commitment to

the growth of people, the leaders show an awareness of the needs of others and a belief in valuing employees as individuals. Additionally, the leaders demonstrate stewardship in the way they take responsibility for leading others while keeping the greater good of the organization in mind. Having a big picture view allows them to respond to complex organizational issues within the context of the school's mission. They also display foresight as they take responsibility for anticipating what could be reasonably foreseen and acted upon, for the betterment of their schools (Spears & Lawrence, 2002).

The finding that the K-12 Christian school leaders exhibit servant leadership traits is congruent with the Christian faith that the leaders affirm. Humility, empathy, and committing to the growth of others are at the heart of servant leadership (Spears, 1998). As Christians, Jesus Christ is a model for how His followers should behave and how leaders should influence others. In the book of John, Jesus took the role of servant as He humbly washed the feet of His disciples in the upper room, just prior to his crucifixion and ascension. Jesus then told His 12 disciples that He was showing them an example of how they should act.

I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them (John 14:15-17, New International Version).

Authenticity is a defining characteristic of servant leadership and is also at the heart of authentic leadership. Northouse (2013) describes authentic leaders as having four distinct traits, (a) self-awareness, (b) internalized moral perspective, (c) balanced processing, and (d) relational transparency. It is evident that the leaders have a strong

understanding of *self* and their place and purpose within the organization. They are driven by a moral prerogative and they value authentic relationships. To a person, the leaders are dedicated to democratic decision-making within a collaborative environment in which opposing viewpoints are valued.

Congruent with both authentic leadership and servant leadership, transformational leadership emphasizes the moral dimension. Understanding what is right and what is good, the Christian school leaders are aware of their own values and they put the needs of their followers above their own. Unlike transactional leaders, who focus on an exchange between the leader and the follower, the Christian school leaders put the emphasis on the needs of the followers. Transformational leaders do this by developing the followers' personal goals and by promoting a collective interest. Riggio and Orr (2003) assert that transformational leadership *transcends* transactional leadership because the style of leadership bonds the leader and follower together by some higher level with shared goals and a shared mission rather than by some personal transaction. As the Christian school leaders strive for excellence, they speak of their desire to motivate others in the organization to reach their highest potential.

Kouzes and Posner (2012) identified five transformational leadership practices, (a) modeling the way, (b) inspiring a shared vision, (c) challenging the process, (d) enabling others to act, and (e) encouraging the heart. The Christian school leaders model the way spiritually and authentically as they inspire others to act. They consider themselves to be the growers of leaders as they willingly and purposefully are content with being in the background. They take joy in enabling their employees to act with integrity and excellence. Additionally, as innovators and entrepreneurs, the Christian

school leaders voice a motivational discontent with where their organizations are presently, continually challenging the process so that their organizations can stay ahead of the competition.

Related to innovation and sustainability is the reality that K-12 Christian schools must innovate and strive for excellence or risk non-existence. Certainly public schools have their own challenges in providing education for all children. They typically do not, however, have to be as concerned with funding their organizations by attracting and meeting the needs of tuition-paying families. Christian school leaders are forced to strive to be the best and to adequately fund their mission. They are not able to risk losing their families to the competitive public and non-public school market. The need to be concerned with sustainability may, in itself, promote innovation and adherence to best practices.

The findings of this study are consistent with the findings of previous studies related to the leadership of non-profit organizations and specifically K-12 Christian organizations. Additionally, results of this research contribute to the scholarly work related to leaders in K-12 Christian schools. There is limited research relevant to the leadership practices of leaders functioning in schools identified as sustainable. The leadership practices model, Figure 5.1, confirms previous literature on leadership practices and adds depth and specificity to the science. Schools that wish to remain or become sustainable can benefit from understanding the leadership practices that emerged from the current research as they measure their schools and their leaders through the lens of these research results. Additionally, the leadership practices that emerged from the

research will assist K-12 Christian schools in the hiring, supporting, and evaluating of school leaders.

The research also has potential significance from a social justice perspective. Social justice involves the existence of opportunities and privileges within society so that individuals have both the freedom and capacity to make personal choices. K-12 Christian schools are facing declining enrollments and an increase in closures. As this research potentially contributes to increasing the sustainability of Christian schools, there will be increased opportunities for Christian schools to continue to exist for a segment of society that desires education to occur within a faith-based curriculum with a biblical worldview. Strong leadership may result in more sustainable schools. As schools demonstrate sustainability, they will become more accessible to diverse socioeconomic and racial subgroups of the population. There is still an accessibility issue due to tuition costs, but accessibility can be increased through improved leadership practices. Ultimately, K-12 Christian schools benefit the whole community. Continuing the conversation around leadership and adding to the literature regarding the sustainability of Christian schools will increase the capacity of others to accomplish ends that benefit all members of society.

### **Limitations**

There were limitations within the current study that may have had an impact on the trustworthiness of the data. One limitation was the demographic representation of the participants. The majority of the schools were from suburban areas of the United States that were located in or near extremely wealthy populations. Several of the schools were located in what is known as the Bible Belt of the United States. In these areas the quality

of public schools was predominately considered by the Christian school leaders to be poor in quality, resulting in less competition for the Christian school. Additionally, the spiritual climate of the population surrounding these schools was primarily considered healthy by the school leaders, possibly contributing to greater access by the schools to mission-appropriate families willing to pay tuition costs. A third demographic limitation of the study may have included the lack of socioeconomic diversity of the regions in which the schools were located. Differences in competition for students and the spiritual climate of the populations surrounding the schools may have contributed to decreased generalizability.

**The role of the researcher.** An additional limitation of the study was the role of the researcher in the data collection and analysis. In qualitative research it is impossible for the researcher to completely separate himself from the data. In qualitative research, complete objectivity is difficult to achieve and is not always something that is desired (Ahern, 1999).

The researcher in this study is employed as the primary school leader in a K-12 Christian school, which presents the possibility of bias in the collection and analysis of the data. At the same time, the researcher serving in the same leadership position as the participants may have provided a unique awareness of the science of Christian school leadership resulting in a richer and more insightful analysis. Despite a sincere desire to put aside experiences and beliefs about the leadership role that might result in bias, it is possible that personality, leadership style, and life experiences may have had some impact on the collection and analysis of the data. Bracketing was used to lessen this possible shaping of the data collection and analysis. Reflection is required to increase

objectivity while putting aside personal feelings and preconceptions. Frank (1997) claims that reflexivity means that the researchers realize that they are part of the social world they are studying. Honestly examining this interconnectedness with the research is dependent on the reflective skill of the researcher as the researcher navigates the paradoxical nature of being part of the research while at the same time distancing oneself.

Bracketing occurred throughout the development of the research questions and the collection and analysis of the data. The methods for bracketing included keeping a reflexive journal in a note-taking software program called Evernote and by maintaining reflexive memoranda throughout the analysis process using Atlas.ti coding software. Bracketing resulted in several instances requiring a personal reflective dialog to take place, thus limiting the impact of inherent biases.

### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that K-12 Christian schools consider the research in helping to determine best practices for leadership. Considering the model for sustainability leadership practices displayed in Figure 5.1, schools can learn from the wisdom of school leaders who have led organizations that have demonstrated sustainability. Specifically, schools can understand the relationship between the board and the leader. The board has fiduciary responsibility for the school and has the leader as its one employee. With the mission of the school as the supporting pillars, the board should hire and evaluate a leader who is able to demonstrate financial stewardship, manage the school culture, strive for excellence, and lead collaboratively.

Additional recommendations related to the research findings include the possible impact on policy. Christian schools and Christian school accreditation agencies may

consider setting standards related to leadership and sustainability. Boards will be better informed as they strategize for long-term success and as they think through hiring and evaluating practices of school leaders. Understanding what school boards and school leadership should focus on will assist organizations in setting standards related to resource allocation and the prioritization of strategic initiatives.

Replicating the current study with a larger, more diverse population would add to the literature and help to confirm and expand the knowledge of leadership practices that contribute to the sustainability of K-12 Christian schools. Of particular interest is the sustainability of schools in smaller, less wealthy cities. It is possible that leadership practices differ in schools in more adverse settings, including schools that are located in communities with greater competition from public schools or in communities that are less spiritually minded.

One of the goals of this study was to understand the leadership practices leading to K-12 Christian school sustainability. While structured interviews allowed for more deeply understanding the self-perceived values and beliefs of the leaders, the research was not able to fully ascertain what leaders actually do on a day-to-day basis.

Previous studies related to the work of Mintzberg (1973) involved the research practice of structured observations (Bloom, 1983; Hammons & Ivery, 1988; Martin & Willower, 1981). This qualitative research technique includes structured observations in which the participant is observed without direct involvement. Empirical validity is achieved through sustained observation of time spent on actual activities. The use of structured observation with K-12 Christian school leaders would help by providing a comparison between what leaders say that they value and what they are actually doing.

Additionally, while this study looked at leadership within schools that demonstrated sustainability, there might be value in looking at schools that failed to be sustainable. In so doing, the researcher can study the contributing factors for closure. As the current study looked at models of success that can be followed, there likely could be poor models and leadership practices that can be avoided.

## **Conclusion**

K-12 Christian schools in the United States are experiencing declining enrollments and increasing closures. Leaders in Christian schools are leading schools within an age of educational accountability and they have additional challenges related to growing costs, increasing parent expectations, and changes in spiritual climate. Since 2005, Christian schools have been closing at a rate of 150 per year (ACSI, 2007). The top 11 evangelical Christian school associations in the United States have suffered some level of decline during the past decade, aggregately decreasing in school membership from 8,064 schools in the 2006 school year to 6,484 in the 2012 school year (Nichols, 2016).

Leadership was identified as a contributing factor to the sustainability of organizations. Despite the need for exceptional leadership, managerial challenges and job complexity has resulted in high attrition rates for school leaders. One in five leaders of private schools turns over each year (Independent School Management, 2016). K-12 Christian school decline and the existence of a leadership vacuum highlight the importance of identifying leaders demonstrating sustainability practices and understanding what these Christian school leaders do to promote sustainability.

The purpose of this study was to explore the leadership practices of K-12

Christian school leaders that promote sustainability. Additional purposes of this study included developing a model of leadership for leaders of Christian schools and to contribute to a shallow pool of scholarly work related to K-12 Christian school leadership and sustainability. To accomplish these purposes, the researcher set out to answer two questions:

1. What are the leadership practices of K-12 Christian school leaders that promote sustainability?
2. From the perspective of the K-12 Christian school leader, which leadership practices are most important to the sustainability of their school?

Henry Mintzberg's 10 managerial roles, Table 2.1, were used as a theoretical framework to better understand the nuanced and interrelated management skills that CEOs of organizations need in order to be successful (Mintzberg, 1973). Mintzberg is a contingency theorist who used a structured observation technique to study the actions of CEOs of organizations over an extended period of time. What Mintzberg found was that leaders participated in 10 managerial roles that could be organized into three categories, Interpersonal, Informational, and Decisional. These findings were in contrast to the traditional understanding of leaders as planners, organizers, coordinators, and controllers (Turner, 1990). In contrast, Mintzberg's leaders used their formal authority to acquire valuable information for decision-making through relationships and information gathering.

A review of the literature started with a closer look at Mintzberg's managerial roles and how they were applied to other settings, including the educational setting. The studies showed a general consistency in the managerial actions of CEOs of organizations.

Absent from the literature, however, were studies related to Mintzberg's managerial model applied to leaders of Independent schools or K-12 Christian schools.

Expanding on Mintzberg's work, literature related to leadership and sustainability was discussed. This included leadership theories such as transformational leadership, servant leadership, and collaborative leadership. Leaders in organizations, including K-12 education, demonstrated traits associated with each of these leadership theories. In addition to common leadership traits, the literature indicated that there were several common sustainability practices shared by K-12 Christian schools, including maintaining a spiritual focus, maintaining missional admission requirements, the existence of cash reserve, evidence of effective strategic planning, a budgetary dependence on hard-income, and a positive faculty culture and student experience.

A qualitative, phenomenological study involved a purposeful, criterion-based sample of six school leaders from schools that were identified as sustainable. Sustainability was determined using four metrics chosen by the researcher: (a) leader with at least 5 years serving in this position at the school (Waters & Marzano, 2006), (b) school is accredited through a recognized evangelical school accreditation agency, (c) recommendation of school and school leader by the accreditation agency, (d) enrollment trend that is static or increasing over 5 years, and (e) the leader had a willingness to participate in the study.

This qualitative phenomenological study used semi-structured phone interviews to gain an understanding of the leadership practices of K-12 Christian school leaders in the United States. The participants represented schools from the West, Midwest, South, and Northeast. Data analysis took place using three phases. The first phase involved in vivo

coding as a form of exploratory coding. The second phase of data analysis involved pattern coding, allowing the researcher to analyze the qualitative data by categorizing and identifying emerging themes. The third phase of data analysis involved code weaving as a way to synthesize key code words and phrases gleaned from the first two phases of coding so a narrative could develop. Trustworthiness was maintained through employing researcher reflexivity, member checking, and peer debriefing.

The results of the data analysis included a model for leadership practice comprised of four leadership practice categories and 13 leadership themes (Figures 5.1). The first leadership practice category, financial stewardship, is illustrated in Figure 5.2 and incorporates the four leadership themes of (a) strategic planning, (b) sound fiscal practices, (c) mission-focused, and (d) forecasting. It is within this category that the board is often closely involved with the school leader. These organizational practices closely align with the stability markers referenced in the literature review related to Christian school sustainability. An element of this category includes succession planning. While the leader, in collaboration with the board, is regularly planning and considering the future state of the science, they are also always developing new leadership so that there are smooth transitions at the school and administrative levels.

The second leadership practice category, managing school culture, is illustrated in Figure 5.3 and incorporates the three leadership themes of (a) spiritual focus, (b) authentic relationships, and (c) telling the story. These three themes involve both communication of the mission and the interpersonal roles of leadership that Mintzberg (1973) identifies as being essential for information gathering and decision-making. Of primary importance to all participants is the leader's role in maintaining a strong spiritual

focus for the school.

The third leadership practice category, striving for excellence, illustrated in Figure 5.4, incorporates the three leadership themes of (a) excellent programs, (b) excellent people, and (c) innovation. Common across all participants was an insatiable desire to have the best people and to not compromise excellence. The leaders do not rest on past or current accomplishments but rather strive to lead the way in terms of programs, facilities, and people.

The fourth and final leadership practice category, leading collaboratively, is illustrated in Figure 5.5 and incorporates the three leadership themes of (a) leading the process, (b) inspiring others, and (c) shared decision-making. In contrast to an authoritarian style of leadership, the participants value democratic decision-making, trust, and developing talent within the organization. Collaboration starts with the leadership team and permeates all levels of the faculty and staff. Through managing the collaborative process the leader builds ownership, creates a culture of learning, and ensures better decision-making.

Figure 5.1 shows the leader in the center, surrounded by the four connected leadership categories. The figure illustrates the interrelated relationship between the categories and themes. A theme does not occur in isolation but either directly impacts or is dependent on another, working together to accomplish the mission of the school and to create a sustainable organization.

The implications of the findings include the potential for increasing the sustainability of K-12 Christian schools through promoting best practices for leadership. Additionally a model for leadership practices emerged which schools can use to inform

policy and to hire, support, and evaluate school leaders.

Limitations of the study were discussed as well as recommendations for future research. These included replicating the study with a more diverse group of participants to increase generalizability, using structured observation techniques to understand what Christian school leaders do on a daily basis, and researching K-12 Christian school sustainability from the perspective of schools that have closed. Considering the limited amount of research related to K-12 Christian schools, additional studies will help to substantiate the current findings and bring greater understanding of the leadership practices that promote sustainability.

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## Appendix A

### *Interview Protocol*

Interview Protocol: Leadership Practices of leaders of K-12 Christian Schools
<p><i>Basic Information About the Interview</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Time of the Interview:</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Place:</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Interviewer:</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Participant:      Alias/Number:</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Recording/storing information about interview:</li></ul>
<p><i>Introduction</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) Introduce myself</li><li>2) Discuss the purpose of the study</li><li>3) Review informed consent obtained before phone interview</li><li>4) Provide structure for the interview (audio recording, field notes)</li><li>5) Ask if interviewee has questions</li><li>6) Define any terms necessary (leader, sustainability)</li></ol>
<p><i>Interview Content Questions</i></p>
<p><i>Demographic Questions</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) Age</li><li>2) Race</li><li>3) Gender</li><li>4) Years at the school</li></ol>

- 5) Years as school leader
- 6) Describe the pathway to your current position.
  - a. Follow-up: What is your training? What is your highest degree and in what areas are you degreed?
- 7) Describe the campus as far as number of buildings and grades served.
- 8) What is your current year enrollment (end of 2015-16 school year)?
- 9) What is tuition at the highest grade level?
- 10) Number of employees? Teachers? Staff?
- 11) What is your selection criteria for teacher acquisition?
- 12) How would you describe your school setting; rural, suburban, urban, or other?
  - a. Follow-up to Urban (small, medium, or large city)
- 13) Describe your administrative structure. Would you be willing to share your organizational chart with me?
- 14) Can you describe the community from which your school draws its students?
  - a. Follow-up: Political, Spiritual, Socio-economic.
- 15) Describe your primary and secondary competition in your market for students.

Leadership/Management

- 1) What do you consider to be your leadership style?
- 2) How have you changed as a leader?

3) Describe what a day of leading your school looks like including how you prioritize your time and your tasks.

#### Sustainability

4) You have been identified as an exemplary leader and your school has been identified as sustainable. By your own standards do you believe that your school is sustainable (demonstrating an ability to accomplish the mission of the school in the current or future environment over time)? Why or why not?

5) What other contributing factors do you attribute to your school's success and sustainability?

6) What do you believe are the top five leadership practices that contribute to the success and sustainability of your school?

7) What are the biggest issues or concerns that your school is struggling with?

8) What do you see as the biggest challenges for your school 5 years from now and how do you plan on addressing these challenges?

#### Closing Questions

9) Describe your relationship with your school board.

a. Follow-up: Do you feel supported by your board? How important is the support of your school board to your leadership and the sustainability of your school?

10) Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your leadership or contributing factors to your school's success?

*Closing Instructions*

- Thank the individual for participating
- Assure individual confidentiality
- Request that the interviewee read the transcript for accuracy of thought
- Comment on how the interviewees will receive the results of the study

Source: Adapted from Creswell (2016).

## Appendix B

Survey Invitation Letter and Consent – Head of School

Neal A. Capone

Doctoral Candidate

St. John Fisher College

315-416-9650 cell

315-469-7777 work

[ncapone@faithheritageschool.org](mailto:ncapone@faithheritageschool.org)

Dear Christian School Leader:

I am a doctoral candidate in the Ed.D program in Executive Leadership at the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education at St. John Fisher College. I am in the process of writing my dissertation, and I am planning my research study for the summer of 2016.

I am reaching out to you as a fellow K-12 Christian school head of school because my study is in the area of head of school leadership, and the authentic application of specifically identified practices by leaders of K-12 Christian schools.

My dissertation, entitled *Christian School Sustainability: Leadership Practices*, is dependent on the participation of practicing school leaders. My desire is to interview eight to 12 school leaders of K-12 Christian schools and identify the leadership practices that lead to school sustainability and success. I look to you to assist me as I endeavor to make a contribution to scholarship and practice in our very important profession and the field of Christian education.

I am asking you to participate in a one-hour phone interview that will be set up at your convenience to be scheduled within the next two weeks. Participants' personal identity will be kept confidential throughout the study process. Your name and the name of your school will NOT be revealed in any way. All data will be aggregated into themes and trends learned from all of the participants collectively.

If you are willing to participate, please email me at my St. John Fisher address: [nac06282@sjfc.edu](mailto:nac06282@sjfc.edu), my work address: [ncapone@faithheritageschool.org](mailto:ncapone@faithheritageschool.org), or call/text my cell (315) 416-9650. In addition, please sign the attached consent form and return it to me via an e-mail attachment. Once I hear from you I will reach out to schedule an appointment with you for the phone interview.

Sincerely,

Neal A. Capone

**St. John Fisher College**  
**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**  
**Leadership Candidate**

**Title of study:** Christian School Sustainability: Leadership Practices

**Name of researcher:** Neal A. Capone

**Qualification of researcher:** The researcher is a New York State certified School Building Leader and School District Leader and is the head of school of a K-12 Christian school based in Syracuse, NY. The researcher is currently enrolled full time as a doctoral candidate at St. John Fisher College Education Department's Doctorate in Executive Leadership program.

**Contact Information:** Researcher, Neal Capone: 315-416-9650 (cell) or 315-416-9650 (office) or [nac06282@sjfc.edu](mailto:nac06282@sjfc.edu). Doctoral Advisor, Dr. Michael Robinson: 585-738-3567 (cell) or 315-498-7237 (office) or [crobinson@sjfc.edu](mailto:crobinson@sjfc.edu).

**Purpose of study:**

The purpose of the study is to identify the leadership practices of K-12 Christian school leaders in the United States that promote school sustainability.

**Approval of study:** This study has been reviewed and approved by the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board (IRB).

**Instructors of Record:** This study is being conducted with the permission of the course instructors: Michael Robinson, Ed.D and Kim VanDerLinden, Ph.D.

**Place of study:** Participant choice

**Data collection method:** Phone interviews will be conducted with participants and conversations will be recorded and transcribed.

**Risks and benefits**

The expected risks and benefits of participation in this study are explained below:

Risks

- There are minimal to no risks in this study.
- Participant confidentiality will be protected by the coding of names and removal of identifying data, including removal of data identifying the school and district the participant is based in.

Benefits

- The benefits of the study are the opportunity to engage in a professional reflection through the dialogue of the interview questions.
- The results of the study will contribute to scholarship and professional practice in K-12 Christian school leadership.
- Participants will be offered the opportunity to read the candidate's final published dissertation.

**Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy:**

All interview transcripts and audio/video tapes and results will be kept in a locked cabinet and will be destroyed after three years. No names will be identified with comments or from participant work in any publications.

**Your rights:** As a research participant, you have the right to:

1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate
2. Withdraw from participation at any time
3. Refuse to answer a particular question
4. Be informed of the results of the study.

If the participant has any concerns regarding human subject participation in this study they can contact the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board (IRB) directly at [irb@sjfc.edu](mailto:irb@sjfc.edu).

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

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Print name (Participant)	Signature	Date
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Print name (Investigator)	Signature	Date
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