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HOOD COLLEGE



Catholic Elementary School Success: Governance Lessons from a Qualitative Study of Five  
Advisory Boards in the Archdiocese of Baltimore

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of Hood College  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Doctor of Organizational Leadership

by

Christopher J. Currens

Frederick, Maryland  
2021

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## DOCTORAL COMMITTEE

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Catholic Elementary School Success: Governance Lessons from a Qualitative Study of Five  
Advisory Boards in the Archdiocese of Baltimore

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**ABSTRACT**

Catholic schools have had a remarkable impact on education in the U.S., especially serving minority students in vulnerable communities. Unfortunately, there has been a significant decline in Catholic school enrollment beginning in the 1960s. In addition, the number of Catholic schools has steadily declined since the 1970s. This qualitative multi-site case study explores the lived experiences of Catholic elementary school principals and board chairs in the Archdiocese of Baltimore and reveals the impact of their perceptions of roles and responsibilities on school governance and success. Analysis of individual interviews, a survey, and observations revealed: (1) school boards provide useful advice and support to principals; (2) while formal roles are clear, boards can struggle with identifying a compelling purpose; (3) differences exist between common perceptions of a board's governance role and the reality of decision-making; and (4) the most valued board interactions are described in terms of a coaching skills/approach to leadership. Implications of these findings are critical to ensuring that the Catholic elementary school boards of the future have the leadership models, tools, and training needed to make sound decisions crucial to the success and viability of the schools.

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

In 2016, I was awarded the Distinguished Graduate Award by the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) for my service as board chair to St. John Regional Catholic School (SJ RCS) in Frederick, MD. Receiving this award was a great honor and touched me deeply. I was asked to address the graduating class of 2016 at SJ RCS and discuss my experience with Catholic education. As I prepared my remarks, I was struck by how central Catholic education has been to every aspect of my life. I graduated from SJ RCS, St. John's Literary Institution at Prospect Hall High School (now St. John's Catholic Prep), and Mt. St. Mary's College (now University). In fact, most of my extended family, going back four generations, has attended one of more of these Maryland schools.

Reflecting on why Catholic education means so much to me, I recounted to that graduating class my favorite memory of St. John. Many years ago, my mother, also a graduate of St. John, and I were walking near the old St. John Elementary School in downtown Frederick, MD. It was the first day of school. Mom noticed a little girl and her father. The little girl was obviously a first grader and was crying because she was afraid of starting school. Before I realized it, Mom went up to them and started talking to the little girl. She told her that we had both attended St. John. She joked with the girl and asked if she was the baby of her family, telling her that I was the baby of our family. Then she told her how much fun school would be and how she would be helping her father by being a big girl. Mom completely distracted her so that she stopped crying and even started smiling. The father took his daughter's hand and walked her into the school. Before he disappeared inside, he turned around and mouthed the words "thank you" to my Mom.

It did not seem like much at the time but it made a big difference to that little girl and her father. Empathy, compassion, good humor, taking responsibility for others—my Mom learned these values at St. John and taught them to my brothers and me. I often wonder what that father said to his wife about that first day of school.

### **Background**

In the summer of 2019, the Archdiocese of Baltimore (AoB) sent a memorandum to school pastors, principals, and school board chairs (Appendix A). In this memorandum, the Archbishop noted that the “elementary schools’ by-laws and other governing documents, in many cases, are not current, are inconsistent school to school, and may not properly align with the schools’ current operating environment” (W. Lori, personal communication, July 3, 2019). To address these discrepancies, the Archbishop also disseminated a new Catholic schools governance guidance document for parish schools.

Catholic elementary schools need good governance to face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Shifting demographics and inadequate resources pose unprecedented challenges to current school boards as they attempt to promote Catholic identity, student achievement, and financial viability in their schools. Among the many consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic is the closing of Catholic schools. The NCEA (2021) estimated that by the start of the 2020 school year, 209 Catholic schools would close, many because of COVID-19, but others due to declining enrollment and financial instability. Their fortunes and those of their students rely heavily upon charitable donations, which have fallen off in the months since stay-at-home orders went into effect. Without those funds, the schools cannot offer scholarships to families that otherwise could not afford tuition. In 2019, 21.2% of students in the nation’s nearly 6,000 Catholic schools are minorities, including Hispanic/Latinos, African Americans, and Asians (McDonald & Schultz,

2019). The school closures disproportionately impacted these underserved families, as well as non-Catholic families (NCEA, 2021).

The principal leads the school as the educational administrator and the supervisor of the faculty, staff, and students (Haney et al., 2009). The board is led by a chair and ensures the implementation of overall policies with respect to mission, facilities/maintenance, finances/budget. Boards support the strategic planning, institutional health, and overall operation of the school (Haney et al., 2009). While these two functions are designed to complement each other, in reality, the governance structures in Catholic elementary schools in the U.S. can lead to conflict between these leaders. As principals sit on the school boards, in one capacity or another, it is even likelier that roles and accountabilities can become murky at times.

This multiple site case study will describe the similarities and differences in perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of Catholic elementary school principals and board chairs in the AoB. The tension between servant leadership and transformational leadership will provide a theoretical foundation to answer the central research question: How do principals' and board chairs' perceptions of their roles, responsibilities, authorities, and accountabilities affect the schools' success with regards to academic excellence and operational vitality?

Historically, Catholic school leaders in the U.S. have had to overcome many obstacles to successfully educate students in the Catholic faith tradition. Catholic educators and parishes face declining numbers of religious sisters and brothers as they struggle to maintain a work force of teachers. In fact, nearly half of Catholic elementary schools have closed in the United States since their peak in the 1960s (Goldschmidt & Walsh, 2011). In addition to a dearth of Catholic faculty, other factors have contributed to this alarming closure rate, including the increased cost of running a school and changing demographics.



The challenges and complexities of the modern world pose an existential threat to Catholic schools today. As a result, the role of the school board is more important than ever. At its very core, the successful governance of a Catholic elementary school relies heavily on the effectiveness of the principal and the board chair relationship. As the term relationship implies, there is a dynamic between two different people with differing roles in a school. The principal is the key leader of a school and a protector of its Catholic heritage (Belmont & Cranston, 2009). He or she is responsible for the day-to-day management and control of the school. The board chair oversees policy development and implementation and the overall strategic direction of the school (Haney et al., 2009). Regardless of the lines of authority and accountability designated within the school, the functional roles and the interrelationship between these roles must be delineated and understood by all parties, a key element of good governance.

The religious character and mission of Catholic schools are their distinguishing characteristics. However, as Belmont and Cranston (2009) note, in an era of change, the Catholic identity of the schools is no longer an undisputed aspect of school culture. More and more, Catholic schools are challenged to maintain their Catholic identity while adapting to a pluralistic society, with its diversity of cultures and beliefs.

In the last few decades, the NCEA has played an important role in documenting the crisis in Catholic education. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has challenged the entire Catholic community to respond to the crisis. Catholic colleges and universities, donors, independent think tanks, and consulting firms have all actively convened conferences, conducted research, and developed innovative programs. Improving the governance models and the financial vitality of schools has been the common agenda of these efforts to stabilize and strengthen Catholic elementary education (Goldschmidt & Walsh, 2011).

## **What Is a Catholic School?**

Catholic schooling in the United States is a “phenomenon, a source of national pride, and, many would say, a miracle of U.S. society” (Buetow, 1985, p. 1). Buetow (1985) offers that “Catholic schools constitute not a system but a pattern, one in which all parts have elements in common, but in which each part, and often each school, differs from all others” (p. 1). Their contributions to the country include the first schools of any kind in many remote areas, the first textbook, and the first chartered university (Buetow, 1985).

Catechesis refers to the essential ministry of the Church through which the teachings of Christ have been passed on to believers (Catholic Church, 2005). Although not synonymous with the U.S. notion of education, education is a critical component of catechesis. Education in the faith of all the Church’s members “is intimately bound up with the whole of the Church’s life. Not only her geographical extension and numerical increase, but even more her inner growth and correspondence with God’s plan depend essentially on catechesis” (Catholic Church, 2019, para. 7).

In addition to issues of property ownership, liabilities, and administrative authority, Catholic schools must be filled with a Catholic spirit to deliver a truly Catholic education (Brown, 2010). While there may be a variety of answers to what really is meant by a Catholic school, the answer is much clearer per canon law. Canon 803 (Catholic Church & Canon Law Society of America, 2020) identifies three types of schools that can be considered Catholic: (1) schools directed by a competent ecclesiastical authority (e.g., diocesan bishop); (2) schools directed by a public ecclesiastical juridic person (e.g., religious orders); and (3) schools recognized as Catholic in writing by competent ecclesiastical authority.

## **Legal Structure of Catholic Schools**

“The legal structure of a Catholic school exists in two worlds, that of the Catholic Church and that of civil society” (Cerullo, 2011, p. 1). The Catholic Church’s legal structure, called canon law, is an ancient system of law. The most recent update occurred when Pope John Paul II promulgated the 1983 Code of Canon Law so that the Church’s legal system could correspond with the renewal of the Second Vatican Council (Cerullo, 2011).

The civil legal structure of the Catholic school is designed to protect the Church’s mission and property according to the laws of the civil society. Cerullo (2011) notes that no particular kind of civil organizational structure is required. However, per Canon 22 (Catholic Church & Canon Law Society of America, 2020), the chosen structure must protect the ownership, control, and administration of Church property, while facilitating fulfillment of the Church’s mission. Whatever legal structure is used by Catholic schools should provide for the purpose, organization, structures of authority, governing principles, forms of decision-making, and modes of operation of the school (Cerullo, 2011). Harmony between civil law and canon law, especially regarding schools, is critically important.

### ***Organization***

The organizational framework of the Catholic Church includes what the Church calls juridic persons, which are similar to a corporation in civil law (Cerullo, 2011). Canon 114 (Catholic Church & Canon Law Society of America, 2020) notes that juridic persons transcend the purpose of individuals, particularly in keeping with the mission of the Church. Per Canon 116 §1 (Catholic Church & Canon Law Society of America, 2020), juridic persons are either public (public institution established by ecclesiastical authority to fulfill a designated function) or private (recognized as Catholic and must comply with Church norms). Thus, Catholic schools

are Church organizations that are part of a larger juridic person such as an arch/diocese, a parish, or a religious institute (Cerullo, 2011). However, they can also be independent of any juridic person if they have the appropriate ecclesiastical permission.

Canon law has always allowed for considerable variety and flexibility in the structures that are available for establishing and administering Catholic schools. A variety of organizational and administrative structures are possible, making it possible to adapt solutions to the circumstances of particular localities. It will always be important to keep two central issues in mind when making decisions about a school's legal structure (civil or canonical) and provisions for its day-to-day administration: decision-making authority and property ownership (Brown, 2010).

### ***Types of School Structures***

Catholic schools can be one of the following types: parish, regional, interparish, diocesan, sponsored by a religious institute, or private and governed by a lay board (Cerullo, 2011). While each type of school has differing civil law structures, its approach to governance fits into one of three categories: (1) part of a larger juridic person, (2) a juridic person (e.g., a public association of the faithful), or (3) a school permitted by the bishop to be Catholic. To capitalize on economies of scale, there is a growing movement toward creating schools or networks of schools as juridic persons or associations of the faithful. This trend allows the school to maintain its own identity in the Church, separate from the structures of the parish, diocese, or religious institution (Cerullo, 2011). This separateness provides the school with much needed clarity on its religious identity and mission, as well as on its rights and obligations within the Church.

## ***Church Authority***

As Cerullo (2011) notes, the Code of Canon Law addresses every organization in the Church, including Catholic education. The canons that relate to Catholic schools provide guidance and requirements on school governance. Canon 803 (Catholic Church & Canon Law Society of America, 2020) speaks to what makes a school Catholic. Paragraph 1 addresses the school's relationship to Church authority. The arch/diocesan bishop or his delegate supervises arch/diocesan schools. Per Canon 805 (Catholic Church & Canon Law Society of America, 2020), a parish school is under the supervision of the pastor, whose authority flows from the arch/diocesan bishop. Schools established and operated by religious institutes are supervised by the leadership of those institutes.

The authority of the arch/diocesan bishop, per Canon 805 (Catholic Church & Canon Law Society of America, 2020), includes appointing and removing teachers of religion. Canon 134 (Catholic Church & Canon Law Society of America, 2020) states that the arch/diocesan bishop's authority can be exercised by others at his direction, such as a superintendent or administrator. Canon 806 §1 (Catholic Church & Canon Law Society of America, 2020) declares the arch/diocesan bishop's right of vigilance over Catholic schools in his territory and authorizes him to regulate the educational policies of Catholic schools.

Canon 806 §2 (Catholic Church & Canon Law Society of America, 2020) is directed to school administrators and focuses on the quality of the educational program in the school. It urges those responsible for the instructional programming to see to it that the quality of the curriculum is comparable with other schools in the area.

## **Catholic School Governance**

Catholic schools have adhered to a fairly standard style of governance. Elementary schools were attached to local parishes and governed entirely by a pastor, who occasionally received advice from a board or council. However, as Catholic schools across the country have struggled to survive, new and innovative forms of governance have emerged to “breathe life into parish and diocesan schools” (Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities [FADICA], 2015, p. 1). These governance models are evolving rapidly, allocating governing authority in a variety of ways, depending on the needs and circumstances of the local community.

Catholic school governance roles include five general categories (FADICA, 2015). These are planning, policy, finance, public relations, and evaluation (assessing other areas of governance, such as determining whether strategic goals are being met). Actual governing authority can rest with three entities: a local pastor, a bishop or his designee, or a board. Depending on the extent to which a canonical authority delegates authority to a board, four general categories are possible: (1) advisory, (2) consultative, (3) limited jurisdiction, and (4) full authority. Canon law allows ecclesial officials the discretion to delegate responsibilities. Because of this flexibility, numerous configurations of authority are possible. In many cases, authority is shared among these entities. When the proper balance is not found, the result can be confusion, power struggles, and inaction based on decision paralysis.

*Breathing New Life into Catholic Schools: An Exploration of Governance Models* (FADICA, 2015) outlines a range of Catholic school governance models, using a four-quadrant matrix to illustrate the many possible configurations of governance and the multiple actors involved (Appendix B). It depicts the models examined along two axes: executive (vests

authority in an individual such as a pastor) versus collegial (entails a group such as a board) governance on the x-axis and local (takes place on a school-to-school basis) versus central (vests authority that oversees multiple schools) governance on the y-axis. Given the diversity of the schools and their communities, the variety of allocations of power, and the numerous potential governance models that exist, there are likely few “one size fits all” solutions to the leadership challenges that face Catholic schools.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Catholic schooling has a rich history in the United States. It has made tremendous contributions to the country as well as to the Church. Per DeFiore et al. (2009), Catholic schools have received much scrutiny and several themes consistently emerge. The schools are effective, however, there are real threats to their viability. In response to these threats, many stakeholders and observers seek approaches to ensure their sustainability.

DeFiore et al. (2009) note that the decline in Catholic school enrollment, which began in the 1960s, was halted and reversed briefly in the 1990s, only to begin again in 2000. From 2000 to 2009, Catholic school enrollments decreased by over 17 percent from 2.65 million students to 2.19 million students (McDonald & Schultz, 2009). In addition, the total number of Catholic schools has declined steadily since the 1970s (DeFiore et al., 2009). In 2004, the NCEA commissioned a major study by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) to gather data about the underlying causes of enrollment losses and school closings (Gray & Gautier, 2006).

The CARA report attributes a large part of the decline in enrollment and the number of Catholic schools to changing demographics. These demographic factors include the aging of the U.S. population in the northeast and central states, the migration of families to warmer climates,

and the influx of immigrants representing varied Catholic traditions (Gray & Gautier, 2006). The economic recessions of 2001 to 2003 and of 2008 and 2009 had a powerful effect on the ability of families to afford rising tuitions and the ability of dioceses and parishes to provide financial and other support. Additionally, increased competition from charter schools—some of which, with their strict codes of conduct and uniforms, appear very similar to parochial schools—have hit Catholic schools especially hard. The allegations of child abuse by Catholic clergy received focused media coverage beginning in 2002 and have had a profound impact on enrollments, as well as on diocesan budgets. Representing a twofold blow, funds have been diverted to pay huge legal settlements and donations have been reduced.

The demise of religious congregations is another challenge facing Catholic schools. According to the Vatican Central Office for Church Statistics, the number of religious sisters worldwide dropped from 160,931 in 1970 to 42,441 in 2019 (74%), while the number of religious brothers fell from 11,623 in 1970 to 3,931 on 2019 (66%) (CARA, 2021). The declining number of sisters and brothers has had a profound impact on Catholic education (DeFiore, 2011). The decline in the number of religious teachers between 1965 and 1975 required hiring lay faculty for the schools. The increased costs to hire and retain lay teachers negatively impacted the financial stability of Catholic schools.

Good governance models in which laity and religious leaders collaborate to make sound decisions may well be the key to the survival of Catholic education. Effective decision-making requires a shared vision, common goals, and effective team building (Leithwood, 2005). However, there are cultural and institutional challenges that complicate effective decision-making. For example, the idea of rapid response to challenges does not fit with the organizational culture of the Church—perhaps the world’s oldest and most entrenched bureaucracy. The



Church's main function is to protect and promote the Catholic faith, and it is not designed for organizational efficiency and effectiveness. Evidence-based, data-driven modern management techniques are uncommon in the Church's culture. The result of all of these factors is a level of organizational preparedness and capacity that is inadequate to the challenges faced by the Church.

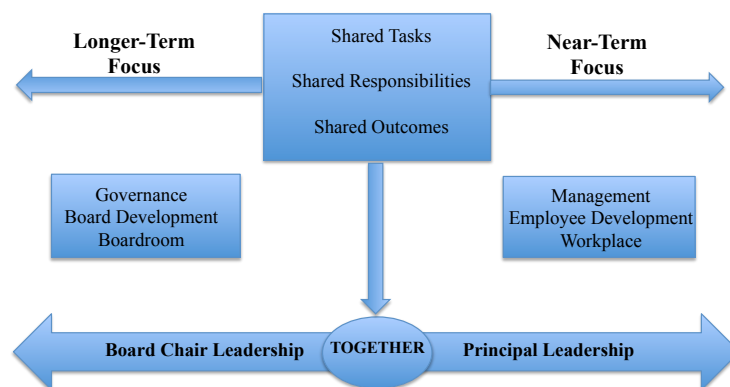
Faith, not efficiency, is the heart of the Church's mission (personal communication, Cardinal L.A. Tagle, May 28, 2018). However, by gaining a better understanding of the roles of school leaders (i.e., principals and boards) and their relationship dynamics, it will be possible to select and train quality leaders and better govern Catholic elementary schools. Strong leaders must be identified, cultivated, and developed and are essential to ensuring a vibrant future for Catholic schools.

### **Conceptual Framework**

During my time as a Catholic elementary school board chair, I interacted with many principals and board chairs from the AoB and other (arch)dioceses. I reflected on my experiences while planning this research project. I began by conceptualizing the leadership dynamic between the principals and board chairs. Generally, I observed that principals, of necessity, were preoccupied with shorter-term concerns while the chairs and boards were more often focused on longer-term goals (Figure 1). Principals had to contend with the day-to-day operational concerns of their schools. They were managers who focused on workplace issues and the development of individuals (i.e., students, staff, and faculty). The board chairs, the principals' partners in school governance, were expected to focus on the big picture and longer time horizons. The chairs and the boards were responsible for planning for the future success of their schools.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework*



*Note.* This figure illustrates the divide in perspectives between the principals and board chairs and is based on a BoardSource infographic describing the board chair and chief executive partnership (BoardSource, n.d.).

I began this research project with the premise that these disparate perspectives would hold for all elementary schools. As these school leaders worked together, I expected that their unique perspectives would inform their approach to shared governance tasks and responsibilities and impact their leadership styles. In looking for theoretical leadership models to explain these perspectives and their impacts on governance, I was drawn to the notion of the principals exhibiting the traits of the **servant leader**, focusing primarily on the well-being and success of the individual. In contrast, I felt that the board chairs exemplified **transformational leadership**, which set organizational outcomes above all other priorities.

The difference between my theoretical and conceptual frameworks might be framed in terms of scale. My conceptual framework, related to perspectives, is a set of specific ideas that can be seen within the larger theoretical framework of transformation and servant leadership. As such, the theoretical framework contains many ideas that are not explored within this paper.

However, by definition, all aspects of the conceptual framework are used in the process of the research.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Stogdill (1981) noted “there are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept” (p. 7). Stogdill (1981) attributes this variation to the wide range of existing leadership theories and perspectives. Scholars and practitioners have attempted to define leadership for more than a century without achieving consensus. According to Northouse (2021), making sense of the modern world and understanding generational differences are among the challenges to developing a commonly accepted definition of leadership. Also, leadership is so often situational, suggesting that there is no single "best" style of leadership. Effective leadership may well be task-relevant, requiring effective leaders to adapt their leadership style to the abilities and needs of the individual or group being led.

In his seminal work, Rost (1991) sifted through more than 200 different definitions of leadership and outlined the evolution of the term’s definition over the last 100 years. During the first few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the focus of leadership was on control and centralization. Traits, such as intelligence, sense of responsibility, and creativity, became the emphasis in the 1930s, viewing leadership as influence, not dominance. Associated theories focused on the distinguishing characteristics of great leaders, and extension of the Great Man Theory (Carlyle & Adams, 1907). Hemphill (1949) wrote about the group approach in the 1940s, where an individual’s leadership efforts were aimed at directing group activities.

Scholarship in the 1950s saw the continuance of group theory and the development of shared goals, focusing on the behaviors of the leaders as opposed to their personal

characteristics. Seeman (1960) highlighted that leaders' behaviors influence people to pursue shared goals. Since leadership is situational, leaders must adapt their behaviors as needed.

In the 1970s, Rost (1991) notes the transition that occurred from the group focus to the organizational behavior approach. Burns's (1978) definition began a movement defining leadership as a transformation process where "one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (p. 83). The 1980s and 1990s saw much scholarly work in the field of leadership, covering numerous themes, including influence, traits, and transformation (Northouse, 2021).

In recent years, research emphasizes emerging approaches to leadership where an individual influences a group to accomplish a common goal. These approaches include authentic leadership, adaptive leadership, and servant leadership (Northouse, 2021). Approaches that include the human factor and emotional intelligence, such as coaching leadership, are receiving greater attention. Leadership in the future will, doubtless, demand new skills, behaviors, and styles to fit the unique demands placed on leaders. Leaders will be needed for networks of organizations with highly diverse cultures and shifting boundaries. These organizations will face challenges that are volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous.

However it is defined, it is clear that leadership moves the world. Modern society requires people who can think critically, reason ethically, and participate effectively. Successful organizations must be populated by people who understand group processes, while maintaining the proper respect for all individual participants. And since change is inevitable, leadership must ensure that change is intentional and well managed. It can be concluded, then, that leadership is a complex and evolving idea whose definition will be debated for years to come but whose value is fundamental to any successful organization.

## **Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership is a reward-based process of mutual exchange between leaders and followers (Smith et al., 2004). It is a model that encourages leaders and followers to challenge the process, inspire a shared vision, and enable others to act (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Transformational leaders stimulate creativity and innovation among others. Followers are moved to exceed expectations as they are empowered to identify problems and generate ideas.

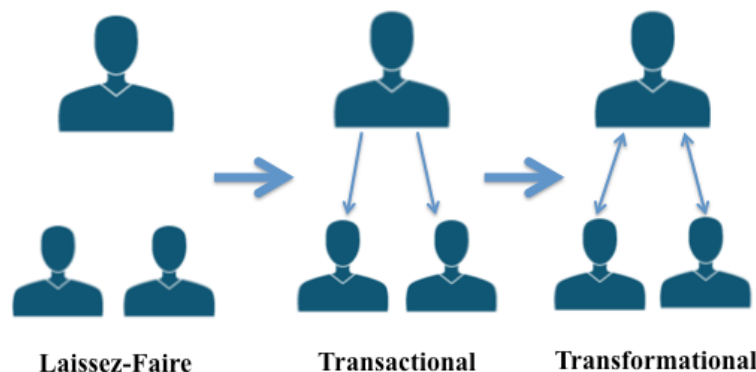
Downton's (1973) theory of transformational leadership included aspects of charismatic, inspirational, and transactional leadership. Charismatic leaders transform people, using their persuasiveness and charm to influence others (Downton, 1973). They are very skilled communicators who can reach followers on a deep, emotional level. This powerful emotional interaction allows the charismatic leader to gain the commitment of others (House, 1977).

For Yammarino (1993), transformational leadership is a continuum from no involvement to transformational (Figure 2). At one end of the spectrum is laissez-faire leadership, where leaders are hands-off and allow group members to make the decisions. The next stage, transactional leadership, is a "process of exchange that is analogous to contractual relations in economic life [and] contingent on the good faith of the participants" (Downton, 1973, p. 75). Transactional leaders use rewards and punishments to motivate followers (Downton, 1973). Bass (1985) further refined this notion, theorizing about the concepts of management by exception and contingent reward. Management by exception is characterized by corrective criticism, either active (constant, usually face-to-face, over the shoulder leadership) or passive (rarely engaging, usually passively correcting). Contingent reward is characterized by an exchange of a reward, such as prizes or raises, for results or specific behavior (Kuhnert, 1994).

The final stage in this continuum is transformational leadership, which has four components, also known as the “Four I’s” (Bass, 1985). The first is the emotional component of *idealized influence* where leaders are seen as role models through their behaviors and personal attributes. *Inspirational motivation* is the second component, where leaders articulate an appealing vision that inspires and motivates others to exceed expectations. The third component is *intellectual stimulation* and is characterized by leaders who encourage followers to challenge assumptions and experiment with new approaches. And finally, leaders who attend to their followers’ needs and act as trusted coaches, mentors, and advisers, exemplify the fourth component or *individualized consideration*.

**Figure 2**

*Continuum from No Involvement to Transformational Leadership*



*Note.* This figure illustrates the range of involvement from a hands-off style of leadership to a transformational leadership style (Wisconsin School of Business, 2018).

While Downton (1973) coined the term transformational leadership, it was a political scientist, James MacGregor Burns, who raised its profile. Burns (1978) attempted to link the roles of leadership and followership. He had developed the idea from his biographical studies of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson. Burns (1978) defined leadership as “inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the

motivations—the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations—of both leaders and followers” (p. 19). This leader-follower dynamic can be characterized as either transactional (focus on exchanges) or transformational (focus on engagement with followers).

Bernard Bass (1985) built on Burns’s (1978) theory. Two years after Burns published his book *Leadership*, Bass (1985) sought to develop a distinction between transactional leaders and transformational leaders. Bass's work was later refined by Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal. According to Bolman and Deal (2021), transactional leaders approach their followers offering to exchange one thing for another, rewarding success and punishing failure. By contrast, transformational leaders are visionaries who recognize their followers’ need for higher purpose and help them in this pursuit (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Podsakoff and his colleagues proposed a model of transformational-transactional leadership that combines aspects of both transformational and transactional leadership (Podsakoff et al., 1996; Podsakoff et al., 1990) and is another useful lens for evaluating these leadership approaches.

Bass and Avolio (1994) hold that transformational leadership has an additive effect on transactional leadership. Bass (1999) describes this effect as the degree to which “transformational leadership styles build on the transactional base in contributing to the extra effort and performance of followers” (p. 5). Further, Bass (1999) contends that “the best leaders are both transformational and transactional” (p. 21). Howell and Avolio (1993) offer that effective leaders often supplement transactional leadership with transformational leadership. And so, transformational leadership describes a wide range of leadership behaviors that are focused on emotions, values, ethics, intrinsic motivations, and long-term vision.

Reflecting the skills approach to leadership, the practices associated with transformational leadership can be learned. “Leadership is not about personality. It’s about

behavior.” (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 13). These leaders foster attitudes and behaviors that promote loyalty to the organization (Jaskyte, 2004). Transformational leaders are open-minded and dynamic, focusing on the future and possibility. As role models, they set a high standard for employee expectations and encourage innovative approaches to problem-solving (Jaskyte, 2004).

Interestingly, the word *charism* comes from the Greek work for “gift” or “favor” (Catholic Church, 2019). In the Catholic faith, gifts become charisms when they are used for the good of others. Examples of charisms mentioned in the Scripture include leadership, knowledge, service, and teaching. There is an aspect of the charisma factor that helps to define the transformational leader. It is generally held that Weber (1947) coined the term *charisma*, defining it as a special personality characteristic marking a person as a leader. House (1977) proposed a theory of charismatic leadership, which is often described similarly to transformational leadership. These leaders are self-confident figures with high moral standards (Avolio, 1999). They inspire trust and confidence in their followers by communicating high expectations and emphasizing the intrinsic rewards of the work and its ties to the organization’s needs (Shamir et al., 1993). It should be noted that charisma is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for transformational leadership (Yammarino, 1993). Charisma enhances the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational performance.

Another critical feature of transformational leadership is its proactive nature. Looking to the greater good, transformational leaders focus on taking action (Bass, 1985). The leadership they provide is adaptive in nature and part of a process requiring continuous self-assessment (Dye & Garman, 2015). Transformational leaders closely resemble the image of Bass’s (1985) idealized leader, with an emphasis on ethics and integrity. As principled leaders, they model ethical behavior and encourage others to follow suit (Engelbrecht et al., 2005).



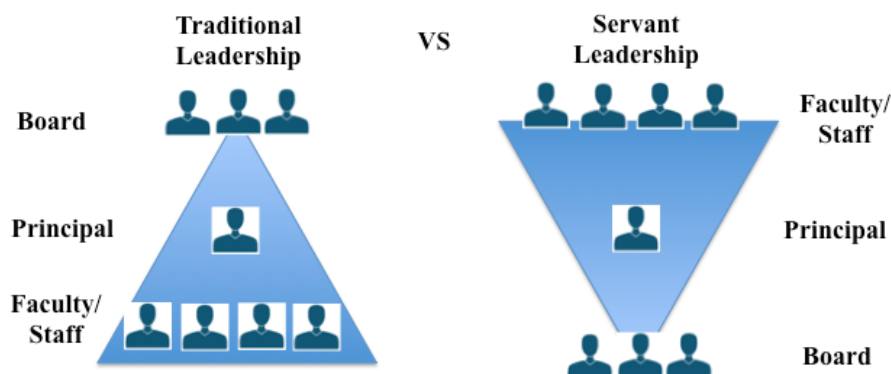
## Servant Leadership

Servant leadership is seemingly a contradiction in terms—leader and servant. This theory contends that the sole reason for the leader’s existence is to serve the followers. But how can leadership be both service and influence? Perhaps servant leadership is best conceptualized as the combination of being a leader and being a servant.

Servant leadership turns the power pyramid upside down (Figure 3). Instead of the people working to serve the leader, the leader exists to serve the people. Servant leadership focuses on the leader and their behaviors. The servant leader is servant first (Greenleaf, 2002). Servant leaders are attentive to the concerns of the followers, empathizing with them and nurturing them. These leaders devote themselves to developing their followers and building the organization.

**Figure 3**

*Traditional versus Servant Leadership*



*Note.* Using the context of school governance, this figure illustrates that servant leadership inverts the traditional top-down leadership model and is based on an article about servant leadership written by Mike Gibbons (Gibbons, 2020).

In 1970, Robert K. Greenleaf published *The Servant as Leader* (Greenleaf, 2015). In this and subsequent writings, Greenleaf developed this leadership philosophy predicated on the belief that serving and developing workers is the best way to achieve organizational goals. Over the four decades of his work for AT&T, Greenleaf noticed that the most successful managers actively

supported the long-term development of their team members' judgment and decision-making. They listened and asked probing questions to see all sides of an issue. The good of their followers is placed above the leader's self-interest (Hale & Fields, 2007). Their power does not come from coercion or their position, but from a moral authority gained by modeling principled behavior to others (Ehrhart, 2004). The servant leader must develop capacities like systems thinking, persuasion, intuition, foresight, and deep listening, in the mold of the coach leader.

Some servant leadership-based outcomes—like profits and retention—are easier to measure, but others, like the growth of people and an organization's societal impact, are more difficult to quantify. Greenleaf (2002) developed a test for servant-leaders and servant-led organizations. He called it the Best Test:

Do those served grow as persons? Do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous (self-reliant), more likely themselves to become servants? *And*, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived? (p. 27)

Servant leadership characteristics can be considered a trait and often occur naturally within many individuals. However, Spears (2010), former president of the Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, offers that servant leadership can also be viewed as a set of behaviors that can be developed through practice. To assist practitioners, Spears (2002) identified 10 characteristics in Greenleaf's writings that are crucial to the development of servant leadership, forming the first model of servant leadership: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community.

In addition to communication and decision-making, servant leaders must commit to applying deep listening skills. Listening and reflection (listening to the inner voice) are both essential to the growth of the servant leader. Leaders who value empathetic listening strive to

understand others. They listen for what is happening in the environment around the client and for any barriers to growth.

Healing relates to the emotional health of people. It is the process of making whole and complete, supporting people both physically and mentally. Servant leaders recognize that the healing of relationships is a powerful force for transformation and integration. In his essay, *The Servant as Leader*, Greenleaf (2002) writes, “There is something subtle communicated to one who is being served and led if, implicit in the compact between servant-leader and led, is the understanding that the search for wholeness is something they share” (p. 50).

Self-awareness helps the servant leader better understand how their emotions and behavior affect others and align with their values. The mindful leader works to learn their strengths and weakness and constantly seeks feedback. As Greenleaf (2002) observed: “Awareness is not a giver of solace—it is just the opposite. It is a disturber and an awakener. Able leaders are usually sharply awake and reasonably disturbed. They are not seekers after solace. They have their own inner serenity” (p. 41).

Servant leaders rely on persuasion, rather than on one’s positional authority, in making decisions within an organization. They encourage followers to take action, looking to build consensus in groups. This clearly differentiates the traditional authoritarian model and that of servant leadership. This emphasis on persuasion finds its roots in the beliefs of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)—the denominational body to which Robert Greenleaf belonged.

Servant leaders are dreamers. They can see the big picture and look beyond day-to-day realities, embracing conceptual thinking. Within organizations, conceptualization is a key role of boards of trustees or directors. Unfortunately, boards can sometimes become too involved in the day-to-day operations, failing to provide a vision for the organization. Trustees need to be mostly

conceptual in their orientation, while staffs need to be mostly operational in their perspective. The most effective executive leaders probably need to develop both perspectives, so servant leaders must strike a balance between operations and future planning.

Foresight is closely linked to self-awareness and allows the servant leader to mine the lessons from the past and present. It involves understanding but not necessarily being bound to the past, seeking patterns that can provide clues to the future. Paying attention to the present allows the servant leader to know what is happening now and what has changed or not changed from the past. The servant leader can be better prepared for the future and more capable to shape it by seeing it as a gap between current reality and future intent.

Peter Block (1993) has defined stewardship as holding something in trust for another. For the servant leader, stewardship is about taking responsibility for the performance of the team. Both servant leadership and stewardship assume a commitment to serving the needs of others. Closely related to stewardship is the belief in the intrinsic value of people. The servant leader is devoted to the personal and professional development of everyone in the organization and can include soliciting ideas from all sources while encouraging follower involvement in decision-making (Spears, 2002).

Finally, the servant leader builds a sense of community within the organization and among other external institutions. Followers are encouraged to take responsibility for their work and reminded of their contributions to the success of the organization. In fact, Greenleaf believed that members of all organizations played significant roles in holding their institutions in trust for the greater good of society. Greenleaf (2002) said “All that is needed to rebuild community as a viable life form for large numbers of people is for enough servant-leaders to show the way, not

by mass movements, but by each servant-leader demonstrating his or her unlimited liability for a quite specific community-related group” (p. 53).

### **Transformational and Servant Leadership in Catholic School Governance**

Stone et al. (2004) identified a distinction in focus between transformational and servant leadership (Figure 4). While transformational leaders have great concern for the progress and development of their followers to support organizational goals, servant leaders strive to meet the needs of others. Servant leaders provide vision and develop trust with their followers to motivate them (Farling et al., 1999). Developing people is the first step in achieving organizational goals. Whether a transformational or servant leader, focus and values determine one's choices.

Catholic school leaders face a variety of challenges. Both servant and transformational leadership have attributes that can prove useful when addressing these challenges. As previously discussed, servant leaders focus on supporting and developing the individuals within an institution, while transformational leaders influence followers to work towards common organizational goals. The overlap in these two leadership styles can prove to be instructive. For example, transformational leaders can be described as coaches as they lead by example and develop others. However, coaching is often considered a servant role, with its strong focus on the individual needs and well-being of others.

In fact, when the characteristics of a servant leader and a transformational leader are considered, they align with the traits of an effective coach. We see co-active learning, with an emphasis on communication and deep, empathetic listening. There is a sender and a receiver of feedback, and the roles change as needed. Empathy is displayed in understanding others' feelings and respecting different perspectives. Understanding oneself, a sort of mindfulness, is a characteristic that effective coaches possess, as do servant leaders and transformational leaders.

Similar to an effective coach, servant and transformational leaders must be committed to the growth of people. Further, a coach and a leader must both be adept at motivating others. Part of the motivation equation is to help people adopt a broader perspective to see how they are a part of the success of an organization.

Catholic schools need leaders who align themselves with the mission and values of the Church. Catholic school leaders see themselves in their respective leadership roles as both serving others in their development and as meeting the needs of their organizations and its members. From an organizational development perspective, organizations benefit from the growth of its members' capacity and capabilities. Complementing the servant leadership model, transformational leadership focuses on the organizational mission, connecting the leaders with the school community so they can work together for the success of the students.

It can be argued that an organizational leader's main job is to achieve results within the context of their organization's mission and purpose. While organizations do benefit from the development of followers by servant leaders, it is not the primary focus of the servant leader. The servant leader focuses on the needs and development of the follower (Choudhary et al., 2013). However, this approach does not necessarily lead to achieving organizational objectives. The servant leader approach is incredibly powerful and positive but can potentially draw focus and resources away from accomplishing an organization's mission. A significant challenge of servant leadership, then, is to find a way to develop followers and leaders, while aligning their efforts to attaining organizational goals and objectives.

Coaching is a potential bridge between these two styles and fits well within the culture of the Church and Catholic schools. There is a strong correlation between effective coaching, servant leadership, and transformational leadership. Transformational and servant leaders are

often described as coaches as they encourage an environment where innovative thinking is aligned with the values and individuals are openly recognized for their unique contributions.

Hocevar (1989) collected data showing that Catholic school governance is moving toward transformational leadership. In addition, Kettenbach (1994) produced a study that described the increasing practice of transformational leadership by Catholic school principals. A better understanding of the tension between exercising a transformational leadership style and attending to daily, administrative tasks (the care and feeding focus of the servant leader) is needed to design effective governance structures for Catholic schools. The moderating effect of a coaching approach is another factor to be considered.

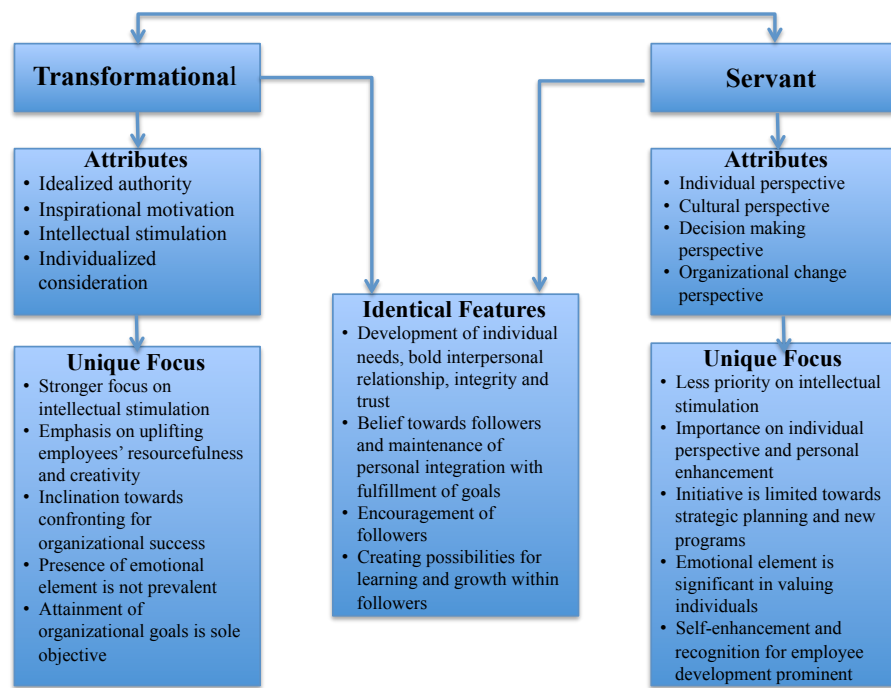
Clearly, an appropriate balance must be struck between a focus on leaders using interpersonal skills to inspire followers and a focus on achieving organizational objectives and goals. From an organizational leadership perspective, as Catholic elementary school leaders are developed, the schools will continue to learn and perform better over time. Developing leaders to be transformers, as well as servant leaders, will then play a critical part in the achievement of a school's goals and objectives.

It is expedient and even convenient to categorize principals as servant leaders focused on others, while the board chair (and by extension, the board) could be seen as transformational leaders concerned with the organization's success. However, the concept of leadership has changed over time and will continue to change as new demands are placed upon leaders (Bennis & Goldsmith, 2010). The leadership roles of the principal and board chair, then, can be overlapping and fluid constructs that serve the school well, but can also be the source of great complexity and nuance. Catholic schools face many challenges today and require adaptable

leaders who can address changing circumstances in the pursuit of organizational goals while still focusing on the development and needs of the individual.

**Figure 4**

*Theoretical Framework*



*Note.* This figure describes the differing outlooks of transformational and servant leadership styles, as well as common features (Kettunen et al., 2015).

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this multi-site case study was to understand any existing gaps between perceptions of roles, responsibilities, accountabilities, and authorities of Catholic elementary school principals, board chairs, and, by extension, boards in the AoB and what transpires with regards to school governance. With unprecedented challenges facing Catholic elementary schools, there is a pressing need to better understand governance models and leadership styles to equip school leaders to support the schools. A better understanding of these relationships and



dynamics will serve as an opportunity to identify and incorporate lessons learned into governance best practices in Catholic elementary schools.

### **Overview of Research Methodology**

This qualitative study examined the dynamics of the Catholic elementary school principal-board chair dynamics and their perceptions of their roles and responsibilities. Qualitative research was selected for this study because of its ability to collect more detailed data with a strong potential for revealing complexity and nuance (Miles et al, 2020). The specific qualitative research approach used was a multi-site case study. The cases of the principals and board chairs in Catholic elementary schools were descriptive and interpretive and produced a detailed view of their leadership by providing explanatory data from their perspectives.

The participants in this study were current principals and board chairs in five Catholic elementary schools in the AoB. Catholic elementary schools in the AoB were chosen because of a recent memorandum from Archbishop Lori that highlighted alignment issues between governing documents and the operating environment at these schools (Appendix A). The principals and board chairs from five schools were invited to participate in the study via email.

The participants were asked to participate in semi-structured interviews after being briefed about the implications of involvement. These interviews were conducted virtually because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The true names of the participants were not used in any reporting of the study. Data were formally collected over a 4-month period. As needed, follow-up interviews were conducted. Follow-up interviews provided opportunities for clarification of responses from the initial interview and ideas developed during these interactions. Member checks were conducted with the participants via email to confirm the findings of the study.

In addition to the semi-structured interviews with current principals and current board chairs, other data collection approaches were employed. Two of the schools allowed me to observe a board meeting virtually. A self-anchoring scale exercise asked participants to describe the most and least successful principal-board chair relationships. A scale from zero (worst) to ten (best) was created. The participants noted where they placed their relationship in the past, present, and in the near future. Finally, participants explained why they believed the numbers on the scale vary or remain the same.

Participants also participated in a ranking exercise. Twelve characteristics of successful board members were presented to the participants, who were asked to identify, in rank order, the three they felt were most important and the one they considered the least important. Four of the five schools provided the board bylaws that I analyzed. I maintained both field notes and my thoughts and feelings about the research process in a reflexive journal. Finally, a board principal-board engagement survey was sent, via emailed link, to all of the elementary school principals and board chairs in the AoB. This survey explored board engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic and probed other aspects of the principal-board chair dynamic and board effectiveness. Thirty-four responses (19 principals and 15 board chairs) were received.

I used methodological triangulation with the survey and interviews along with data source triangulation. The use of multiple leadership theories provided another form of triangulation, as did the involvement of a colleague to check my work. Studies that use multiple methods and gather different types of data provide enhanced “cross-data validity checks” (Patton, 2015, p. 316). Patton (2002, p. 244) observed that “multiple sources of information are sought and used because no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective....By using a combination of observations, interviewing and

document analysis, the fieldworker is able to use different data sources to validate, cross-check findings.”

### **Research Questions**

As this study investigated the role of boards in effective governance of Catholic elementary schools in the AoB, the following research question provided the foundation for the study: How do principals’ and board chairs’ perceptions of their roles, responsibilities, authorities, and accountabilities affect the schools’ success with regards to academic excellence and operational vitality?

#### **Sub-questions:**

- In what ways do Catholic elementary school boards matter to the success of the schools?
- What differences exist between what is said to be going on with regard to governance and what actually transpires?
- In what ways do governing documents (e.g., bylaws) matter to board and school success?
- What tensions do principals and board members experience in governing a Catholic elementary school?
- What gaps exist between the principals’ and board members’ perceptions of their leadership roles and how does this phenomenon manifest itself?

### **Context**

The AoB was established in 1789, becoming the first Catholic Diocese in the United States (Archdiocese of Baltimore [AoB], n.d.-a). It comprises the City of Baltimore and the following counties of Maryland: Allegany, Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Frederick, Garrett, Harford, Howard, and Washington. The AoB comprises over 4,800 square miles and, as of 2019, has a Catholic population of nearly 500,000.

The AoB is rich in historical associations (AoB, n.d.-b). The first priest ordained in the United States, Stephen Badin, was ordained by Bishop Carroll at St. Peter's in 1793. Two years earlier, a group of French Sulpicians established the first American Seminary on Paca Street. Mount St. Mary's Seminary and College was founded by Fr. John Dubois in Emmitsburg, MD in 1808. In 1809, Mrs. Elizabeth Bayley Seton arrived in Baltimore and took up residence in a house on Paca Street where she established a small academy and made plans for the beginning of a religious community of women.

In 1810, Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton opened St. Joseph Free School, the first Catholic School to educate the indigent immigrant children in the United States. In 1829, Mother Mary Lange opened St. Frances Academy in Baltimore, the first Catholic school for African American children in the United States. The AoB Catholic schools enroll over 25,000 students. There are currently 45 elementary and middle schools, and 19 high schools spread throughout the AoB.

In addition to its historical significance, the AoB is a living, growing entity of the Church. Today, more than two hundred years after its founding, the AoB has over one-half million Catholics and over 250 active Diocesan Priests. Under the leadership of the Archbishop, the Premier See enjoys a position of importance in the American Church as a leading center of ecumenical, social, and civic progress. It is also one of the prime locations for priestly formation in the United States. Today, the AoB has 38 elementary schools--17 schools under the Archdiocesan Collaborative Schools governance model, one inter-parish school, and 20 parish schools that are operating under various governance by-laws or other policies of the parish.

As many other archdioceses do, the AoB faces financial challenges. Since the financial crisis of 2008, annual school enrollment in the AoB has declined. Many parents have been forced to withdraw their children, reducing revenue. The aging infrastructure of school buildings

compounds the challenges. The financial stresses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have put a strain on resources, as schools across the AoB are expecting to have budget deficits. In response, the AoB will provide additional scholarship aid and other direct financial assistance to students and schools. This approach is unsustainable given current economic trends that threaten the foundation of Catholic education in the AoB.

### **Researcher Positionality/Subjectivity**

A noteworthy limitation of this study was my direct involvement in the system being examined. As a former board chair of an elementary school within the AoB, I have informed opinions regarding the governance of Catholic schools, as well as the roles and responsibilities of school principals and board chairs. In addition, I am a life-long Catholic and a graduate of several Catholic schools in Maryland: St. John Elementary (now St. John Regional Catholic School or SJRCS), St. John's Literary Institution at Prospect Hall (now St. John's Catholic Prep), and Mt. St. Mary's College (now University). Therefore, researcher bias was a concern.

Another limitation stemmed from the diversity among Catholic schools in the AoB. School leaders in the sample had a wide range of perceptions in terms of funding and economic and social capital. These perceptions possibly influenced their views in terms of governance and the roles and responsibilities of school leaders.

In July of 2019, I attended a conference hosted by the NCEA in Indianapolis, IN. I was conducted a pilot test of the data sources that were used in the research. This pilot testing was useful for rewording confusing questions, eliminating duplicate questions, and ensuring the tools gathered accurate data. I also engaged Hood College faculty, AoB staff, colleagues from my school board, and researchers in Catholic education in the planning, data collection, and data analysis stages of my research.

Lastly, a member of the dissertation committee held a leadership role in the AoB's Department of Catholic Schools at the time of data collection. This leader's input was integrated into my study. This committee member provided a unique perspective and was involved in the development of the sampling plan and the study design.

### **Boundaries**

This study relied on the experiences and perceptions of Catholic elementary school principals and board chairs in the AoB. Only participants selected from Catholic elementary schools in the AoB were considered for this study. Elementary schools were chosen because of a recent memorandum from Archbishop Lori that highlights alignment issues between governing documents and the operating environment at the schools (Appendix A).

A multi-site case study method was utilized. Since the sample was not randomly selected (non-probabilistic), the results could not be applied to all Catholic elementary schools. However, hopefully, consumers of this research will see something of themselves in the descriptions and analysis. This verisimilitude of the study, then, was an approximation toward or closeness to the truth about the way the world really is.

The case study approach has a number of other potential weaknesses that were addressed through the research methodology. There was the possibility of errors of memory and judgment. It was a subjective method rather than objective. Also, due to a narrow scope, discrimination and bias could have occurred. Relatively speaking, far less research has been done on Catholic elementary schools than has been done on Catholic high schools or colleges/universities. Most of the research done so far had been quantitative in nature. The literature did not speak directly to the issue of what factors influenced effectiveness in principal/board relationships in Catholic

schools. As a former Catholic elementary school board chair, I brought a unique understanding to the investigation and had access to data sources in the elementary school community of the AoB.

The COVID-19 pandemic added additional complexity to the data collection process. Hood College mandated that all data collection be performed virtually. In addition, the study participants were subjected to the stresses and challenges that the pandemic represented. For example, the principals struggled to adjust to online classes and were focused on the safety and health of their faculty, staff, and students during my data collection. It was necessary to be flexible with scheduling and understanding in terms of the unusual responsibilities faced by the study participants.

In a recent study, 16 nurses were asked about their experience using the same web-based videoconferencing platform that I used, Zoom (Archibald et al., 2019). Most described their interview experience as highly satisfactory and generally rated Zoom above alternative interviewing mediums such as face-to-face, telephone, and other videoconferencing services, platforms, and products. Further research exploring the utility of Zoom is needed to critically assess its efficacy in collecting qualitative data. However, their findings suggest the viability of Zoom as a tool for collection of qualitative data because of its relative ease of use, cost-effectiveness, data management features, and security options.

### **Significance of the Study**

Clearly, the events of the past half-century offer ample cause for concern for Catholics, but the decline of Catholic schools affects much more than one faith community. Some of those who should be most concerned are education reformers who struggle to narrow the achievement gap between wealthy students and poor students. Catholic education has a long history of superior academic outcomes, especially for historically underserved populations (Smarick &

Robson, 2015). Over the years, a body of scholarly evidence has accumulated showing that Catholic schools have not only excellent academic results overall, but also demonstrate a unique ability to help disadvantaged students (Smarick, 2011).

Catholic schooling has made tremendous contributions to the country, as well as to the Church. Catholic schools function as a public resource in all communities because they introduce a spiritual dimension to the students' education. Catholic schools include religion and moral instruction within their curriculum and programs. Faith and character development have always been at the heart of Catholic schooling and remain an essential counterpart to academic development (Smarick & Robson, 2015).

Over the past thirty years, studies have consistently found Catholic schools to be effective and academically more successful than many of their government school counterparts. Andrew Greeley and his associates (Greeley et al., 1976; Greeley & Rossi, 2013) and others (Neal, 1995; Peterson & Walberg, 2002) reported many positive findings about the effectiveness of Catholic schools. These reports were often discounted, however, the landmark work of James Coleman and his colleagues have withstood the test of time (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman et al., 1982).

Coleman's work confirmed that students in Catholic schools had higher academic achievement than their public school counterparts (Coleman et al., 1982). Also, Catholic schools were especially effective in educating students with lower socio-economic status. Other studies have focused on the benefits of Catholic elementary schools in the inner city (Cibulka et al., 1982; Vitullo-Martin, 1979). Similarly, there have been studies of the positive effect of Catholic high schools on the success of minority or low-income students (Greeley, 1982; Guerra et al.,



1990). In a meta-analysis of numerous studies, Jeynes (2014) found that faith-based schools improved overall student achievement and have greater positive impact on minority students.

In *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*, Tony Bryk and his colleagues at Harvard University found that Catholic high schools were somehow able "simultaneously to achieve relatively high levels of student learning [and] distribute this learning more equitably with regard to race and class than in the public sector" (Bryk et al., 1993, p. 297). More recently, researchers have continued to find that Catholic schools provide numerous benefits, especially for at-risk students. These benefits include higher test scores, improved high-school graduation rates, and higher rates of college attendance (Greeley & Rossi, 2013; Neal, 1995; Peterson & Walberg, 2002). Bryk et al. (1993) have argued that these benefits stem from Catholic schools' commitment to educational excellence, including rigorous curriculum, strong community involvement, local governance, and inspirational ideology. Still others argue that these schools succeed because their staffs are determined to improve the lives of all students, regardless of the students' socio-economic status.

Catholic schools excel academically and are especially good at educating disadvantaged children. Further, Catholic schools promote community. It is not an overstatement to say that America's future success will be determined by whether this kind of education remains available, especially to poor children and families in our inner cities. Over the past several decades, the failures of many urban public schools have prevented millions of poor African American and Latino children from fully realizing the American Dream. Interestingly, today's high-performing urban charter schools bear a striking resemblance to Catholic schools. As these urban charter schools send increasing numbers of low-income minority students to college, the question remains how to help the many more who remain trapped in failed schools.

Millions of Catholics today are firmly rooted in the middle class and above. Many were once recent Catholic immigrants facing many of the same obstacles as today's impoverished inner-city families. A huge proportion of these children attended parochial schools. Is it possible that Catholic education played a critical role in the upward mobility of so many Americans? And if so, can this achievement continue to be repeated with poor students today? The mounting evidence of the efficacy of Catholic schools, particularly for disadvantaged students, has led to a growing interest in the organization and practices of Catholic schools and has inspired questions about what lessons public education can learn from Catholic schools.

### **Definitions of Key Terms (Brown, 2012)**

| <b>Term</b>        | <b>Definition</b>   |
|--------------------|---|
| Advisory board     | A body that participates in the policy-making/decision-making process by formulating, adapting, and recommending policy to the person with authority to enact it. The authority is not bound by the board's advice.   |
| Board              | Governing body whose members are selected or elected to participate in decision-making. A Catholic education board may be called to participate in decision-making at the diocesan, regional, or local level.   |
| Canon law          | The Code of Canon Law is the official body of laws of the Roman Catholic Church.  |
| Catechesis         | A ministry that is done under the direction of the bishop or pastor.  |
| Catholic school    | Understood as one which a competent ecclesiastical authority or a public ecclesiastical juridic person directs or which ecclesiastical authority recognizes as such through a written document.   |
| Consultative board | A body that participates in the policy-making/decision-making process by formulating, adapting, and recommending policy to the person with authority to enact it. The person with the authority is required to consult with the board before making decisions in designated areas but is not bound by the board's advice.   |
| Designated pastor  | The pastor of the school appointed by the bishop to represent the pastors of the area parishes.   |
| Diocese            | A diocese is a portion of the people of God which is entrusted to a bishop for him to shepherd with the cooperation of the presbyterium, so that, adhering to its pastor and gathered by him in the Holy Spirit through the gospel and the Eucharist, it constitutes a particular church in which the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and operative. (Canon 369) |
| Governance         | A process to exert authoritative direction or control. A school may be controlled by state and federal law, board policy, and administrative  |

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
|                            | procedures.   |
| Limited jurisdiction board | Also called a policy-making/decision-making board or a specified jurisdiction board. A body that participates in the policy-making process by formulating, adapting, and enacting policy. The board has been delegated final authority regarding certain areas of institutional operation, although its jurisdiction is limited to those areas of operation that have been delegated to it by the constitution and/or bylaws and approved by the delegating Church authority. |
| Parish                     | A definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis within a particular church. (Canon 515.1)  |
| Pastor                     | The proper shepherd of the parish entrusted to him, exercising pastoral care in the community entrusted to him under the authority of the diocesan bishop in whose ministry of Christ he has been called to share. (Canon 519)  |
| Principal                  | The professional educator who administers the school according to school policies and diocesan, state, and accrediting agency norms.  |
| Subsidiarity               | A principle of the Catholic Church that calls for decisions generally to be made at the lowest appropriate level.   |

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Overview**

This qualitative study provides insights into how Catholic elementary school principals and board chairs in the Archdiocese of Baltimore (AoB) perceive of their roles, responsibilities, accountabilities, and authorities and the effect of these perceptions on school success with regards to academic excellence and operational vitality. In Chapter 1, the Servant Leadership and Transformational Leadership theories provided a framework for discussing how principals and board chairs perceive their roles and approach their responsibilities.

Chapter 2 presents an overview of the supporting theories and literature relevant to the governance roles of school principals and advisory board chairs in elementary schools in the AoB. A review of relevant literature looks at the backdrop of historical research, including subsections on the historical perspective of Catholic education in the U.S. and an historical overview of the development of Catholic school boards and their role in Catholic education. The importance of the Catholic school boards is discussed, including a role comparison between principals and board chairs.

The Catholic school board paradigm and its effectiveness are discussed through the lens of established nonprofit governance models and the National Catholic Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary Schools (NSBECS or Benchmark Standards). The Benchmark Standards provide a framework to analyze Catholic school governance and leadership. The research on the many possible configurations of Catholic school governance are presented via a matrix that places schools in one of four quadrants--executive versus collegial governance on the x-axis, and local versus central governance on the y-axis (Appendix B).

Models of board effectiveness are discussed. Finally, the principal/board chair relationship is discussed through the lens of role theory and a president-principal model.

### **Historical Perspective of Catholic Education**

Catholic schooling in the United States is a “phenomenon” (Buetow, 1985, p. 6), a source of national pride, and, from many points of view, a miracle of U.S. society. Buetow (1985) offers that “Catholic schools constitute not a system but a pattern, one in which all parts have elements in common, but in which each part, and often each school, differs from all others” (p. 6). This pattern has made many contributions to the United States, including the first schools in many geographic areas and the first textbook in the U.S.--*Doctrina Breve* of Juan Zumarraga, brought from Mexico (Buetow, 1985, p. 6).

Figure 5 provides a basic historical timeline of the development of Catholic education in the U.S. As Walch (2016) notes, U.S. Catholic schools had their beginnings in Europe. Spanish, French, and English immigrants brought not only a desire for religious liberty, but also a dynamic faith life. In the colonial period, Catholics struggled to achieve modest success through faith and conspicuous heroism. Walch (2016) notes the emergence of several themes during this era, including the need to overcome obstacles, the central importance of women to the development of parish schools, and great sacrifice. The American Revolution bolstered Catholic education, as antipathy toward the British replaced anti-Catholic sentiment in the colonies.

The end of the colonial period saw the signing of the U.S. Constitution. The First Amendment protects liberties related to religion: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof” (U.S. Const. amend. I). Buetow (1985) notes that in the early national period (about 1783 to about 1828), religious freedom and a clearer separation of church and state developed. Catholic schooling during this

period was a series of small efforts, hindered by poverty, a shortage of teachers, and a fragmented Catholic population.

The period from about 1829 to about 1884 was a time of transition. The increased immigration of Catholics produced an expansion of Catholic schooling, geographical expansion of dioceses through the westward movement, and increases in anti-Catholicism. During this time, Enlightenment ideals saw Church-related institutions co-existing with American higher education (Buetow, 1985). Catholic leaders of that era opposed the curriculum of the early public schools with its focus on Protestant instruction and anti-Catholic propaganda. Thus, the middle nineteenth century movement to establish Catholic schools was primarily an effort to sustain the faith of the children.

From approximately 1885 to 1917, there was a growth in the number of Catholics and their schools. The Church's 1918 Code of Canon Law left no doubt about the Church's right to educate (Catholic Church & Canon Law Society of America, 2020). Civilly, the U.S. Supreme Court's decisions defended the right of parochial schools to exist and the freedom of parents to choose among the alternatives for their children (*Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 1925). The period between the end of World War I and post-World War II saw a steady growth of Catholic schools. Per the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, in 1900, an estimated 3,500 parochial schools existed in the United States (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, n.d.). Within 20 years, the number of elementary schools had reached 6,551, enrolling 1,759,673 pupils taught by 41,581 teachers. The Supreme Court focused on government aid to non-government schools, which had the right to exist and be partially supported by the state. The poor condition of schools led to a reexamination of goals and teaching and to a "rejection of progressive education that climaxed after World War II" (Buetow, 1985, p. 44).

Beginning in the mid-1950s, the Church faced many challenges. A more permissive society challenged many traditional structures. The disaffection of youth, criticism of schools, and the disintegration of the family unit all contributed to these tumultuous times. Vatican II concluded its work in 1965, leading to significant changes in the roles of both the priests and nuns in many Catholic churches across the nation. As many priests and nuns began to leave religious life, Catholic schools hired more lay people as teachers and principals. The exodus of middle-class Americans to the suburbs also increased during this time, as cities began to see increases in crime, violence, and poverty. Many Catholic families enrolled their children in public schools. As previously noted, since their peak in the 1960s, nearly half of Catholic elementary schools have closed in the United States (Goldschmidt & Walsh, 2011).

Despite these numerous challenges, Catholic schools have continued to improve the lives of all students, especially minorities in vulnerable communities. “At the heart of the Catholic parochial school movement is the unwavering belief that the education of children is a primary responsibility of the family and the Church, not the government” (Walch, 2016, p. 1). For over two hundred years, Catholic parochial schools have educated tens of millions of American citizens without direct financial assistance from federal, state, or local governments. By the Catholic school movement’s high point in the middle 1960s, there were more than 4.5 million children in parish elementary schools—fully twelve percent of all of the children enrolled in the United States at that time (Walch, 2016).

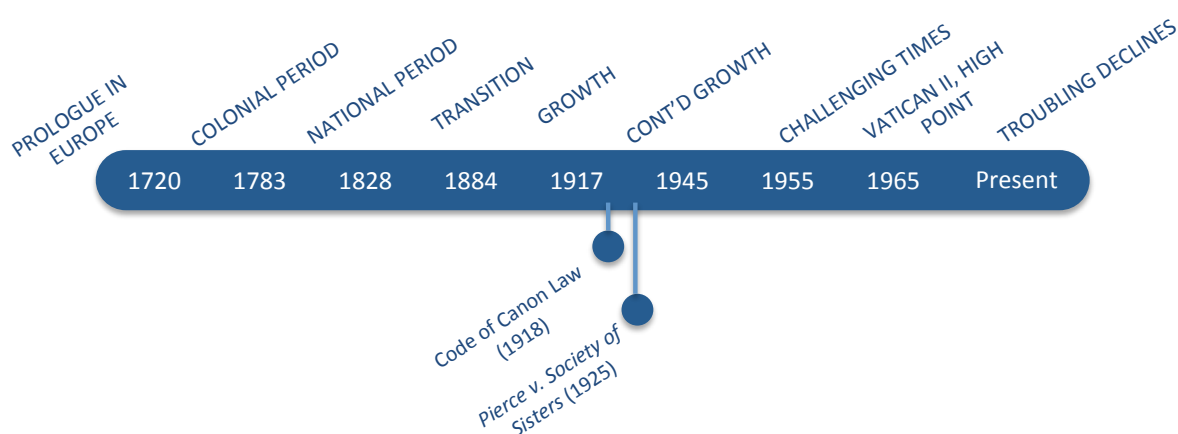
Walch (2016) offers that it is an unparalleled achievement and identifies several themes in the history of the parochial school movement. Survival is one such theme, as Catholics have long fought to sustain their religion. The theme of immigration highlights the changing face of the Catholic population in the U.S. The theme of community emerges as these schools reflect the

goals and aspirations of the local Catholics who support them. Walch (2016) also calls out the theme of identity, acknowledging the long struggle that Catholic schools have endured to maintain their Catholic identity and faith. After the second Vatican Council, the difference between Catholics and non-Catholics on educational issues seemed to fade. The need for maintaining a separate and costly school system seemed less compelling, and many schools were closed or redefined.

As a result of these challenges, the themes of resilience and adaptability emerged as Catholic educators have been willing to revise the parochial school model in response to changing times. In particular, adaptability can be clearly seen in the many possible governance models that are available to ensure the success of the schools. And so, the history of the American Catholic parochial education is a story of a social institution constantly adapting itself to changing times, while working to preserve the faith of Catholic children and prepare them to become productive members of society. As Walch (2016) says, “It is a story worth telling” (p. 3).

## Figure 5

*Historical Timeline of Catholic Education in the U.S.*



*Note.* This figure presents a historical timeline of Catholic education in the U.S.



## Catholic School Boards

### A Brief History

Per Haney and Goldschmidt in *A Practitioner's Guide to Catholic School Leadership* (Robey, 2012), a school administrator they interviewed said “I need help with what I can’t get done. They [the board] always measured up to responding to this” (p. 1). Catholic school boards have been helping administrators for over a century. Unfortunately, many administrators do not leverage their boards to their fullest potential, ignoring a resource that can augment their own capabilities and capacities, while more closely connecting them with the lay community.

Francis C. Wippel, Ed.D., in *An Assessment of the Characteristics of Catholic School Boards in Michigan* (Wippel, 1996), presented the early history of Catholic school boards. He identified two types of education boards within the Catholic school structure: (1) the diocesan board of education and (2) the local school board. A diocesan board of education is an organized group of people, usually priests, religious, and lay people who consult with the diocesan bishop on education policies (Schweigardt, 1972). In contrast, the local Catholic school board is composed of members selected or elected to participate in the decision-making process in assigned areas (Sheehan, 1990).

In 1852, Bishop John Neumann of Philadelphia met with pastors and lay delegates, establishing the first diocesan school board (Ryan et al., 2018). From this gathering, a general board of education for the Diocese of Philadelphia was begun. Its duties included fund raising and recommendations for instruction. Bishop Neumann lobbied other bishops to create diocesan boards nationwide. In 1884, bishops assembled for the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore and called for the establishment of diocesan boards to oversee school operations. These boards grew in the U.S. from 1886 until 1925, their numbers remaining more or less constant until 1960.

This plateauing was partially due to the newly established position of diocesan superintendent (Ryan et al., 2018). The diocesan superintendent was the bishop's direct representative and assumed the duty for assuring that the diocesan board's responsibilities were being fulfilled. Msgr. Olin Murdick also influenced the development of local boards nationwide in the 1960s and 1970s. He wrote numerous articles that recommended capitalizing on the goodwill of Catholic education by involving the community in the decision-making of its local schools.

In the 1960s, Catholic education boards experienced a role expansion. Ryan et al. (2018) credit Msgr. Charles O'Neil D'Amour as the "father of the parish board movement." He established the first parish board in Norway, MI in 1964, in the spirit of Vatican Council II, which called for greater involvement of the laity in decision-making. Lay boards offer life experiences and professional expertise that can benefit the schools. They can provide the "three Ws of wealth, work, and wisdom" (R. Haney, personal communication, July 15, 2019). The United States Catholic bishops recognize the importance of the laity to the future of Catholic education. The 2005 document, *Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium*, emphasizes the laity's talent and expertise and explicitly urges administrators to invite the laity to help sustain Catholic schools (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005).

As of 2016, 83% of Catholic elementary and secondary schools have boards (Ryan et al., 2018). This represents more than 85,000 board members in the U.S. who are actively engaged in supporting schools. A constructive and productive partnership with a board provides more "hands, heads and hearts to assist Catholic school administrators" (Robey, 2012, p. 2).

## **Role of School Boards in Catholic Education**

Boards and commissions have long been an important part of Catholic education (Sheehan, 1990). They were called for by the Councils of Baltimore in the late 1800s and experienced a significant revival in the decades following Vatican Council II. The call for education boards and commissions was primarily to assist the bishop in the administration of schools in the diocese. Diocesan priests were members of these first education boards. The position of superintendent of schools developed later, in the early 1900s.

Ryan et al. (2018) note that Vatican Council II called for more involvement by the laity in the life of the Church, leading to a renewed Catholic board movement seeking broader support for Catholic schools beyond the bishops, clergy, and professionals. Proponents argued that parents and the community should have a voice in the formal education of their children in Catholic schools by participating in school boards. Further, it was thought that increasing the involvement by the laity would increase the financial base of support for schools.

Stephen O'Brien describes the two types of board structures as appropriate models for Catholic school boards: (1) boards with limited jurisdiction and (2) consultative boards (Haney et al., 2009). Boards with limited jurisdiction have final authority on those educational areas specifically delegated as such by the bishop or pastor. Consultative boards cooperate in the policy-making process by formulating but never enacting policy. The person with the final authority establishes those areas in which the board is to be consulted. In 1994, the National Association of Boards of Catholic Education (NABE), a department of the NCEA, added a third model of board authority, the advisory board (Wippel, 1996). An advisory board advises the bishop/pastor on educational policies and other educational matters while the diocesan/pastoral leader develops the policy.

In *Building Better Boards*, Lourdes Sheehan, RSM, Ed.D., provided the seminal work in the field of Catholic school board development in the post-Vatican II era (Sheehan, 1990). She related the Second Vatican Council's call for shared responsibility and participatory decision-making with the laity to the establishment and maintenance of boards. In her view, boards would have official authority to make decisions, formulate policy, and provide financial accountability for the schools.

Sheehan (1990) enumerates some of the reasons that motivated the establishment of boards. For example, boards provide an opportunity for laity to participate in the educational ministry of the Church by ensuring the quality of the curriculum and promoting the Catholic identity of their schools. Boards are a source of stability for the school and are responsible for ensuring the financial viability of the schools. Boards work to ensure the rights and duties of those served by or employed by the schools. Board members commit to ensuring the mission success of the schools. Finally, boards build community, serving as bridges between the schools and those stakeholders interested in their success.

### **Catholic School Board Authority: Advisory, Consultative, Limited Jurisdiction**

In constructing a board, the question of establishing its authority is critical. There are three types of boards: advisory, consultative, and limited jurisdiction. An advisory board gives advice to a person in authority who can take the advice or not. A variation of an advisory board is a consultative board. Consultative boards differ in that the person in authority must be consult with the board in its delineated areas of responsibility. Finally, boards with limited jurisdiction make decisions in stipulated areas.

In Catholic schools, executive governance vests authority in an individual, traditionally the pastor. Collegial governance entails a group, such as a board. Most governance models fall

within the broad spectrum between the two extremes. Even the most traditional parish schools generally have some form of advisory board, which makes the governing model slightly more collegial and collaborative. On the other hand, complete collegial governance of a parish school is uncommon given that canon law requires oversight by the bishop or his designee (often the pastor).

Stephen O'Brien (Haney et al., 2009) indicated that all three board postures (advisory, consultative, and boards with limited jurisdiction) appropriately fit within the church structure. However, Sheehan (1990) indicated that the advisory and consultative boards are more aligned with shared decision-making in the Catholic Church because the constituting authority establishes the areas where the board is to provide advice or be consulted. The advisory and consultative boards appear to be involved in the board functions to a greater extent than limited jurisdiction boards.

Board structures offer opportunities as well as potential threats to a school or school system, which vary by the type of board. Advisory and consultative boards are prevalent models, yet suffer from a commonly expressed view that they are “do nothing” or “rubber stamp” committees. Individuals best suited to be effective and enthusiastic board members eschew joining advisory or consultative boards because their ideas and opinions are not routinely heard or implemented.

### **Governance and Boards**

The concept of governance has been defined less clearly than is ideal to advancing our understanding of this construct, and many misconceptions remain (Cornforth & Brown, 2014). A first step in clarifying our understanding is to distinguish between governance and a board. Governance is a function, while a board is a structure. The laws of the U.S., among other nations,

hold governing boards accountable for the governance of the organization (Brody, 2007), yet many others have important governance roles, too. With this pluralistic view of governance, a system approach begins to emerge. Cornforth and Brown (2014) provide a useful definition of governance as “the systems and processes concerned with ensuring the direction, control, and accountability of an organization” (p. 18).

### **Frameworks for Catholic School Governance**

In this section, a number of frameworks were examined. The first framework is the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools (NSBECS or Benchmark Standards), which provide guidance for PK-12 Catholic school effectiveness and sustainability. In addition, a variety of governance models are discussed in *Breathing New Life into Catholic Schools: An Exploration of Governance Models*. This document focuses on the governance of a high-level policy-making authority and details the advantages and disadvantages of the most common models.

#### ***The National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools***

The NSBECS “provides Catholic school educators and stakeholders with research-based criteria for operating a mission-driven, program-effective, well-managed, responsibly governed Catholic school” (Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2013, p. 157). The standards provide a framework within which any substantive discussions of Catholic school governance and leadership must occur.

The NSBECS is intended to describe how the most effective and efficient Catholic schools operate (Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2012). They are offered as school effectiveness standards rather than curriculum content standards, although they support curriculum development consistent with national standards and the Common Core State Standards. The

Benchmark Standards describe policies, programs, structures, and processes that should be present in responsibly governed Catholic schools. They address four domains: (1) Mission and Catholic identity, (2) Governance and Leadership, (3) Academic Excellence, and (4) Operational Vitality. They provide measurable descriptors for each standard (Appendix C).

Catholic school education is central to the Church’s mission. Catholic school governance and leadership (addressed in Standards 5 and 6, discussed below) can be seen as a ministry that promotes and protects the responsibilities and rights of the school community, ensuring the Catholic identity, academic excellence, and operational vitality of the school (Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2012). The Benchmark Standards provide clear direction for the critical work of Catholic school governance and leadership on two levels (Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2012). First, governance and leadership are called out as necessary for implementing all of the standards. For example, many benchmarks begin with this phrase or a similar one, “The governing body and the leader/leadership team ensure that . . .” (Ozar & Weitzel- O’Neill, 2012, p. 12). The Benchmark Standards are used to measure a school’s level of success in achieving a standard. Specifically, the Foreword for Section II on governance and leadership, affirms that the “success of this [school] mission depends on the key components of effective governance, which provide direction or authority, and leadership, which ensure effective operations” (Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2012, p. 17).

On a second level, the Benchmark Standards set the bar as they guide the work of the board and board committees through robust self-assessment. It is important to note that board roles and expectations must be clear in order for them to effectively promote stability and growth of the school. A board must understand its role to adequately address the domains of mission, academic excellence, and operational vitality.

**Standard 5 – Governance.** “An excellent Catholic school has a governing body (person or persons) which recognizes and respects the role(s) of the appropriate and legitimate authorities, and exercises responsible decision-making (authoritative, consultative, advisory) in collaboration with the leadership team for development and oversight of the school’s fidelity to mission, academic excellence, and operational vitality” (Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2012, p. 8).

Benchmark 5.1 addresses membership diversity and adherence to the governing documents. Board member recruitment and selection must consider gender, cultural and ethnic diversity, professional background, and skill sets when identifying potential candidates. Attention must be paid to the governing documents (i.e., bylaws) with regards to board and committee structure, roles and responsibilities, and procedures (Haney & Sabatino, 2016). Benchmark 5.2 seeks to bring all stakeholders to a common understanding of the school’s operations and policies, in alignment with the school’s mission. Continuity of operations is of critical importance, so succession plans for all leadership positions should be developed. In addition, this benchmark identifies accountability for school success as an area of collaboration between the principal and the board.

Benchmark 5.3 calls for a clear understanding by the board and other school leaders of the rules and procedures set by the bishop. Similarly, the board must know and abide by all diocesan policies and procedures. The principal is a key intermediary to inform the board as to updates, reports, policies, and procedures that have been communicated by the bishop.

Benchmark 5.4 recognizes that each board can have a unique role depending on its bylaws and its governance model. The principal and board must maintain a productive and collaborative relationship with the arch/diocesan office of education. The elements of subsidiarity (social and political issues should be dealt with at the local level) and solidarity (the willingness to give



oneself for the good of one's neighbor) define the ideal working relationship with the diocese. Community is built by sharing goals, resources, and efforts with the (arch)diocesan education office (Haney & Sabatino, 2016).

Benchmark 5.5 encourages the principal, board, and pastor to strive for collaborative working relationships, marked by trust and open communication. Finally, Benchmark 5.6 addresses the need for boards to provide members with training and opportunities for faith formation. Effective boards engage in continual learning, in coordination with the arch/diocese and informed by regular feedback and assessment (Haney & Sabatino, 2016).

**Standard 6 – Leadership.** “An excellent Catholic school has a qualified leader/leadership team empowered by the governing body to realize and implement the school’s mission and vision” (Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2012, p. 9).

The spirit of Benchmark 6.1 is to indicate the necessity of qualified professional and faith-based school leaders. Every leader or member of the leadership team must be qualified to serve as a faith and instructional leader based on completion of a school leadership preparation program and/or appropriate state licensing. Benchmark 6.2 charges the leader/leadership team with developing and communicating a clear understanding of the school’s vision and mission to the entire school community (Haney & Sabatino, 2016). All actions taken by the leader/leadership team must clearly support the school’s mission. Benchmark 6.3 focuses on the creation and development of a school’s faculty and staff. The leader/leadership team is responsible for hiring quality faculty and staff and developing them to their fullest potential. Performance evaluations and data-based decision-making are critical elements of applying this benchmark. Benchmark 6.4 charges the leadership team to establish a collaborative professional environment at all levels of the school community. These networks of stakeholders are dedicated

to excellence in all aspects of the school and are engaged in the school's continuous improvement.

Benchmark 6.5 points to the leader/leadership team as the instructional leader of the school's curriculum. In collaboration with the faculty, the leader/leadership team is responsible for planning, assessing, and monitoring the school's curriculum to achieve and sustain academic excellence. Benchmark 6.6 ensures that the leader/leadership team collaborates with the governing body to choose an operational and organizational model that promotes academic success and addresses focus areas concerning the operational vitality of the school (e.g., enrollment management, budgeting, finance, facilities, technology, and marketing/advancement). Benchmark 6.7 states that the leader/leadership team is responsible for clearly communicating new initiatives and/or changes to school programs to all stakeholders (Haney & Sabatino, 2016). This benchmark recognizes that transparent communication is essential for creating a sense of community and helping the school to achieve its mission.

### ***Catholic School Governance Models***

While the Benchmark Standards offer guidance for the day-to-day administration of the school, *Breathing New Life into Catholic Schools: An Exploration of Governance Models* (FADICA, 2015) focuses on the governance of a high-level policy-making authority. In doing so, the paper describes only new models for how high-level policy and decisions are developed, not how they are implemented. To facilitate consistency in comparison, it includes parish and diocesan schools, but not those established by a religious order.

In the context of Catholic schools, governance roles encompass five general categories (FADICA, 2015). They are (1) planning, (2) policy, (3) finance, (4) public relations, and (5) evaluation of governance roles. The governing body may also guide issues related to spirituality

and Catholic identity. Actual governing authority generally falls to one of three entities: (1) a local pastor or canonical administrator, (2) a bishop or his designee (e.g., staff in the diocesan office), or (3) a board. Because canon law allows ecclesial officials to delegate responsibilities at their discretion, infinite configurations of authority are possible. Therefore, in many cases, no one entity controls governing functions. Depending on the extent to which a canonical authority delegates power to a board, four general categories of boards are possible: (1) advisory, (2) consultative, (3) limited jurisdiction, and (4) full authority.

A matrix is used to organize research findings and recognize the many complex configurations of governance and the multiple actors involved (Appendix B). It depicts the models examined along two axes: executive versus collegial governance on the x-axis, and local versus central governance on the y-axis. In Catholic schools, executive governance vests authority in an individual, traditionally the pastor. Collegial governance entails a group, such as a board of directors or a religious congregation. Complete executive or collegial governance is rare and most models fall within the broad spectrum between the two extremes. Local governance takes place on a school-to-school basis, detached from a larger system, such as a diocese. Central governance vests authority in a single office that oversees multiple schools. As with executive and collegial indicators, complete local or central control is rare. Models on the broad spectrum include parish, diocesan and private, independent schools operating independently or in collaboration, and networks with others.

### **Models of Board Effectiveness**

Based on interviews with executives and directors of multiple *Fortune 500* firms, Charan et al. (2014) argue that the role of the board has evolved from being focused on monitoring issues to that of strategic partner to the chief executive. Under Charan et al.'s (2014) governance

model, the board and the chief executive work collectively in the strategic decision-making process. To do this effectively, the chief executive provides the board with a clear view of the business and its external context. This “central idea” of the organization is the vision for fulfilling the institutional mission, as well as the strategy to get there. As Charan et al. (2014) explain, a compelling central idea draws management and the board onto common ground, united by an overarching purpose. In contrast to the *Breathing New Life into Catholic Schools: An Exploration of Governance Models* governance model which simply acknowledges mission as one of several areas of potential board involvement, Charan et al. (2014) makes clear that the board’s central role must be mission focused for governance success. Hammack (1998) goes on to state that with a lack of consensus on aims, actions are likely to be stultified, and participants will lose satisfaction and enthusiasm for the organization. Further, the central idea forms a frame of reference against which the board must gauge strategies, external information, and decisions (Charan et al., 2014).

While Charan et al.’s (2014) work is focused on for-profit boards, there are lessons that can benefit any examination of Catholic elementary school governance. Charan et al. (2014) discuss two standards for director obligation: (1) a duty of care, requiring directors to exercise reasonable care in executing board responsibilities and (2) a duty of loyalty, requiring that directors exercise good fiduciary judgment. While these duties have become critical to a board’s monitoring function, the additional responsibility of a duty of leadership is becoming essential as well, as organizations become more and more complex.

Charan et al. (2014) further explain that governing boards delegate almost all operating decisions to top management, but they will want to retain influence in several areas—directly in some cases and in partnership with the chief executive in others. Proactive board leadership is

essential, but knowing where and when to stop is vital if the board is to guide the organization without micromanaging. The key is to know when to lead, when to partner, and when to get out of the way for the good of the enterprise. Boards should take charge in forming the central idea, selecting the chief executive, ensuring board competence, maintaining ethics and integrity, and designing the compensation structure. However, boards should partner with the chief executive in matters of strategy, financial goals, enterprise risk management, resource allocation, and talent development. Finally, boards can best avoid becoming micromanagers by avoiding becoming involved in execution, operations, areas of delegated authority, or non-strategic decisions.

### ***Six Dimensions of a Successful Non-profit Board***

Governing boards are critical to many nonprofit organizations. When a board is effectively fulfilling its responsibilities, an organization will be more effective and efficient. According to a study of 202 organizations in the Los Angeles and Phoenix areas, organizations that reported higher board effectiveness also reported higher perceived organizational success (Brown, 2005).

Despite their importance, nonprofits consistently struggle to create effective boards. When Larcker et al. (2015) surveyed nonprofit directors, nearly all of them reported some sort of serious governance-related problem. Further, 66% of the survey participants expressed misgivings about the board's experience level and frustration over the board's lack of engagement.

Chait et al. (1993) interviewed 108 board members and presidents at 22 independent liberal arts and comprehensive colleges to identify specific characteristics of strong board leadership. These interviews provided the basis of a framework of six distinct dimensions through which effective boards operate as a collective body. By focusing on these six

dimensions, nonprofit boards can strengthen their effectiveness and increase their impact on the organization.

It should be noted that there are some interesting parallels between the six dimensions and the Benchmark Standards. For example, the first characteristic of strong board leadership is the *contextual dimension*, in which the board fully understands and embraces the organization's mission, goals, and values. Similarly, the Benchmark Standards encourage boards to promote fidelity to the schools' mission. Since leaders make decisions based on their understanding of their organization, increasing board diversity is one approach to increasing the effectiveness of the board. Benchmark Standard 5.1 also acknowledges the value of diversity to organizational effectiveness. A group of diverse individuals is more likely to question assumptions and challenge one another's beliefs and opinions, resulting in better, more informed decision-making. Also, a more diverse board is more representative of the community that the organization serves, leading to mission success as the organization is better positioned to serve its constituency.

Both the *educational dimension* and Benchmark Standard 5.2 recommend that the board ensures that all stakeholders understand the board's role and process. It stands to reason that board members need to fully understand their roles and responsibilities to effectively educate their stakeholders. Open communication with the community and robust feedback loops are critical to success.

The *interpersonal dimension* ensures that the board functions as a group in all aspects and understands how to handle conflict. Conflict resolution is a key component of the interpersonal dimension. Since boards should be encouraging all members to voice their opinions, disagreement is inevitable. Thus, being able to constructively discuss the issues is critical to

producing beneficial results. Although the Benchmark Standards do not explicitly address conflict, they encourage school leaders to value close cooperation and forthright communication.

The board should welcome all perspectives when solving a problem and encourage robust conversations, according to the *analytical dimension*. This dimension focuses on the board being welcoming to all opinions, while Benchmark Standard 5.1 promotes board diversity. All board members should have the opportunity to discuss their thoughts and opinions at meetings or, else, the power of the group dynamic is lost while some board members may disengage.

The *political dimension* ensures that the board maintains a positive relationship with all stakeholders. To be successful, all board members must be aware of what stakeholders they serve. Stakeholders could include staff members, program participants, and donors, to name a few. The board must understand who these stakeholders are and what motivates them. Benchmark Standard 6.7 also focuses on stakeholder engagement, recommending transparent communication as a way to create a sense of community.

Finally, the *strategic dimension* addresses the fact that the board must be concerned with planning the future of the organization, as strategic development is one of its key responsibilities. A strategic plan should consist of achievable goals for the organization's future direction. Partnering with stakeholders is important to ensure that all opinions and perspectives are captured. Also, the strategic plan should be revisited to confirm its continued relevance and whether the organization is on track. Interestingly, the Benchmark Standards focus more on operational activities and do not specifically identify a board's responsibility for strategic planning, although planning for the future is certainly a board focus.

## **Principal/Board Chair Relationship**

### **Role Theory and Leadership**

Role theory proposes that human behavior is guided by expectations held both by the individual and by other people (Merton, 1957; Stryker, 2007; Stryker & Burke, 2000). The expectations correspond to different roles individuals perform in their daily lives. The model is based on the observation that people behave in a predictable way, and that an individual's behavior is context specific, based on social position and negotiation among role occupants (Mead, 1934; Swann, 1987). Each social role is a set of rights, duties, expectations, norms, and behaviors. Role theory has been used in many kinds of organizations to better understand and predict organizational behavior.

Role theory as it relates to organizational leadership is how the leaders and followers in an organization define their roles and the roles of others, as well as how people act in their roles and how people expect others to act in their roles within the organization. It is assumed that leaders often define their own roles within an organization based on the how the employees see the leader's role. Role conflict is a possible experience for leaders within an organization, such as principals and board chairs in a Catholic school. When the employees in an organization have a set of expectations for the role of the leaders that are different from what the leaders accept as their role, role conflict can occur. For this reason, the Benchmark Standards recognize the importance of clarity regarding the role of boards. Role conflict can also occur when different people have differing expectations of their leaders. Leaders may also have different ideas about what they should be doing compared to the expectations of others.

Also, it is possible that while a person may carry a certain title (i.e., elementary school principal, board chair), that person may actually have a different role because of the way various



groups perceive that role. One human social behavior is the division of labor whereby different individuals engage in different kinds of activity and are guided by different rules of conduct (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Thus, people occupying a given position, such as that of elementary school principal, will have differing roles because such a position will come into contact with many persons and groups, each perceiving the role of the principal in different ways. The ways of acting or the performing of roles that individuals come to accept as proper for themselves are in part a result of the internalization of what they think others expect of them (Stryker, 2007).

Role conflict can be the result of poor communication of job duties or unclear or misleading guidance as to roles. In fact, one of the main causes of role conflict is role ambiguity, which is the lack of certainty as to what a certain role in an organization requires or contradictory ideas as to what tasks are to be accomplished (Kahn et al., 1964). For example, team members can then be uncertain of their role and their teammate's roles on the team and of team objectives and may begin to conflict with one another, reducing organizational efficiency and effectiveness. Thus, organizational success requires that role expectations be clear. The Benchmark Standards recognize this as they describe the duties of the leadership team and require observance of all guidance documents, which typically outline board roles and responsibilities.

### **President-Principal Model**

Many Catholic high schools employ a president-principal administrative model (James, 2009). In this model, the president can be seen as the chief executive officer of the school, while the principal can be considered the chief academic officer. This administrative structure of Catholic secondary schools acknowledges the need to balance long-term institutional advancement with the daily demands of leading a Catholic school. This model can provide a

useful lens through which to view the roles of principal and board chair in Catholic elementary school governance.

In the period after 1965, Catholic secondary schools were faced with “a generation of crises” (Walch 1996, p. 169). These crises included the rapid drop in enrollment, increased costs, and increased competition for students. In response, they created lay boards, adopting operational models used in higher education (James, 2009). Similarly, elementary schools recognize the increased complexity of the responsibilities that makes it increasingly difficult for a Catholic school principal to provide adequate leadership in so many diverse areas. Dygert (2000) reports that “the majority of presidents and principals agreed that the most important reasons for the model are development and fundraising along with the related activities of public relations, marketing, and strategic planning” (p. 18).

Several studies point to the success of the model from the self-reported perceptions of the practitioners (Dygert, 1998; Mullen 1998; Pasi, 1995). The studies also note that the success of the model is highly relationship dependent (Dygert, 1998; Mullen 1998; Pasi, 1995). Pasi (1995) states, “virtually all indicated that the key to the success of the structure is the personalities of the president and the principal” (p. 50).

However, personal compatibility alone may not ensure the success of the model. James (2009) recommends analyzing the model through the lenses of organizational theory, research on effective teamwork, and paradigm change theory. Decision-making practices are also briefly discussed, as the heart of any governance model is decision-making and problem-solving. The concept of alignment, and its use by the administrative team, is a mechanism that can help to move organizations toward high performance, including Catholic elementary schools.

## ***Organizational Theory***

Bolman and Deal (2021), in *Reframing Organizations*, provide four perspectives (or frames) for viewing the operation of an organization. While all four frames are useful in understanding the president-principal model, the structural frame is of particular importance. Two of the structural frame assumptions are that organizations become more efficient and productive through specialization, but that these divisions of labor require coordination to ensure that individuals and groups work together effectively (Bolman & Deal, 2021). The two assumptions suggest a tension within the president-principal model and in organizations in general: how to allocate work that is too much for one person to do (differentiation) and how to coordinate roles and units once responsibilities have been divided (integration).

The implications drawn from the application of Bolman and Deal's (2021) analysis to the problems cited by practitioners of the president-principal model include the fact that tensions between the president and principal roles cannot be eliminated but must be managed. This reality is addressed in the Benchmark Standards' call to leaders to work collaboratively. The Benchmark Standards align with Bolman and Deal in that appropriate forms of role clarity, coordination, control systems, and networks are recognized as necessary to ensuring effective operations.

## ***Effective Teamwork and Administrative Alignment***

Larson and LaFasto (1989) identified eight characteristics of highly successful teams through their 3-year grounded theory research of 75 highly successful teams: a clear goal, a results-driven structure, competent members, commitment, collaborative climate, standards of excellence, external support and recognition, and principled leadership. Each characteristic is applicable to the president-principal model and all are necessary for highly successful teams. However, the collaborative climate element is particularly appropriate for this study because

collaboration and the related concept of trust were cited in the research on the president-principal model as essential to its success (Dygert, 1998; Pasi, 1995). Chait et al. (1993) and the Benchmark Standards also highlight collaboration as being critical to board success.

### ***Paradigm Change Theory***

Kuhn (2012) described the nature of paradigms as a controlling mental construct in scientific advancement. His notions of paradigms were quickly appropriated to other disciplines and provide a powerful framework for examining the shift of Catholic secondary schools to the president-principal model. The president-principal model gained popularity because it was more successful than the lone principal model when faced with solving today's complex problems. However, it should be understood that not everyone has learned to fully utilize the paradigm (Dygert, 1998).

Principals have had to take on new and more challenging work (e.g., development, advancement). This process of accepting new responsibilities may, over time, lead the autonomous principal to adopt the new paradigm. Using old terms and titles from the old autonomous principal model further complicates matters and can lead to misunderstandings regarding the relationships among and between the various parties. Dygert (1998) relates the observations of respondents that "the model demands a readjustment of expectations of all involved, that there is a tendency for parents and the public to try to go right to the president and bypass the principal" (p. 163). So, it would seem that truly adopting this new shared leadership paradigm is challenging, but a reasonable approach to address the many challenges facing today's Catholic schools.

### ***Decision-Making Practices***

A number of approaches to problem-solving were identified by Hoy and Tarter (2008). Shared decision-making engages others to assist in finding solutions to problems meaningful to the people affected by those problems (Polka et al., 2016). Hopefully, overburdened Catholic school principals will seek to empower others by favoring decision-making processes that are both “participative” and “collaborative” (Palestini, 2009, p. 36). Ozar (2010) affirmed the potential of this approach by school leaders, concluding that “on the person of the principal we need a new model built on shared leadership” (p. 115). Bryk et al. (1993) describe the sense of community that pervades Catholic schools, where “genuine dialogue” is valued (p. 299). Heft (2011) states that Catholic school leaders should promote a collaborative environment within the community for the benefit of the students. Dias and Halliwell (1996) found that faculty were involved in shared decision-making in Catholic elementary schools.

There is ample evidence that this collaborative leadership approach to solving problems is being used successfully in Catholic schools today. This spirit of collaboration is reflected in the Benchmark Standard 5. This standard charges the governing body of the school to exercise “responsible decision making in collaboration with the leadership team” (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012, p. 8).

### **Conclusion**

Understanding the rich heritage of the Church and Catholic education is critical to fully comprehending the governance challenges facing the schools. One lesson of history is that with any transition involving the Church, there is a clash of old versus new. This tension is keenly felt as school leaders try new and creative responses to the myriad challenges facing Catholic schools. New and innovative forms of Catholic school governance are constantly emerging to

address the sustainability of the schools. These governance models are evolving rapidly and are as different as the communities that adopt them.

Research on Catholic elementary school governance lags behind examination of other governance topics. To address this gap, a first step is to explore the existing environment to identify the opportunities and challenges posed by existing governance models that allocate governing authority in differing combinations. Evaluating these models will provide best practices and fertile areas for future research.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology used to guide this research. The research questions, sample population, and data analysis are discussed.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 outlines the qualitative methods and procedures that guided this dissertation and that were used to answer the research questions. It details the purpose of the study, the research questions, and limitations to the approach. The sample population, data collection instruments, and data analysis techniques are also discussed in this chapter.

### Introduction

The main purpose of this qualitative study was to understand any existing gaps between perceptions of roles and responsibilities of Catholic elementary school principals and board chairs in the Archdiocese of Baltimore (AoB) and what actually happens. The tension between servant leadership and transformational leadership provided a theoretical foundation to answer the central research question: How do principals' and board chairs' perceptions of their roles, responsibilities, authorities, and accountabilities affect the schools' success with regards to academic excellence and operational vitality? A qualitative approach was selected because of its ability to understand a phenomenon through research methods that allow for an in-depth examination of the data. A multiple site case study was the specific research approach chosen for this study, and numerous data collection instruments were employed (Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Research Question and Data Collection Matrix*

| Research Question   | Data Collection Instrument      |
|---|---------------------------------|
| RQ 1. How do principals' and board chairs' perceptions of their roles, responsibilities, authorities, and accountabilities affect the schools' success with regards to, academic excellence and operational vitality? | Q1, Q6a, Self-anchoring scale   |
| RQ 2. In what ways do Catholic elementary school boards   | Q2, Q8, Board engagement survey |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| matter to the success of the schools?  |  |
| RQ 3. What differences exist between what is said to be going on with regard to governance and what actually transpires?                             | Q4a, Q4b, Q5, Q6a, Self-anchoring scale, Board meeting observation |
| RQ 4. In what ways do governing documents (e.g., bylaws) matter to board and school success?   | Q7, Document review of school bylaws                               |
| RQ 5. What tensions do principals and board members experience in governing a Catholic elementary school?  | Q1, Q3, Q9, Q10, Board meeting observation                         |
| RQ 6. What gaps exist between the principals' and board members' perceptions of their leadership roles and how does this phenomenon manifest itself? | Q4, Q4a, Q4b, Ranking activity                                     |

Key: 'Q1' refers to Interview Question #1; Warm-up questions were separately numbered.

*Note.* This table aligns the research questions with the data collection instruments employed, including specific interview questions.

### Research Design

Within the interpretivist framework, a multiple site case study approach was employed for the research (T. Burgess-limerick & R. Burgess-limerick, 1998). Bassey (2007), Schwandt (2015), and Stake (2003) describe a case as a bounded system characterized by wholeness or integrity and the integration of its parts. It could be an event, a person, a group, an institution, or a phenomenon (Freebody, 2003; Gillham, 2000; Johnson & Christensen, 2020; Merriam, 1998; Rossman & Rallis, 2016; Yin, 2015) systematically focused “on one particular instance of educational experience” (Freebody, 2003, p. 81). In this inquiry, the bounded system was the board in a Catholic elementary school and the particular governance instance is the working relationship between the principal and the board chair. The case studies of the boards in Catholic elementary schools in the AoB, therefore, were descriptive and interpretive, and produced a detailed view of their leadership by providing data from their perspectives.

Creswell (2018) describes the qualitative method as research that takes place in a naturalistic setting and focuses on the participants' perspectives and subjective views. In this emergent design, the role of the researcher is reflexive (Patton, 2015). Data analysis establishes



patterns and themes, which result in a holistic, complex picture revealing the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

The research was undertaken with school board chairs and principals in Catholic elementary schools in the AoB. The scope of this study included five pairs of principals and board chairs from five schools. To best understand the position-related experiences of Catholic elementary school board leaders, the participants were studied in the context of their natural environment. The board chairs and principals were asked to volunteer to participate in the research project after being briefed about it and the implications of involvement. The names of the participants were not used in any reporting of the study.

### **Setting and Context**

After the American Revolution, American Catholics sought independence from the bishop of the Apostolic Vicariate of the London District in England, who had ecclesiastical jurisdiction at the time. Because Maryland was one of the few predominantly Catholic colonies, the Pope established the office of the Apostolic Prefecture of the United States there on November 26, 1784 (Spalding, 1989). It was elevated to the Diocese of Baltimore on November 6, 1789, becoming the first diocese in the United States. Bishop John Carroll became the bishop of Baltimore that year as well, making him the first Roman Catholic bishop in the United States.

The AoB is the metropolitan see (seat of authority) of the larger regional Ecclesiastical Province of Baltimore. The AoB is the oldest diocese in the United States whose see city was entirely within the nation's boundaries when the United States declared its independence in 1776. The Vatican granted the Archbishop of Baltimore the right of precedence in the nation at liturgies, meetings, and Plenary Councils on August 15, 1859 (Spalding, 1989).

The AoB has 153 parishes and missions located in nine counties and the City of Baltimore (AoB, n.d.-c). Catholic Schools in the AoB enroll over 25,000 students. There are currently 45 elementary and middle schools, and 19 high schools spread throughout the AoB, which includes: Baltimore City, Allegany, Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Frederick, Harford, Howard and Washington Counties (AoB, n.d.-d).

### **Researcher Positionality**

Patton (2015) describes a researcher conducting a qualitative study as the instrument of the study. Since the credibility of qualitative methods relies heavily on the skills and objectivity of the researcher, I have provided information on my background, my qualifications to conduct this research, any biases I may have related to the research, and how I plan to address and mitigate those biases.

I am a lifelong Catholic and was baptized in the same Church as my great grandfather and great grandmother in Frederick, MD. I attended 16 years of Catholic education in the same schools as my mother, aunts, uncles, siblings, and cousins. Conducting a study of Catholic education was significant for me personally. And, as the instrument of the study, I was obligated to reflect constantly on the relationship between the research decisions and conclusions drawn and my biases. As dire as the future of Catholic education can appear at times, the competence, dedication, and good humor exhibited by my research participants left me more optimistic at the end of my study than I was at the beginning.

As a former board chair of an elementary school within the AoB, I have informed opinions regarding the governance of Catholic schools, as well as the roles and responsibilities of school principals and board chairs. Generally, my experience as a board chair strengthened my role as the researcher in this study. I have a working knowledge of the role, and, due to my

experience, participants were willing to openly discuss their perceptions of their experiences with me. However, this personal involvement and experience in the subject area also represented a noteworthy source of bias and a limitation of this study.

My approach to addressing any bias in conducting this research was to involve as many people as possible in its planning and execution, helping me to identify any partiality I might have in evaluating the data. For example, in July of 2019, I attended a conference hosted by the NCEA in Indianapolis, IN. In a breakout session, I was able to conduct a pilot test of the data collection methods and sources that were used in the research. This pilot testing was useful for rewording confusing questions, eliminating duplicate questions, and ensuring the tools gathered accurate data.

Prior to data collection, I contacted two former AoB elementary school board chairs that I had worked with in the AoB's Western Collaborative of Board Chairs. During these calls, I was able to refine my research design, postulate some potential findings, and test some of my survey questions. Before I scoped the research to the AoB, I engaged school officials in more than a dozen (arch)dioceses across the U.S., using them as a sounding board for my research ideas. They provided invaluable feedback as I finalized my approach to the study. Similarly, staff researchers at FADICA reviewed my survey and made many suggestions that were incorporated into the final version.

During my doctoral coursework at Hood College, I was able to practice and improve my interviewing, coding, and survey development skills. For one of my doctoral courses, I conducted a qualitative research study of a school board in the AoB. The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of leadership styles, communications styles, and motivation on the board's effectiveness. Data were collected via a board self-evaluation and an evaluation of the

chair, as well as through recorded interviews of five board officers and members. This data were coded and analyzed to develop case recommendations and research conclusions. This study was a great rehearsal for me and helped me to think through the various obstacles that I would face during my dissertation research.

Given my formal training and experience as an executive coach, it was helpful to compare the mechanics and aims of coaching versus interviewing. I have learned that the interviewing relationship is a partnership between the interviewer and the subject. Similarly, good coaching is an active collaboration. Both approaches emphasize respect for the respondent/client (promises of confidentiality, asking permission to broach sensitive subject matter). Finding the question to pose, without leading the client/respondent, is equally difficult for both and takes practice. I did note that a difference in goals posed a potential problem for me, as the aim of interviewing is answering the research question, while the welfare of the client is the coach's main concern. It was, at times, a challenge for me to pursue research aims without trying to counsel the person on governance issues based on my experience. Overall, these reflections reminded me of the need to develop mutually beneficial relationships with the study participants.

### **Research Questions**

As this study investigated the role of boards in effective governance of Catholic elementary schools in the AoB, the central research question was, "How do principals' and board chairs' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities affect the schools' success with regards to academic excellence and operational vitality?"

#### **Sub-questions:**

- In what ways do Catholic elementary school boards matter to the success of the schools?

- What differences exist between what is said to be going on with regard to governance and what actually transpires?
- In what ways do governing documents (e.g., bylaws) matter to board and school success?
- What tensions do principals and board members experience in governing a Catholic elementary school?
- What gaps exist between the principals' and board members' perceptions of their leadership roles and how does this phenomenon manifest itself?

### Participants

With the permission of the Archdiocese of Baltimore (AoB)'s Department of Catholic Schools, an anonymous survey was sent to the principals and boards chairs in the AoB. Table 2 describes the demographics of the respondents to the survey, while Table 3 describes the schools and boards of the survey respondents.

**Table 2**

#### *Demographics of AoB Survey Respondents*

|                          | Principals (n = 19) |            | Board Chairs (n = 15) |            |
|--------------------------|---------------------|------------|-----------------------|------------|
|                          | Frequency           | Percentage | Frequency             | Percentage |
| <b>Gender</b>            |                     |            |                       |            |
| Male                     | 6                   | 32%        | 9                     | 60%        |
| Female                   | 13                  | 68%        | 6                     | 40%        |
| <b>Race</b>              |                     |            |                       |            |
| Black/African American   | 0                   | 0%         | 1                     | 7%         |
| Hispanic/Latino          | 1                   | 5%         | 0                     | 0%         |
| White                    | 18                  | 95%        | 13                    | 87%        |
| Prefer not to Answer     | 0                   | 0%         | 1                     | 7%         |
| <b>Age</b>               |                     |            |                       |            |
| 25-34                    | 1                   | 5%         | 1                     | 7%         |
| 35-44                    | 5                   | 26%        | 2                     | 13%        |
| 45-54                    | 7                   | 37%        | 2                     | 13%        |
| 55-64                    | 2                   | 11%        | 4                     | 27%        |
| 65+                      | 4                   | 21%        | 6                     | 40%        |
| <b>Years in Position</b> |                     |            |                       |            |
| <1 year                  | 3                   | 16%        | 1                     | 7%         |
| 1 year to <3 years       | 6                   | 32%        | 9                     | 60%        |
| 3 years to <5 years      | 1                   | 5%         | 5                     | 33%        |
| 5 years to <10 years     | 4                   | 21%        | 0                     | 0%         |
| 10 years+                | 5                   | 26%        | 0                     | 0%         |

*Note.* This table summarizes the demographic information collected from the survey respondents in the AoB.

**Table 3**

*School/Board Descriptions Provided by AoB Survey Respondents*

|                            | Principals (n=19) | Board Chairs (n=15) |
|----------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| <b>School Type</b>         |                   |                     |
| Parish/Parochial           | 12                | 10                  |
| Regional                   | 1                 | 0                   |
| Diocesan                   | 4                 | 5                   |
| Other                      | 2                 | 0                   |
| <b>Blue Ribbon School</b>  |                   |                     |
| Yes                        | 3                 | 6                   |
| No                         | 16                | 9                   |
| <b>Executive Authority</b> |                   |                     |
| Pastor                     | 10                | 5                   |
| President                  | 1                 | 1                   |
| Principal                  | 5                 | 9                   |
| Other                      | 3                 | 0                   |
| <b>Board Type</b>          |                   |                     |
| Advisory                   | 12                | 8                   |
| Consultative               | 4                 | 2                   |
| Limited Jurisdiction       | 3                 | 3                   |
| Fiduciary                  | 0                 | 1                   |
| Other                      | 0                 | 1                   |

*Note.* This table summarizes school and board data collected from the survey respondents in the AoB.

In addition, the survey provided an opportunity for respondents to share their contact information if they were interested in further participating in the study. Three principals supplied their contact information. Snowball sampling was used to identify two additional principals, and the principals then helped to recruit their board chairs as participants. All participants experienced the phenomenon, were interested in understanding the meaning of the phenomenon, and were agreeable to participating in a one-hour semi-structured interview, which was recorded. Table 4 describes the study participants, while Table 5 provides the pseudonyms chosen for the participants and their schools. The purposefully selected sample included principals and board

chairs from five Catholic elementary schools in the AoB. Each of the selected schools has an advisory board, so this governance model became the focus of this research study.

Due to the COVID-19 crisis and Hood College prohibition against in-person qualitative data collection, all interviews took place via a web-based platform (Zoom). All participants were from Catholic parish schools in the AoB. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants to protect their identity.

**Table 4**

*Demographics of Study Participants*

|                          | <b>Principals (n=5)</b> | <b>Board Chairs (n=5)</b> |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Gender</b>            |                         |                           |
| Male                     | 2                       | 1                         |
| Female                   | 3                       | 4                         |
| <b>Race</b>              |                         |                           |
| White                    | 5                       | 5                         |
| <b>Age</b>               |                         |                           |
| 25-34                    |                         |                           |
| 35-44                    | 2                       |                           |
| 45-54                    | 2                       |                           |
| 55-64                    |                         | 2                         |
| 65+                      | 1                       | 3                         |
| <b>Highest Education</b> |                         |                           |
| Associates/Bachelors     |                         | 2                         |
| Masters                  | 5                       | 3                         |
| <b>Years in Position</b> |                         |                           |
| <1 year                  |                         |                           |
| 1 year to <3 years       | 1                       | 3                         |
| 3 years to <5 years      |                         | 1                         |
| 5 years to <10 years     | 4                       | 1                         |
| 10 years+                |                         |                           |

*Note.* This table outlines the demographic information collected from the study participants.

**Table 5**

*Pseudonyms for Schools, Principals, and Board Chairs Participating in the Study*

| <b>Schools</b> | <b>Principal Pseudonym</b> | <b>Board Chair Pseudonym</b> |
|----------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| A              | Christine                  | Marian                       |
| B              | Sharon                     | Jaime                        |
| C              | Peter                      | Debbie                       |
| D              | Janice                     | Kellie                       |
| E              | Mark                       | Martin                       |

*Note.* This table lists the pseudonyms used for the schools, principals, and board chairs participating in the study (in random order).

### **Data Collection Instruments and Procedures**

#### **Principal-Board Engagement Survey**

As I scoped my research, I worked with (arch)diocesan school offices across the U.S. to send an anonymous principal-board engagement survey (Appendix D) to elementary school principals and board chairs across the U.S., receiving 173 responses (104 principals, 69 board chairs). With the guidance of my doctoral committee, I decided to focus on the AoB, using the data provided by the 34 respondents (19 principals, 15 board chairs). The data collected from outside of the AoB proved useful in further grounding the research, sharpening my understanding of the constructs, and informing the implications for future research section of Chapter 5 of this paper.

As Table 5 indicates, survey responses from the AoB represented a variety of school board models, including advisory, consultative, limited jurisdiction, fiduciary, and other. Most of the AoB survey respondents identified themselves as serving on advisory boards. In addition, the principals and board chairs who volunteered to be interviewed for this study came from five schools that each had advisory boards. Thus, the focus of this study evolved to be advisory



school boards. It should be noted that all survey responses from the AoB (not just from members of advisory boards) were considered where a more holistic view of the AoB's boards proved valuable to more fully understanding the relationship dynamics of these boards.

This survey was designed by the researcher to gather data on elementary school board engagement in the during the COVID-19 crisis and to determine who had the responsibility in a variety of areas of governance and the nature and level of support provided by the boards. Additional survey questions captured perceptions of leadership role clarity, value of the board, and board activity levels during the COVID-19 pandemic. Open-ended questions asked the principals and board chairs to provide the most important reason to have a board, a description of their leadership style, and one change they would make to improve board effectiveness. The final question of the survey asked the participant to contact the researcher if they wished to participate further in the study.

The survey was piloted with the researcher's dissertation committee members, Hood College doctoral faculty, and Catholic school officials in various (arch)dioceses. Also, I received valuable input from staff researchers from FADICA, NCEA, and work colleagues with a background in qualitative social sciences research.

### **Observation of Board Meetings**

Two of the participant schools (Schools A and B) granted me permission to observe a school board meeting. Observing the dynamics between the principal and board chair, especially with regard to role expectations and decision-making styles, helped to ground the research and contextualize key relationships on the board for me. Emerson et al. (2011) write about "participant observation" as a way to understand and describe social settings. The researcher must enter into a social setting and record the experience in a systematic manner.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was necessary to join the meetings virtually via a web-based platform (Zoom). The observation protocol I developed (Appendix K) recorded a description of the setting, the chronology of events in 15-minute intervals, the interactions, any decisions made, non-verbal communication, participant responses, and how the meeting ended. The virtual nature of the meeting made collecting some of this data more challenging, but generally, it was an effective means of data collection and added to my understanding of the principal-board chair and board dynamics.

### **Interview Protocol**

As Weiss (1994) notes, “interviewing gives us access to the observations of others” (p. 1). By understanding the interior experiences of others, we can learn about what they perceived, their interpretations of these perceptions, and the impact on their thoughts and feelings. Qualitative interviewing can lead to a “fuller development of information” and help achieve more “coherence, depth, and density of the material each respondent provides” (Weiss, 1994, p. 3).

The semi-structured interviews for this qualitative case study were conducted during web-based meetings with principals and board chairs at five selected Catholic elementary schools in the AoB (Appendix H), each of which had advisory school boards. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Hood College required that no data collection could be made in person, so all interviews were conducted virtually, using a web-based conferencing platform (Zoom). I prepared for the interviews by reviewing the schools’ websites and the biographies of the principals and board chairs, when available. The interview participants were initially recruited via a question in the survey asking for volunteers for the study. After this, snowball sampling (or chain sampling, chain-referral sampling, referral sampling) was also employed

(Appendix E). This sampling approach is a nonprobability sampling technique where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances. Thus, the sample group is said to grow like a rolling snowball. All participants received and signed an informed consent form approved by the Hood College Institutional Review Board (Appendix G).

The interviews were prearranged so that participants would know in advance what was expected. The participants were asked ten questions (Appendix H) that were provided ahead of the interviews, so they would have time to consider their responses. Participants answered questions such as “How does your official role as principal/chair fit with others’ perceptions of your role?” and “How do you communicate with other leaders on the board?”

The principals and board chairs participating in the interviews were given the option of one 60-minute interview or two 30-minute interviews. All participants opted for the 60-minute format. The interviews with principals and board chairs were formally conducted over a 4-month period. As needed, a follow-up interview was conducted after the initial interview. These follow-up interviews provided opportunities for clarification of responses from the initial interview and generated ideas to be developed during the research, serving as member checks to confirm my understanding of the data collected.

### **Ranking Activity**

Ranking activities require participants, individually or in groups, to prioritize competing alternatives and explain their choices. They are an excellent method for defining values, discussing conflicting points of view, and building consensus. Weller and Romney (1988) discuss a variety of data collection formats, including comparisons and rating scales. These approaches can improve the data collected, as well as the process for interpreting and analyzing the data.

A ranking activity (Appendix I) was conducted after the interviews. The participants were asked to examine a list of 12 qualities of successful board leaders. They were then prompted to select the three qualities they found most important to board success (1 as most important, 2 as the next important, etc.), listing them in rank order. They were also asked to identify the one leadership quality they found least important to board success. Finally, they were asked why they made the selections they did.

### **Self-anchoring Scale Activity**

A self-anchoring scale was used to provide a “first-person point of view, as opposed to the third-person point of view which assumes an objectively definable reality which, except for error, is the same for all” (Kilpatrick & Cantril, 1960, p. 158). A self-anchoring scale is an activity in which participants are asked to describe, in their own words, the top and bottom extremes of a phenomenon. For this study, participants were asked to describe their ideal principal/board chair working relationship, as well as their idea of the worst possible working relationship (Appendix J). A scale from one (worst) to 10 (ideal) was created. The participants were asked where they would place their current working relationship on that scale, as well as where they would place their experiences within the last five years. Participants were also asked what the relationship would be in five years. Further, participants were asked why they believe the numbers on the scale vary or stay the same.

### **Demographic Information**

As part of the interviews, the principals and board chairs were asked to complete demographic information questions (Appendix F). Demographic data were used only to create an aggregate that describes the group being studied. It was necessary to describe the group since an

aim of qualitative research is to provide potential transferability. For this study, a participant's demographic data were not shared individually.

### **Reflexive Journal**

The reflexive or reflective journal in qualitative research is a written record by the researchers themselves and is written throughout the research process. According to Russell and Kelly (2002), keeping self-reflective journals during the analysis process facilitates reflexivity by examining "personal assumptions and goals" and clarifying "individual belief systems and subjectivities" (p. 2). The reflective practice encourages researchers to consider and address preconceptions, experiences, actions, and rationales during the research process.

For this study, I added my thoughts and observations to a journal after each interview and board meeting I attended and whenever an insight to my research occurred to me. This journal was a log of my evolving perceptions and feelings, day-to-day procedures, methodological decision points, and day-to-day personal introspections. The aim of keeping this journal was to improve the rigor and reliability of the research and to remove any bias.

### **Document Analysis**

Document analysis is a form of qualitative research in which documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning around a particular topic of interest (Bowen, 2009). It is an efficient and effective method for gathering data. Documents are readily accessible and are a stable, reliable data source since they remain unchanged by the research process.

Bylaws are used to guide the board's actions and decisions. They are helpful in preventing or resolving conflict and disagreements. They can also protect the organization from potential problems by clearly outlining rules around authority levels, rights, and expectations. Upon request, four of the five schools provided their board bylaws. I reviewed these documents,

performing a gap analysis between these governing documents (expectations) and actual practice (reality).

### **Data Analysis**

Making meaning of the data began with the transcription and organization of material contained in digital recordings and field notes from the semi-structured interviews, observations, survey responses, and document analysis. The transcripts enable the researcher to identify patterns in the evidence (data) and the causal links to be analyzed and explained (Yin, 2015) and therefore, gain a deeper understanding of what had been studied. Using the constant comparative method developed by Bogdan and Biklen (2003), Glaser and Strauss (1967), Merriam (1998), Miles et al. (2020), Silverman (2014), and Yin (2015), comparisons within each case and among the cases were made.

The purpose of gathering data from interviews, observations, a self-anchoring scale activity, a ranking activity, and a survey was to triangulate the responses from the data sources to determine the current perceptions of school leadership roles of the principal and board chair. The data gathered was coded and analyzed using the charting method. According to Saldana (2016), “Charting enables the analyst to scan and construct patterns from the codes, to develop initial assertions or propositions, and to explore the possible dimensions which might be found in the range of codes” (p. 229).

### **Boundaries/Delimitations**

This study relied on the experiences and perceptions of Catholic elementary school principals and board chairs in five Catholic elementary schools in the AoB. Only volunteers from Catholic elementary schools in the AoB were considered for this study. Since a multiple site case study method was utilized, and the sample was not randomly selected (non-probabilistic), the

results were not generalizable to all Catholic elementary schools. However, it is hoped that consumers of this research will see something of themselves in the descriptions and analysis. The verisimilitude of the study, then, was an approximation toward or closeness to the truth about the way the world really is. A questions-methods matrix was used to document data collected from a range of sources, using a variety of methods (observation, interviews, focus groups, participant journaling), employing triangulation (Maxwell, 2013) to increase the trustworthiness of this qualitative study.

The multiple site case study approach has a number of other potential weaknesses that must be addressed through the research methodology. There is the possibility of errors of memory and judgment. It is a subjective method rather than objective. Also, due to a narrow scope, discrimination and bias can occur. Relatively speaking, far less research has been done on Catholic elementary schools than has been done on Catholic high schools or colleges/universities. Most of the research done has been quantitative in nature. As a Catholic elementary school board chair, I brought a unique understanding to the investigation and had access to data sources in the elementary school community of the AoB.

Canon law allows ecclesial officials to delegate responsibilities at their discretion, so infinite configurations of authority are possible. Most often, pastors govern Catholic schools with authority delegated to them by the bishop. However, the amount that individual pastors actively engage in the governance activities of the schools varies greatly due to a number of factors, including a growing trend toward more collaborative and decentralized decision-making in the schools. While the pastors remain a critical partner in Catholic school governance, along with the principals and board chairs, their specific role was not examined in depth for this research.

The COVID-19 crisis presented a unique challenge to the data collection for this research. Due to social distancing and other precautions necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, Hood College mandated that all interviews and observations be conducted virtually via a web-based platform. I used Zoom for all of my interviews and observations. At first, I was concerned about ease of use, call quality, and reliability issues while collecting qualitative data for my study. Although a few participants experienced slight technical difficulties, when asked, most described their interview experience as satisfactory. While I found that virtual data collection was superior to nonvisual communication, especially with regards to reading facial cues and other non-verbal signs, it is unclear if anything was lost in translation. To build rapport and facilitate effective communication, I shared my interview questions ahead of the interviews and made use of the various file and screen sharing options. Despite my concerns, Zoom seemed to be a viable tool for collecting qualitative data. I agree with Sullivan who noted, “The potential for video conferencing as a research tool is almost unlimited” (2012, p. 60).

### **Trustworthiness**

Before my research began, I addressed the reliability of the data sources by establishing a pilot study of individuals. The test group consisted of a Catholic elementary school’s principal and members of the school board. After the pilot study was completed, all participants were asked to comment on the survey, interview questions, self-anchoring scale, and ranking activity with regards clarity and effectiveness. Based on the group’s feedback, appropriate changes were made to the data collection methods for this study.

Patton (2002, p. 244) observed that “multiple sources of information are sought and used because no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective...By using a combination of observations, interviewing and document analysis, the



fieldworker is able to use different data sources to validate, cross-check findings.” And so, for this study, data were collected from a survey, interviews, exercises, field notes, reflexive journals, direct observation, and document analysis. As Maxwell (2013) recommends, triangulation, feedback, and rich data were all deployed for dependability.

Different triangulations methods were employed to corroborate the data collected and the findings (Table 6). Mathison (1988), who viewed triangulation as effective, stated “that research and evaluation will be improved by such a practice” (p. 13). In addition, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), combining methods allows the strengths of one method to compensate for the weaknesses of another. Triangulation was used to minimize errors, such as loaded interview questions and biased responses, within the methods. Patton (2015) explained that using multiple methods provides “cross-data validity checks” (p. 316).

I collected data from multiple sources, surveying and interviewing participants from different schools in different locations in the AoB over a period of several months. I summarized my handwritten notes after each interview to capture data not represented in the audio transcript. Individual interview data provided triangulation when examined in context with the ranking and self-anchoring scale exercises. I also employed multiple methods to study the phenomenon to decrease the deficiencies and biases that come from any single method. These data collection methods included interviews, observations, self-anchoring scales, ranking activities, and a board engagement survey. This approach is a variation on data triangulation, with an emphasis on using data collected by different methods.

To decrease the likelihood of bias in gathering, reporting, and analyzing the study data, I asked a research colleague to review my research and provide feedback. This approach helped to confirm the findings, enhancing their credibility. Further, I employed “member checking” when I

asked the study participants to confirm my study findings for accuracy and resonance with their experiences. All 10 of the participants responded, saying that they agreed with my findings.

Finally, I used theory triangulation to look at the study phenomenon from different perspectives. By evaluating the principal-board chair dynamic through the lenses of different leadership models, I was able to identify different issues than would not have been possible using a single-theory approach.

**Table 6**

*Research Question/Data Source Matrix*

|  | Interviews | Exercises | Survey | Observations | Document Review |
|--|------------|-----------|--------|--------------|-----------------|
| <b>Research Questions</b>  |            |           |        |              |                 |
| RQ 1. How do principals' and board chairs' perceptions of their roles, responsibilities, authorities, and accountabilities affect the schools' success with regards to academic excellence and operational vitality? | x          | x         | x      | x            |                 |
| RQ 2. In what ways do Catholic elementary school boards matter to the success of the schools?  | x          | x         | x      | x            |                 |
| RQ 3. What differences exist between what is said to be going on with regard to governance and what actually transpires?   | x          | x         |        | x            | x               |
| RQ 4. In what ways do governing documents (e.g., bylaws) matter to board and school success?   | x          |           |        |              | x               |
| RQ 5. What tensions do principals and board members experience in governing a Catholic elementary school?  | x          | x         |        | x            |                 |
| RQ 6. What gaps exist between the principals' and board members' perceptions of their leadership roles and how does this phenomenon manifest itself?   | x          | x         | x      | x            |                 |

*Note.* This matrix associates the data source used with each of the research questions.

## Conclusion

The qualitative methodology fostered a creative, open-ended research approach. This approach focused on the lived experiences of the study participants, capturing their attitudes and perspectives. While challenging, incorporating the human element added a richness and depth

and complexity to this research. Chapter 4 outlines the results of the study. The results include supporting quotes to illustrate the critical factors impacting the principal-board chair relationship in the context of Catholic elementary school governance.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to answer the research questions based on the collected and analyzed data explored in this study. As discussed in the previous chapter, this study collected data using semi-structured interviews, a ranking activity, a self-anchoring scale, direct observations, document analysis, and a school board engagement survey. I conducted the interviews and research activity via a web-based platform due to mandatory quarantining caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and at the direction of the Hood College Institutional Review Board. Each participant chose a pseudonym and each school was given a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. Coding, including the application of the charting method, was used to determine the findings and to summarize and compare the data collected in this qualitative study.

### **The Analysis Process**

To chart and code the data, I organized each interview question and activity according to the participants' transcribed responses. After organizing the information, I read all of the responses and highlighted words or phrases that could be used as codes for the questions, such as 'collaboration' and 'trust.' After I coded the transcriptions, I used a chart to identify patterns within the codes and to determine which codes could be combined (Appendix L). For example, I combined 'collaboration' and 'shared leadership' because they both involve working with others as governance partners. Once I compiled the charts, I wrote an executive summary of each response/activity and summarized the themes that emerged based on what the principals and board chairs shared with me (Appendix L). Finally, I organized the charts according to the research questions and determined the concepts that emerged for each research question. By examining the data in this manner, I discovered patterns that were used to develop themes for the

research questions. Themes from the data explained what was happening and suggested why something was done a particular way based on the words of the participants.

### **Research Question 1**

**How do principals' and board chairs' perceptions of their roles, responsibilities, authorities, and accountabilities affect the schools' success with regards to academic excellence and operational vitality?**

The first question explored how the principals and board chairs saw their roles, responsibilities, authorities, and accountabilities with regard to successful school governance. To answer this question, I included questions in the interview protocol and the school board engagement survey.

#### **Principal and Board Chairs Reported Role Clarity**

The vast majority of the thirty-four AoB principals and board chairs that responded to Survey Question 17 either agreed or strongly agreed that roles were clear (Table 7).

**Table 7**

*AoB Responses to Survey Question 17*

| <b>Survey Question</b>  | <b>Strongly agree</b> | <b>Agree</b> | <b>Neither agree nor disagree</b> | <b>Disagree</b> | <b>Strongly disagree</b> |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| 17. The roles of the Principal and the Board Chair are clear. | 17                    | 15           | 1                                 | 1               | 0                        |

*Note.* This table summarizes the responses to Survey Question #17 from the Archdiocese of Baltimore (AoB) respondents.

In the interview protocol, both principals and board chairs were asked to describe their leadership roles and responsibilities in school governance. The interview participants also generally reported that their roles were clear. There was consensus as to the general boundaries of their roles. They reserved the academic leadership role for the principal, emphasizing that academics is a line not to be crossed in the principal-board chair dynamic:

*Well my role and responsibility is to manage and lead the school through its day-to-day workings. I think that, to be very simple, her [board chair] role is to run the board.*  
(Principal Christine)

*...they [the board] don't run the school...* (Principal Sharon)

*...for me, [the principal's role is] the instructional piece."* (Principal Mark)

*[the board chair role includes] running clear, clean, concise meetings and market[ing] the school...[the principal must be a] role model for Catholic identity and Catholic education...* (Board Chair Jaime)

Some participants shared Board Chair Marian's admonition against "intruding in areas that you know are not under your purview. Like intruding into a faculty issue or ... day-to-day operations of [the] school or...the educational program."

*I went to school and learned how to do the academic piece...[the board chair] can tell me about the budget and marketing and all those things I don't know about, but don't tell me how to academically run my school. I've got that figured out....Financial development, marketing, all of that is board territory, but again, don't cross...the barbed wire...[into] the academics and instructional piece.* (Principal Janice)

*[in matters of academics and the day-to-day operations,] you defer...you're not the authority. It really is [the principal's] thing....I don't deal with what [the principal] does with the school, with academics. That's not our area.* (Board Chair Kellie)

### **Board Purpose Needs Clarification**

Surprisingly, role clarity was not an issue for the participants, but questions did arise as to the purpose for a board and the need for a clear understanding of the board's purpose. The roles identified by both the principals and the board chairs were rather limited in scope, adding to the question of board purpose. The responses to Survey Questions 18 and 19 further suggest that many principals and board chairs struggle with the purpose of boards as they evaluated the effectiveness of their boards as a resource to the schools (Table 8).

**Table 8**

*AoB Responses to Survey Questions 18 and 19*

| Survey Question  | Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|--|----------------|-------|----------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| 18. This Board is an effective means of utilizing the expertise of lay people to enhance the governance of the school. | 9              | 15    | 6                          | 4        | 0                 |
| 19. The Board has been a valuable resource to the school during the COVID-19 crisis.                                   | 5              | 13    | 10                         | 4        | 1                 |

*Note.* This table summarizes responses to Survey Questions #18 and #19 from respondents from the AoB.

The theme of boards being “underutilized” and needing greater purpose emerged during the interviews:

*...boards are greatly under utilized...the more we all understand the purpose of the board, the more effective they'll be.* (Principal Sharon)

*[I had to talk board members from wanting to resign] ...maybe they thought [the board] would be more integrated into decision-making...we're not a decision-making [body]....It's just governance, there's nothing we can do about it. We're just an advisory board.* (Board Chair Marian)

*...if you don't give [the board] a job, okay, it's just going to turn into a social club....[the board lost several board members because they needed] to do something...* (Board Chair Kellie)

Another theme that emerged during the interviews was that of “frustration” with the processes and hierarchy that are part of a board’s working environment:

*[the] leadership and fiduciary responsibilities you give to these boards, sometimes...becomes [a] direct conflict with [the Archdiocese]....[the boards] can get disenchanted a little bit, because they're like “We go to these board seminars, and you tell us to take ownership and responsibility, but sometimes we're kind of trumped by what downtown says.”* (Principal Peter)

*...frustration [is the word] to describe boards discussing small matters, such as spending \$50 more on a cleaning service...[this can be attributed] to boards not being asked the right questions in many instances.* (Board Chair Martin)

## **Research Question 2**

### **In what ways do Catholic elementary school boards matter to the success of the schools?**

The second question examined the principals' and board chairs' perceptions of how school boards impact school success. Various data collection methods were used to research these perceptions, including interviews and the board engagement survey.

I expected the principals and board chairs to talk more about the traditional duties of a board. To be sure, they mentioned the board's compliance-oriented roles, such as finances, budget, and fundraising—technical challenges. But when asked how boards matter, their responses tended to focus on the advice and support that boards provide, with more of an emphasis on adaptive challenges. Technical problems, while often challenging, can be solved applying existing know-how and the organization's current problem-solving processes. Adaptive challenges refer to situations where there are no known solutions to the problem or cases where there are too many solutions but no clear choices (Heifetz et al., 2009). These challenges are fluid and change with circumstances.

### **Principals and Board Chairs Describe Value in Terms of Advice, Support, and Building/Sustaining Networks**

The principals uniformly appreciated the advice and support provided by their advisory boards in helping their schools flourish, as well as assistance with what could be categorized as building and sustaining networks--information gathering, communications, and outreach. Principals recognized that members of advisory boards provide a third-party perspective to the principals, especially in times of crisis such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. In a similar vein, Board Chair Marian acknowledged that while her board members are not decision makers, they are "more influential than you think." As an advisory board, she noted, "if you don't like



something, then you'll speak up," indicating both advisory and accountability functions are provided by the board.

Survey Questions 12 and 13 asked both principals and board chairs the number of monthly contacts they had with each other both before and since the COVID-19 crisis. Interestingly, both before and since the crisis, the most common response was two contacts per month, while the overall reported number of meetings was very consistent. Table 9 shows that while board meetings were cancelled due to COVID-19, a significant number of principals and board chairs reported that additional board and committee meetings were held during the crisis. It was also reported that many boards took on additional responsibilities and provided strategic advice. The data suggested that in some cases, the contribution of the boards went beyond their normal duties, and board support continued to be valued by school leadership, even during a crisis.

**Table 9**

*AoB Responses to Survey Question 14: Which, if any, has the Board done due to the COVID-19 crisis? Please select all that apply.*

| <b>Actions Taken</b>                 | <b>Principals<br/>(n=19)</b> | <b>Board Chairs<br/>(n=15)</b> | <b>Totals</b> |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------|
| Cancelled scheduled Board meetings   | 10                           | 9                              | 19            |
| Held additional Board meetings       | 6                            | 6                              | 12            |
| Held additional committee meetings   | 4                            | 3                              | 7             |
| Taken on additional responsibilities | 2                            | 2                              | 4             |
| Offered strategic advice             | 6                            | 8                              | 14            |

**Note.** This table captures responses to Survey Question #14 from respondents in the AoB.

### **Advice**

Principal Christine appreciated “[the board’s] knowledge and their perspectives so much because it gets me thinking about things.” Expounding on this response, Christine said:

*I think if you have people you trust to talk to and they trust you...it can be really great....Even just as advisory, a great sound board to get different perspectives and look at something a little bit bigger than what's happening in the building.*

As another example, Principal Janice added that at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the board was “brainstorming things that the board could do for the teachers.” The board recommended concrete ways to express appreciation for the teachers. These expressions of gratitude, from other than the principal, carried additional weight and demonstrated another value that boards can add to the school.

Board Chair Jaime saw the board as filling the gap in education and experience of the principals and pastors, stating “[the principal and pastor] cannot do [it] alone.” Jaime further suggested that boards can “[provide] a safe, confidential forum for principals and pastors to be creative.” Jaime amplified her response by stating:

*...I don't want to hear the best of what [the principals] have....I want to hear what [the principal is] struggling with....what do[es] the [principal need advice on...what do[es] [the principal] need guidance on....what is keeping [the principal] up at night....That's what I want to hear. And that's what I want the board to talk about....We are here to support you and you don't need support with things you're doing well.*

Board Chair Martin made an interesting point regarding the collaborative nature of the principal-board chair relationship by emphasizing the need for the principal to co-create with the board. Martin expressed doubt about whether the principals were “asking the boards the right questions,” suggesting the board’s role as internal consultant and advisor.

## **Support**

Principal Sharon repeated the words “support” and “supportive” in describing the value added by boards, highlighting a certain loneliness that comes with her leadership role. She then expanded on her perspective, by identifying a mentor/coach role for the board chair and, by extension, the board:

*...[the board] should at least assist with setting budgets and things like that....they can definitely bring in their expertise and help [through] coaching[ing] ....A principal in many ways, especially...in the Catholic school system...can be an island, just a one-person show....It can be really helpful to have [the board provide] that kind of coaching and expertise.*

Several principals identified board chair characteristics and values beyond those usually associated with governance, which seemed to address the social-emotional needs of the principal and school community. For instance, the terms “kind” and “good-hearted” were emphasized by Principal Sharon. Principal Janice used the term “down to earth” to describe her chair, suggesting to the researcher the values of humility and openness. Principal Mark spoke of “vulnerability” regarding his board chair, sharing that the board chair “validated my feelings, making sure that she’s always very empathetic.”

### **Building/Sustaining Networks**

Principal Peter is “comfortable” with any beneficial interaction between the board and the school staff. Specifically, value was seen in the board securing “feedback” that the staff might not readily share with the principal, as their supervisor. Further, Peter noted that “people do reach out to [the board],” so the board can help the principal by answering questions, disseminating information, and explaining school policies. In some instances, Peter offered that boards help to insulate the principals from undue criticism for necessary but unpopular decisions or policies, such as “collecting tuition.”

Principal Mark thought that the board “need[ed] to be the ones communicating to the parent community.” Mark saw an important board contribution in terms of communicating “trust...[and] confidence in the school....Because so often I think, if the principal’s [the] only one communicating, they turn a deaf [ear] to it.” In addition, he described a nuanced perspective

on the role of the board regarding enrollment and representing the school to the broader community:

*...the board has to match, to some degree, the community that it's serving so they can understand some of those dynamics....as the board becomes more diverse, we've been able to have some conversations about race, about equity, and how we want to expand our reach to pull students from different areas of Baltimore City, and to pull students of different socio-economic backgrounds, not just middle, upper class.*

It was recognized that advisory boards can help to expand the school's network by providing and leveraging access to their existing personal and professional networks, as well as by forging new alliances. For example, Mark appreciated the board "being able to have those conversations....Then being able to access or leverage the resources that they have, the people...they know." Board Chair Debbie identified the value provided by the board in seeking to develop strategic partnerships. Debbie's board "reached out to a local high school" for technology support and is considering forming an "ad hoc committee of grant people to look for grants" for the school.

### **Research Question 3**

**What differences exist between what is said to be going on with regard to governance and what actually transpires?**

Differences were identified between the perceived expectations of the board role, often based on previous experience and the school board bylaws, and the reality of decision-making in the schools. Data were collected from a review of an AoB guidance document, the interviews, and a survey. The following section focuses on the nature of these perceived differences in the context of the school board governance model.

The most recent AoB school board manual (*Embracing the Vision: Manual for Catholic School Boards*, 2016) identifies the overriding responsibility of the School Board, which is to

assure that the assets and personnel of the school are used to promote and strengthen the school and the parish community. No data were collected that disputed this purpose statement. There were, however, differences in perception as to how best to promote and strengthen the school and community. While alignment generally existed between the principals and board chairs as to the part each plays in governance, external guidance from the AoB tends to set expectations that conflict with the reality of advisory board governance.

## **Decision-Making**

### ***Embracing the Vision: Manual for Catholic School Boards***

The AoB board manual describes the purpose of the board to include working with the Pastor and Principal on policy development and implementation in specified areas such as Catholic identity, finance, development/institutional advancement, facilities, community (school/parish) and public relations/marketing (*Embracing the Vision: Manual for Catholic School Boards*, 2016). The schools that are part of this study all have advisory boards, as do the majority of elementary schools in the AoB. Advisory boards are responsible for making recommendations to the principal or pastor in these areas.

The designation of “advisory” seems to preclude any decision-making authority for the board. However, confusingly, decision-making is called out as a board responsibility in *Embracing the Vision* and is described in some detail (*Embracing the Vision: Manual for Catholic School Boards*, 2016). Even the suggested opening prayer for board meetings, *A Board Member’s Prayer*, asks for help in making decisions: “Help me to approach issues with an open, inquiring mind, free from prejudice, with my spirit depending on yours for the strength to make hard decisions” (p. 4).

The language used in the board manual imbues the board with some degree of responsibility for making decisions and provides guidance in the process to be used. The board manual directs boards to use the consensus method of decision-making and discusses the need for the chair to call for a vote when consensus cannot be reached. In general, decision-making by consensus involves prayer, reflection, data analysis, open discussion of positive and negative consequences of particular actions, confirmation of an intended course of action determined by the group, and, in the end, the consent of everyone involved. In a consensus process, each member is expected to speak to the issue under consideration unless there is a conflict of interest. As views are discussed, it is important that all members share their ideas and participate in the decision. After discussion has run its course, the chair, in the role of facilitator, will ask the membership if they feel that a consensus can be reached.

### ***Interviews***

When asked during the interviews how school boards matter to the success of the school, none of the principals or board chairs interviewed cited decision-making as a board function. In fact, several of the participants indicated that decision-making was not a significant part of the board's contribution to school success:

*[The board] doesn't run the school. They don't make personnel decisions, for instance...* (Principal Sharon)

*So I thought [the board] would be more integrated into decision-making and that's just not how the board operates. We're not a decision-making [body].* (Board Chair Marian)

*We're not a deliberative board, we are an advisory board.* (Board Chair Jaime)

### ***Survey***

Survey Question #20 asked respondents to identify the most important reason to have a board. Of the 19 AoB principals that responded to this question, only four mentioned decision-

making as a reason to have a board. Two of those were boards of limited jurisdiction while only two were advisory boards. Both responses from principals of advisory boards focused on “group” decisions, made “through discussion and collaboration,” not independent board action. Of the 15 AoB board chairs that responded to this question, none mentioned decision-making as a reason to have a board. Most board chair responses (11 of 15) focused on providing the principal with advice, resources, and support. Four others mentioned “oversight, prepar[ing] the budget, pay[ing] more attention to...Catholic education, and ensur[ing] that the school continues to successfully serve the families and children.”

### **Resources and Board Training**

There appears to be a gap between the actual functions that the board performs and the perceptions of the resources and training that are provided to support these functions. When asked during interviews to identify resources available to help with discharging governance responsibilities, the board chairs generally seemed satisfied with the guidance documents provided by the AoB, board bylaws, NCEA publications, the AoB Department of Catholic Schools’ School Board Leadership Webinar series, and conversations with AoB personnel. This training and guidance seemed largely aimed at the mechanics of running a board. Board Chair Debbie shared that soft skills training, especially in the area of team building and communications, would be useful. Board Chair Martin sees a need for “aligning skill sets” with the principal.

In responding to the same question, the principals identified a number of resources, including their board chairs, the AoB board manual, NCEA information, workshops, and an annual retreat provided by the AoB. These resources were highly valued but there was the sense

that training could address softer skills that speak to adaptive challenges, and not merely the technical problems, facing the schools or matters of compliance.

Principal Sharon agreed that there “definitely is [a role]” for training in soft skills, but only for boards that have evolved past the formative stage. Principal Peter felt that much of the board training provided was “kind of the same retreaded stuff.” Peter added that “I can only [be trained] so many times on fiduciary responsibility of the finance committee and what a board looks like and what it’s supposed to be made of and committee development...I’ve only listened to that now for six years.” Further, Peter suggested that boards could share their practical experiences: “...this is what we did. These are the things we tried that didn’t seem to work...that collaboration, I think, would be helpful.”

Principal Janice valued the annual school board retreats, but stated that “...[the training] may not hit everybody but [the] common theme in our schools is advancement and development.” Principal Mark listed professional development offered by NCEA and books as useful resources. Mark perceived that training interventions from the AoB were more “reactive” and necessarily focused on schools with problems. Further, Mark felt that the board chair benefited from this training in the first years as chair, but it became less impactful over time.

### **Successful Boards Go Beyond What Is Required**

My sense from the interviews and two board meeting observations was that boards provide great value, but, as a group of volunteers, they lack the authority, access, and power to fully utilize their gifts and maximize their capacity to consistently contribute to the schools’ success. The boards search for purpose, as well as opportunities to contribute beyond the core duties and expectations as outlined in the bylaws, promulgated by the AoB, and generally understood by the communities involved. The principals and board chairs shared several



examples of generative thinking, involving inventive ways to produce ideas from the board by tackling habits of thinking that prevent making good strategic decisions. For example, a re-framing of board composition had important enrollment implications for one school. Principal Mark noted that ideally, boards should “match, to some degree, the community that it’s serving so they can understand some of those [diversity] dynamics.” As a board becomes more diverse, it is possible to have some conversations about race, about equity, and how...to expand [the school’s] reach to pull students from different areas.” Beyond marketing the school to the community, according to Principal Mark, the board is an important surrogate for the principal in “communicating to the parent community...because so often...if the principal is the only one communicating, [the parents] turn deaf to it.”

Board Chair Marian’s board experimented with an ad hoc committee on school volunteerism. One focus area of this committee was planning for re-entry after the COVID-19 crisis ends, when the school returns to a semblance of normalcy. Marian also led a succession planning effort “for the school’s leadership team...[using] an NCEA publication on succession planning for Catholic schools.” Board Chair Debbie shared her board’s focus on the development of strategic partnerships for the benefit of the school. Debbie’s board assembled an ad hoc committee of grant writers to help the school with its grant applications. Debbie also reached out to a nearby high school to find technology resources and expertise to help students and teachers in Debbie’s school with “making [Debbie’s school] a technology school.”

#### **Research Question 4**

**In what ways do governing documents (e.g., bylaws) matter to board and school success?**

The fourth research question explored the impact of governing documents on effective governance of the school. As part of my research, I examined the new Archdiocesan Governance

Model and the board bylaws provided by the sampled schools. Generally, bylaws determine how an organization operates. They are the rules that determine essential functions, such as running meetings, selecting members, and appointing officers, as well as define the duties and responsibilities of the board.

### **New Archdiocesan Governance Model**

In the summer of 2019, the Archbishop sent a memorandum to all elementary school pastors, principals, and board chairs regarding the transition to a consistent governance model for all of the parish schools (Appendix A). The transition to this new governance model was launched in September of 2019 and estimated to take 12-24 months, depending on the readiness of the schools and planning needs. This schedule has been interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This model was designed to address the inconsistencies in bylaws between the parish schools, often leading to misalignment with the schools' current operating environment. The model contains a number of attributes, including an emphasis on "collaborative governance between the pastor, principal, school board, and the Superintendent/Department of Catholic Schools." Recognizing the complexity of running a parish school and the limitations of "operating in a silo," a "shifting of some responsibility to other support resources such as the Superintendent/Department of Catholic Schools and the School Board" is warranted, according to the Archbishop's memorandum. This "shift of responsibility and collaborative decision-making" is aimed to create a school system (and not a system of schools) that leverages the "specialized skills and experience that the other team members bring to the table." Moving from a "system of schools" (personnel communication, J. Sellinger, October, 17, 2017) to a school

system “will drive efficiencies and a rigorous academic model that will attract funders and lead to academic excellence, operational vitality, and the growth of our schools.”

Article III of the Catholic School Governance guidance provided in the summer of 2019 discusses the 11 powers and duties of the school board. Four of these are focused on internal board operational activities: member election, chair election, professional development in areas important to the life of the school, and annual board self-evaluation. The board also approves the mission statement of the school and participates in the selection and annual evaluation of the principal. The “power” of the board resides in the following: establishing overall policies with respect to the finances, advancement, marketing, buildings and grounds, and other areas of management of the school in consultation with the pastor and Superintendent; holding the school administration accountable for implementation of established policies; setting tuition and other related school fees and costs; establishing an annual budget for the school; and developing and implementing a strategic plan for the school.

These expectations are reflected in the bylaws of the schools being examined. While the new AoB guidance sets the stage for a team approach to school governance, the fundamentals of school governance outlined do not differ drastically from previous guidance. For example, the board exercises much of its power and authority through their committees, which are discussed in Article IV. The standard standing committees are described: Executive, Finance, Development/Institutional Advancement, Facilities, Catholic Identity, and Ad Hoc. The charge of the committees remains to recommend policies and review activities related to their focus areas.

The fundamental areas of board responsibility remain essentially unchanged, although expectations may be heightened by the new guidance. For instance, requirements are enumerated for the board as it exercises the powers and authorities previously described. These requirements

assign more of an oversight role to the board than has been the case in the past. For example, the board would oversee the operation of the school within the approved budget and submission of quarterly financial statements. The board would also ensure that at least the minimum level of benefits is provided to school employees and that the standard Archdiocesan forms of employment contracts are used.

### **Bylaws Partially Reflect the Reality of Governance**

Four of the five schools examined provided their current by-laws. One of the schools sent the bylaw template promulgated by the AoB's Department of Catholic Schools. Each document addressed internal board management matters, such as board membership, selection of officers, regular self-evaluation, and committee structure. In addition, commonly accepted areas of board responsibility were addressed at a high level in these documents, including recommending and evaluating school policy, strategic planning, budget/finance, marketing/public relations/external communications, and institutional development. These broad areas of board oversight outlined in the bylaws belie the fact that the actual mandate for the boards examined is much narrower and tends to focus on other types of advice and support than is envisioned in the guidance documents. Based on the data collected, what consistently seemed most important to the principals and board chairs was not the more formal board responsibilities, such as oversight and compliance, but rather the quality of the relationships, open communication, and the soundness of advice and support provided to each other.

### ***Quality of the Relationships***

All the principals and board chairs highlighted the need for trust and respect in their partnerships, as well as the co-equal nature of the dyad. In both the interview and the self-anchoring scale exercise, Principal Christine spoke of “compatible personalities” and “respect”

as key factors in a productive working relationship. Interestingly, Christine indicated that the board chair did not have to be a “best friend” to be a good governance partner. “Positive and supportive” with “common goal[s]” described Principal Sharon’s ideal relationship with the board chair. Sharon also valued trust as part of a successful partnership. In the self-anchoring scale exercise, Principal Peter felt that “co-ownership” was a necessary feature of the relationship. “Honesty” and “transparency” were called out by Principal Janice in describing the most successful relationship in the self-anchoring scale exercise. Janice also appreciated that the board chair was “level-headed and down-to-earth.” Echoing trust as a theme, Principal Mark added that a successful relationship must be “trusting.” Mark felt that “not being transparent” would be a fatal flaw.

During the interview, Board Chair Marian said that “form[ing] a relationship is vital and should be characterized by “mutual respect” and “honest[y].” In the self-anchoring scale exercise, Marian repeated the need for “respect” and added “trust” and the need to “build [the relationship].” Board Chair Jaime cited a number of factors, with “trust” being identified in both the interview and self-anchoring scale exercise, especially in terms of “motives.” Board Chair Debbie valued the relationship in terms of compatibility and being “easy to work with.” “Not gelling” was a sign of a dysfunctional relationship per Debbie, who wants to be “inspire[ed]” by the principal as a leader. “Respect” was named by Board Chair Kellie as a critical factor, as well as being “on [the] same page.” “Respect” was flagged by Board Chair Martin in the interview. In the self-anchoring scale exercise, Martin narrowed the focus on “respect” in terms of acknowledging one’s governance partner’s “ability to acquire and access resources” for the good of the school.

## ***Open Communication***

All the principals and board chairs referenced communication, in one form or another, as a key to the success of their working relationships. Principal Christine anchored the self-anchoring scale with “communication” as the mark of a successful principal-board chair relationship, while placing “poor communications” on the bottom of the scale. Christine identified “conversation” as her preferred form of communication in an ideal relationship with a chair. Similarly, in the self-anchoring scale exercise, Principal Sharon noted that being “non-communicative” would be a characteristic of an unsuccessful relationship and added that communication should be “purposeful.”

During the interview, Principal Peter valued the fact that his board chair was “easy to communicate with” and cited “positiv[ity]” as an important part of communicating effectively. Principal Janice agreed that mindset was integral to effective communication. Janice shared during the interview the value of “positiv[ity]” and noted that “negativity” in communication often characterized unsuccessful partnerships. When interviewed, Principal Mark said that “communication” is the key to successful partnering and further elaborated on the point in the self-anchoring scale exercise, stressing the need for “open communication”.

Board Chair Marian felt that communication was critical to “build[ing] a relationship over time.” Board Chair Jaime noted that they have “communicated...more consistently and probably more frequently” during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in terms of what was being shared with the community, the impact on staff, and the impact on school finances. Jaime also placed “communication” on top of the self-anchoring scale, which signaled her perception of its importance to the success of the principal-board chair relationship. Board Chair Debbie shared examples of deferring to the principal during meetings, as well as instances of the

principal asking for Debbie's opinion first. These interactions modeled "open communication and demonstrated a co-equal partnership." "Communication" was also identified by Board Chair Kellie, in both the interview and the self-anchoring scale exercise, as the "key." Kellie explained that she asks the board members to keep her "in the loop...so [she] can see what's going on," modeling trust as an essential component of open and effective communication.

### ***Soundness of Advice and Support***

I was struck by what was *not* said during the interviews of principals and board chairs as much as by what was said. When I asked how boards matter to the success of the schools, I referenced the usual areas of responsibility found in the bylaws. Only two principals responded initially with a typical board-designated area of responsibility. And, in both cases, it was finance. Principal Peter valued the work of the finance committee, especially when they "report on the tuition" to the community. However, Peter also valued the "broader perspective" and "good feedback," leading to ideas of things to "work on." Principal Mark identified "the money" as a key focus of the board, but also appreciated the board's willingness to take "calculated risks," helping Mark in finding creative solutions to challenges facing the school.

Principals Christine, Sharon, and Janice's first responses during their interviews were more general in terms of identifying board roles beyond what is usually envisioned for them. For example, Principal Christine expressed appreciation of the board's "knowledge and their perspectives so much because it gets [the principal] thinking about things." During the observation of Christine's board, there were numerous instances where the board chair offered advice and support for the principal, which were visibly well received and seemed to create a safe space for collaboration and the sharing of ideas. Principal Sharon hoped that the board would be "allow[ed]...to have an impact on the school," by providing them with "the

permission, the ability, the tools, etc. to do what they need to do so that they can have an impact.” This thought suggested that there is hidden value that needs to be unearthed for the board to fulfill its potential and be more “purposeful,” as Sharon phrased it.

Board Chair Marian spoke of “a collaborative decision-making model,” but was quick to clarify that the board was not a decision-making body. Rather, Marian saw the board as a source of “expertise” that tried to contribute via “committees” and “projects.” Board Chair Jaime saw that the primary board role is to support the principal and pastor by providing sound advice. Jaime stated that “...principals alone and pastors alone don’t have the educational experience, the practical benefit and the employment experience of other jobs....they cannot do [it] alone.”

Board Chair Debbie mentioned strategic partnering with individuals and groups outside of the school to provide needed skills and resources. Board Chair Kellie described board members frustrated with what was perceived as a limited role, despite a broad scope of duties described in the bylaws. Kellie stated that they had “lost several board members” due to not being able to “give them a job” to do that met their expectations for involvement. Frustration was also a theme shared by Board Chair Martin, who felt that boards are not being asked the “right question[s].”

### **Research Question 5**

#### **What tensions do principals and board members experience in governing a Catholic elementary school?**

The fifth research question sought to identify obstacles facing principals, board chairs, and the board members in partnering effectively and efficiently in leading their schools.



## **Differing Perceptions of Purpose and Authority Can Create Tension**

Aligning the different rhythms and priorities of the principal and the board can become a challenge, according to Principal Christine. Christine sometimes “get[s] behind on board things,” but compatibility with the board chair helps to resolve these situations. In the self-anchoring scale, she used the words “communication” and “conversations” to describe the most successful approach to the relationship. Principal Sharon recognized that “pastors all have a different vision of their authority and their jurisdiction.” The “triangle of power” (as Board Chair Jaime calls it) that forms between the pastor, principal, and board chair can create tension. Sharon stated that with true collaboration, a “positive tension” can be productive and even “necessary.” She identified “trust” on the self-anchoring scale as necessary for successfully balancing these relationships.

Because boards are closely connected to the community, by design, Principal Peter noted the risk of tension in the board addressing school “personnel matters.” Aside from this being outside the board’s areas of responsibility, Peter did not want the board taking on the role of “micromanager” of school operations. He echoed this theme when he used the term “authoritarian” to describe an unsuccessful relationship with a previous board. Principal Janice expressed similar concerns as the board chair supported retaining a staff member while others in school leadership had reservations about the fit for the role. The idea of the board chair acting as the “boss” of the principal caused Janice some discomfort.

Principal Mark said that at times, differences in “perspectives” create misunderstanding. Mark explained that a principal often has to focus on “things at a more granular level as far as execution and what needs to be done at school.” Since a board chair is “removed from the day-to-day activities...[there may be a lack of] understanding [about] the urgency in which [the

principal] need[s] to make decisions or how going down a certain path can create more difficulties.” In both the interview and the self-anchoring scale, Mark shared that some boards that can be “too directive.” In his opinion, a “collaborative” approach and “communication” are the keys to successfully addressing this tension. Mark also provided an example of the board having a different perception of a school staff member’s fit for their job, but in this case, “having that conversation” proved valuable in the long run.

Board Chair Marian echoed the ideas that different perspectives can play a part in creating tension, as “[parties] might see things differently.” For Marian, this emphasized the need to understand the roles and responsibilities of an advisory board and the limitations inherent to that board model. In fact, her response to the self-anchoring scale highlighted “intruding on the principal’s role” as a sign of an unsuccessful partnership. A further distinction that Marian made in terms of board role was the need to recognize that boards are comprised of volunteers who have a unique perspective on leading the organization. Marian felt that failing to account for this can create misunderstandings in terms of expectations.

Board Chair Jaime also saw potential tensions surrounding the “clarity of roles in an advisory board...[as role clarity can be] challenging.” Discerning “what is best for the faculty versus what [are] the principal’s wishes” can represent an “inherent conflict,” according to Jaime. This issue emerged as faculty members have approached the board at times to “resolve issues that are not within [the board’s] purview.” In this case, external parties misconstrued the role of the board. Jaime saw another potential source of tension as stemming from the division of power between a pastor, principal, and the board chair of an advisory board—a “triangle of power.” She named “humility” in the self-anchoring scale as playing a moderating role in untangling confusion regarding divisions of authority.

Board Chair Martin explained that tensions can “arise...when the...board meetings become a waste of time in the eyes of the principal and a burden.” Martin felt that a number of factors weaken the value proposition of board governance, including “communications problems...egos becoming a priority driver in leading... and differing views of [the] mission and vision [of the school].”

### **Research Question 6**

#### **What gaps exist between the principals’ and board members’ perceptions of their leadership roles and how does this phenomenon manifest itself?**

There are many ways of conceptualizing leadership and leadership roles. Some definitions of the phenomenon of leadership focus on personal traits or characteristics that a leader might possess, while others focus on acts or behaviors of leaders that aim to enact change in others. When asked to define leadership, most of the principals and board chairs described actions or behaviors, such as moving people forward, engaging others, listening, providing a sounding board, and mentoring. When asked to describe their leadership styles and those of their counterparts, all of the principals and board chairs listed personal traits, such as respectful, honest, communicative, and open. There was much commonality in the various descriptions of leadership provided by both principals and board chairs.

After interviewing the principals and board chairs, it became clear from their perceptions of leadership and their leadership roles that both considered leadership to be an interactive event and accessible to everyone. Interestingly, when completing the ranking activity, none of the participants prioritized possessing “extensive leadership experience” as a quality of a successful leader (Appendix I). These perceptions fit a definition of leadership as a “process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2021, p. 6).

Initially, I did not intend to examine only advisory boards, but the research path took a different shape as I employed snowball sampling. There is not a lot of research on advisory boards. However, the data collected demonstrates that advisory boards really do play a different role than expected in Catholic elementary school governance. This role can best be understood as a partnership that is defined in terms of a coaching perspective.

### **Complementary Views of Leadership Exist**

No significant perception gaps were revealed but, rather, complementary views of leadership and their roles emerged. The principals and board chairs generally agreed that the principals were more likely to focus on day-to-day school operations, while the board chairs usually tried to focus on the future and the big picture. However, there were areas of overlap between these near- and longer-term perspectives. In some cases, as necessitated by circumstances, principals and board reported readily adopting both perspectives in service of their schools.

Principal Christine defined a leader as someone who “helps people understand where their gifts and talents lie and engages them to use them in that way.” It is, then, not surprising that having the respect and confidence of other board members was her highest priority board leadership quality from the ranking activity. “Seeing the big picture” and “help[ing] your people get to it” are also part of leadership according to Christine. In describing the leadership role of the board chair, Christine again focused on “get[ting] to know the people...so [the board chair] can put them in their best role...that lean[s] towards their gifts and talents.” The board chair can also “help shift the focus when it needs to be shifted...[so that the board] is focused on the bigger picture.”

Principal Sharon defined leadership as the “ability to inspire and assist others in meeting the goals of the organization.” This definition is consistent with her top priority choice in the ranking activity: displays effective influence, diplomacy, and constructive guidance. An alignment of personal and organizational goals mattered to Sharon, who described her leadership style as “collaborative.” When asked to describe an ideal leader from their experience, Sharon mentioned the ability to “listen...make decisions...[and] look at the big picture.” Sharon valued the board chair’s ability to identify “the gifts in other people [and] encourage others to use their gifts for the good of the school.”

Principal Peter saw a leader as someone who “move[s] people forward.” Peter valued “collaborative discussion[s]” with the board chair because he is not a “micromanager...[or] keeper of all knowledge...[and does not] have all the answers.” Peter felt that his leadership style and role were “complementary” with the board chair, with a shared appreciation of the importance of “communication” and being able “to refocus on the [right] issues” when necessary. Consistent with the perceptions shared from his interview, Peter’s top board leadership qualities from the ranking activity were being collaborative and restrained in style.

“Trust” and “transparency” were key attributes of a good leader for Principal Janice. Janice felt that the board chair’s leadership style was complementary in terms of openness in that they were both willing “to learn and to listen.” Principal Mark favored a “distributed...[or] shared leadership model,” especially with regards to decision-making. Mark chose to follow this model “because if [the principal is] going to ask these people to invest their time,” they should respect their contributions and listen to their opinions. “Collaborative and communicative” were cited by Mark as key leadership traits of the board chair that promoted “build[ing] consensus.”

He identified the qualities of being collaborative and restrained in style as the most important leadership qualities from the ranking activity.

Board Chair Marian defined leadership in terms of “the ability to engage others, to encourage others to follow them.” Marian further explained that a “team perspective” is needed “to set goals and work together,” in order to fully engage a group of volunteers. With the volunteer model in mind, her top leadership quality from the ranking activity was the willingness to bring personal time and energy to devote to board leadership. Two repeated themes emerged as Marian described the leadership style of the principal: “competence [and] kindness.”

Board Chair Jaime saw leadership as “the ability to allow people to perform their best...lead[ing] a group of people who are intellectually and financially smarter than I am to a place where they can best support the [school].” From the ranking activity, she saw the qualities of displaying effective influence, diplomacy, and constructive guidance as most important to successful leadership. When asked about how she viewed the principal’s leadership, Jaime saw an evolution from an intellectual, data-driven perspective to “more of a communicative style...[that is needed] to bring people along with you.”

Board Chair Debbie described leadership more in terms such as “knowing your adversaries and then fighting for what you know the school needs.” Debbie felt that leaders “look out for [their] people...and take care of them.” This principled approach to leadership is reflected in her top selection from the leadership qualities in the ranking activity: embodying integrity and expecting it from others. Debbie also appreciated her principal’s “straightforward” and “thoughtful” approach to leadership.

Board Chair Kellie wanted “to be able to bring people together for a common purpose to help the school run efficiently.” Kellie appreciated that the principal felt that “communication”

was an important value in their partnership. She also identified integrity as a critical leadership quality in the ranking activity. Board Chair Martin also promoted a shared leadership role and approach, which he defined, in part, as “helping” the principal as they went through a “management and leadership...maturation” process. “Provid[ing] a sounding board” for the principal, as well as acting as a “mentor,” were examples of the help that Martin provided. Resilience was the top leadership quality identified by Martin in the ranking activity, with a drive to confront and surmount setbacks. This resilience also applied to the leadership maturation process that Martin described in his interview.

### **A Coaching Approach to Leadership Emerges**

During the interviews and self-anchoring scale exercise, numerous principals and board chairs described leadership perspectives and relationship characteristics that reminded me of the International Coaching Federation (ICF) definition of coaching which describes “coaching as partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential” (International Coaching Federation [ICF], n.d.-a). Table 10 shows a crosswalk between codes identified during the interviews and self-anchoring scale exercise and the ICF Core Competencies (ICF, n.d.-b). The ICF Core Competencies were developed to support greater understanding about the skills and approaches used within today’s coaching profession as defined by the ICF. The Core Competencies are grouped into four domains according to those that fit together logically based on common ways of looking at the competencies in each group. The groupings and individual competencies are not weighted, since they are all core and considered critical for any competent coach to possess.

**Table 10***ICF Core Competency-Codes Matrix*

| <b>ICF Core Competency</b>               | <b>Codes from Interviews</b>  | <b>Self-Anchoring Scale</b>   | <b>Survey</b>   |
|--|---|---|---|
| <b>Foundation</b>                        |   |   |   |
| Ethical Practice                         | Honest, transparent   | Honest  | Spiritual   |
| Coaching Mindset                         | Flexible, open  | Willing to take calculated risks, flexible  | Open to suggestions   |
| <b>Co-Creating the Relationship</b>      |   |   |   |
| Agreements                               | On the same page, co-ownership  | Recognizes volunteer role of board, agreed to shared mission/vision, co-ownership                             | Engaging, collaborative   |
| Cultivates Trust & Safety                | Trust, respect, confidentiality, humility, recognizes talents/gifts, transparent, relationship                  | Respect, trust/trusting, respect abilities, collaborative/collaboration                                       | Inclusive, collegial, more diverse  |
| Presence                                 | Safe space to innovate, curiosity, collaborative  | Positivity/positive, no ego, energetic, confidentiality   | Relational  |
| <b>Communicating Effectively</b>         |   |   |   |
| Listens Actively                         | Engaged, asks questions, communication  | Engaged, purposeful, communication  | Discussion, communicative   |
| Evokes Awareness                         | Confidence, flexibility, generative, re-framing perspectives, shares insights, conversation                     | Transparent   | Transparent, beneficial to have regular conversations                             |
| <b>Cultivating Learning &amp; Growth</b> |   |   |   |
| Facilitates Client Growth                | Purposeful, worthwhile, visionary, moving forward, consider resources, know adversaries, motivation, enthusiasm | Motivator, recognizes distinct roles/responsibilities, inspiring, hopeful, interpersonal skills, enthusiastic | Advice/counsel, guidance, support/supportive, help plan, empower, willing to work |

*Note.* This table shows the alignment between each ICF Core Competency and codes identified from the interviews, self-anchoring scale exercise, and survey.

The leader-as-coach model creates a true learning organization. Participants can engage in ways that help define the organization's culture and advance its mission. An effective leader-coach asks questions instead of providing answers, supports colleagues instead of judging them,



and facilitates their development instead of dictating what has to be done, all while creating a safe space to experiment.

Before data collection, servant leadership and transformational leadership were the leadership theories and frameworks expected to best describe the working relationship between the principal and the board chair. These two leadership theories continue to inform the principal-board chair relationship. However, based on the data collected, it can be stated that the principal-board chair relationship is dynamic and formed through multiple leadership practices. With the emergence of a leadership-coaching theme from the data, in addition to transformational and servant leadership, other leadership theories can be linked to a coaching approach (Cherry & Boysen-Rotelli, 2016). These leadership theories inform coaching practices in an organizational context and re-frame the governance-as-leadership assumptions prevalent in Catholic elementary schools.

A strong correlation between coaching and the other leadership styles can be observed. In fact, many aspects of these leadership styles mirror the attributes of an effective coach. For instance, strong communication and listening skills are of paramount importance. Empathy is critical to understanding the feelings and perspectives of those being led. Self-knowledge is fundamental to successful coaches and is a distinguishing characteristic for these other leadership approaches. Finally, a commitment to the growth and development of others is a coaching characteristic that is evident in these other leadership styles.

### **Conclusion**

The data presented in Chapter 4 answered the research questions, finding that: (1) principals and board chairs generally reported that their roles are clear on the advisory boards, but the purpose of the boards needs clarification. (2) principals and board chairs repeatedly

described the value of the boards in terms of advice and support provided; (3) there is a perception that the resources, guidance, and training provided set expectations that boards (even advisory boards) have more opportunity to be decision-makers than is actually the case in practice; (4) successful boards search for purpose and go beyond what is required in the bylaws; (5) differing perceptions of purpose and authority sometimes created tension on a board; (6) principals and board chairs generally exhibited similar and often complementary views of leadership; and (7) a coaching approach to leadership was described by many principals and board chairs, characterized by partnership and collaboration.

These answers were analyzed to produce several discussion points covered in Chapter 5. Advisory boards make a difference. While formal roles are clear, boards struggle with identifying a compelling purpose. Differences exist between common perceptions of the board's governance role and the reality of decision-making. Lastly, participants described the most valued board interactions in terms of a coaching leadership approach.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS/IMPLICATIONS**

The purpose of this study was to explore the principal-board chair dynamic and its impact on the effectiveness of board governance and school success. By asking principals and board chairs about advisory board governance and leadership dynamics, this study aimed to understand the value proposition of advisory boards to Catholic elementary schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore (AoB).

Initially, the focus of this study was on all board governance types, but snowball sampling led to a focus on advisory boards. There has not been a lot of research conducted on advisory boards. However, the data in this study show that advisory boards do indeed make a difference, playing a more nuanced role than expected. The theoretical models that initially guided the design of this study were servant leadership and transformational leadership. Based on the data collected, it became apparent that the full impact of the boards must be understood as the result of partnering while employing coaching skills and behavior. And so, the original leadership models were extended to reflect a coaching skills approach to optimizing the effectiveness of board governance, characterized by partnership and collaboration.

The findings of the study uncovered that even though advisory boards have limited authority, they make a difference as both principals and board chairs emphasized the value of the advice and support that boards provide. The participants perceived a gap between formal and informal roles. While the participants made clear that they fully understood their formal roles, the purpose of advisory boards as decision-makers was a source of confusion for the participants. This question of purpose for the boards studied impelled them to seek increased relevance as they tried to reconcile discrepancies between the expectations and realities of school governance.

The discussion below is based on this study and focuses on the Catholic elementary school principals and board chairs being studied. Therefore, the results cannot be applied to all schools or boards and are, therefore, not generalizable. However, it is hoped that consumers of this research will see something of themselves in the descriptions and analysis. This verisimilitude of the study, then, is an approximation toward or closeness to the truth about the way the world really is. The chapter is divided into five main sections addressing: (a) the value provided by advisory boards, (b) the purpose of advisory boards, (c) governance perceptions versus reality, (d) a coaching skills/approach to leadership, and (e) implications.

## **Discussion**

### **Advisory Boards Make a Difference**

The most fundamental question regarding purpose that was addressed in this study is whether advisory boards matter. Both the principals and board chairs interviewed agreed that advisory boards provide value to the schools. During the interviews, the principals and board chairs mentioned formal responsibilities, such as oversight and strategic planning, to be sure. However, the participants generally expressed more enthusiasm when discussing the advice and support provided by their boards.

### ***Principals and Board Chairs Describe the Value of the Advisory Boards in Terms of Advice and Support Provided***

**Advice.** Interestingly, I observed profound differences in the dynamics of two boards going about their formal duties. It became clear to me that there are stark differences in how advice was provided during the two virtual board meetings I observed at two of the schools in my sample. I particularly focused my attention when the agenda topic of finances and budget arose in both meetings. One school board finance committee chair reported out on details of the

school's budget (Board A). The finance committee of Board A submitted a number of recommendations for the school to consider. There was very little discussion. It felt more like a monologue, with the principal as the primary audience. This board had fulfilled its role as an advisor on a topic area in their portfolio, but something seemed wanting to me. What was not being said or being done? The board members seemed bored and disengaged to me, and there was no energy on the call.

During the other school's board meeting, I observed that there was more of a discussion, and the tone of the meeting was very different (Board B). Board B followed more of a Socratic method during their meeting, holding a collaborative dialogue about the school's finances. Powerful questions were asked and answered, stimulating critical thinking, drawing out ideas, and challenging underlying assumptions. The discussion was lively. Every board member present participated, and all were on equal footing, as the meeting felt like a safe space for a conversation. No specific advice was provided, but a number of ideas were offered and then thoroughly discussed. For example, a suggestion was made to see whether the phone company would be interested in placing a cell tower on the school property, paying the school a fee. The discussion ranged widely and covered law, real estate, aesthetics, possible community reactions, tax status, safety, and construction. The group appeared energized by the discussion and several follow-up activities were assigned. I contacted the chair to see what happened and was told that after more information was gathered, it was decided not to pursue this idea. The lesson for me was that the value was in the discussion, not in the ultimate resolution.

It is illuminating to compare the styles of these two advisory boards. Both conscientiously went about their work. But Board B got the most out of its members and provided the most value to the school. The energy level was much higher during Board B's

meeting than during Board A's meeting. Board B's meeting seemed to be a safe space to explore possibilities and opportunities. For instance, the principal on Board B started a discussion about remote learning scenarios necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Remote learning is definitely not one of the school board's areas of responsibility, but the principal welcomed their thoughts and valued their insights. Was this a traditional area for a board to engage? Not at all. Was it useful in the moment? Yes. And so, even without authority in critical areas of governance, advisory boards can offer value to their schools. This value can, of course, come from providing advice in recognized areas of board responsibility. However, sometimes value comes in unexpected ways as boards can be invited to engage in areas not usually reserved for them. Different boards provide different types of advice using different approaches, some more impactful than others.

**Support.** Ideally, principals and board chairs actively support one another. Principals in particular have social-emotional needs due to the stress in their jobs. Board chairs and members can provide this type of support to the principals, addressing the issues of isolation shared during the interviews. When I was a board chair, I often spoke with my counterpart at another school about issues of organizational culture. He once told me that his principal would say that she looked forward to the board meetings because they were a group of peers she could confide in about her concerns for the school without starting a panic. She described being able to unburden herself as very freeing and an important resource to her as the school leader.

Similarly, the principal and chair of Board B demonstrated this type of emotional support and openly expressed gratitude for each other during the meeting. Board B held a virtual surprise birthday celebration for their principal at the end of the regular board meeting. Being a principal can be a lonely and isolating job, as noted by the participants. The principal appreciated this

demonstration of emotional support provided by Board B. It is logical to conclude that this kind of support allows a principal to be more successful in their role and have greater impact on their school.

### **While Formal Roles Are Clear, Boards Struggle with Identifying a Compelling Purpose**

Perhaps recognizing the galvanizing effect of a shared purpose, the chair of Board B ended the meeting by exhorting the assembled group to “let your light shine before others” (*New International Version [Bible]*, 2011, Matt 5:16). The search for a compelling purpose was an open question for the boards in this study. In examining the idea of purpose, there is an opportunity to reframe how we define the problem of board engagement. How individuals frame people, situations, and events has important consequences for the way they make sense of the world. Such framing can also be a tool of persuasion, used to shape organizations (Fairhurst, 2011).

As I began this study, I expected to confirm the commonly held view that the problem is rooted in a board's lack of clarity about its role. It follows that the solution becomes delineating the board's role and clarifying its tasks. However, as the data demonstrated, the advisory boards examined already had clear job descriptions in their bylaws. Further, the principals and board chairs in this study reported role clarity and knew their roles as defined both through these job descriptions and common practice. There was also consensus as to the boundaries of their roles. For example, the academic leadership role was reserved for the principal, while organizational development matters occupied the board's attention. While it was clear that academics and managing staff were the purview of the principal alone, occasionally boards in this study were asked to opine on these topic areas, blurring the lines.

Scholars have shed light on what can be the root of the problem of advisory board engagement and effectiveness. The crux of the matter is that boards often do not have a compelling purpose (Chait et al., 2005). Much like Charan et al.'s (2014) "central idea," a sense of purpose is needed to prod boards into coordinated action on behalf of the schools. Hammack (1998) goes on to state that with a lack of consensus on aims, actions are likely to be stultified, and participants will lose satisfaction and enthusiasm for the mission of the organization.

While many boards know what to do, they can be derailed by a sense of "meaninglessness of what they do" (Chait et al., 2005, p. 23). The data support the notion that board members experience a feeling of meaninglessness as the principals and board chairs conveyed to me the challenges of recruiting and retaining members. This reminded me of a conversation I had when I was a board chair. I often spoke with my counterparts at other Catholic elementary schools, one of whom felt the need to assure potential and new members of his board that "we will not waste your time."

A lack of satisfaction can be attributable to a number of realities of board work. For example, Chait et al. (2005) note that official board work is highly episodic. The boards in this study generally conducted business during regularly scheduled meetings. Even during the COVID-19 crisis, the frequency of contact between principals and board chairs did not change significantly (Table 11). As a board chair, I found that this infrequency of contact led my board's members to feel disenfranchised from the school and its missions. Building trusting relationships was challenging for my board members. Also, my board's members felt frustrated with their lack of access to valuable sources of information because they were only at the school conducting board business once a month, at most. For example, they missed out on what my school called "parking lot conversations".



**Table 11**

*Survey Responses from the AoB to Questions 12 and 13: Contacts Between Principals and Board Chairs Before and During COVID-19 Pandemic*

|   | <b>Principals<br/>(n=19)</b>          |   |              | <b>Board Chairs<br/>(n=15)</b>    |                                     |              |              |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|--------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| <b>Average # of<br/>Monthly<br/>Contacts<br/>Pre-<br/>COVID-19</b>  | <b>Initiated<br/>by<br/>Principal</b> | <b>Initiated<br/>by Board<br/>Chair</b> | <b>Total</b> | <b>Initiated by<br/>Principal</b> | <b>Initiated by<br/>Board Chair</b> | <b>Total</b> | <b>TOTAL</b> |
| 0   | 1                                     | 2                                       | 3            | 0                                 | 0                                   | 0            | 3            |
| 1   | 5                                     | 6                                       | 11           | 4                                 | 2                                   | 6            | 17           |
| 2   | 7                                     | 5                                       | 12           | 6                                 | 7                                   | 13           | 25           |
| 3   | 2                                     | 1                                       | 3            | 2                                 | 2                                   | 4            | 7            |
| 4   | 1                                     | 1                                       | 2            | 0                                 | 1                                   | 1            | 3            |
| 5   | 1                                     | 1                                       | 2            | 2                                 | 2                                   | 4            | 6            |
| 6   | 1                                     | 1                                       | 2            | 0                                 | 0                                   | 0            | 2            |
| Total   |                                       |   | 35           |                                   |                                     | 28           | 63           |
| <b>Average # of<br/>Monthly<br/>Contacts<br/>Since<br/>COVID-19</b> |                                       |   |              |                                   |                                     |              |              |
| 0   | 2                                     | 2                                       | 4            | 0                                 | 0                                   | 0            | 4            |
| 1   | 3                                     | 5                                       | 8            | 3                                 | 1                                   | 4            | 12           |
| 2   | 5                                     | 2                                       | 7            | 6                                 | 6                                   | 12           | 19           |
| 3   | 4                                     | 4                                       | 8            | 2                                 | 3                                   | 5            | 13           |
| 4   | 3                                     | 2                                       | 5            | 2                                 | 3                                   | 5            | 10           |
| 5   | 1                                     | 1                                       | 2            | 1                                 | 2                                   | 3            | 5            |
| 6   | 0                                     | 0                                       | 0            | 0                                 | 0                                   | 0            | 0            |
| 7   | 0                                     | 0                                       | 0            | 1                                 | 0                                   | 1            | 1            |
| Total   |                                       |   | 34           |                                   |                                     | 30           | 64           |

*Note.* This table shows the responses to Survey Questions #12 and #13. It contains the estimated number of monthly contacts made by principals and board chairs. The most frequently estimated average number of contacts remains constant at 2, both before and during the pandemic.

### ***Successful Boards Search for Purpose and Go Beyond What is Required in the Bylaws***

While roles such as overseeing financial oversight, ensuring management accountability, and reviewing compliance issues are necessary, they can be uninspiring and insufficient to sustain engaged and effective service by the board members. Additionally, these formal responsibilities are not generally very time consuming. So a question of purpose that arose in my mind was what do board members do beyond what is needed to meet their formal board

obligations. The participants in this study did not mention that board members spent time in preparation for their formal duties. However, the boards regularly engaged in activities beyond what they perceived as their limited role in school governance as they searched for purpose. For example, one board chair in this study sought to make strategic alliances with a local high school. Another board chair set up a volunteer committee to engage with the community. While *Embracing the Vision: Manual for Catholic School Boards* describes a high-level role for a board's Development/Institutional Advancement Committee to include "identifying and supporting the financial prospects for the school" (*Embracing the Vision: Manual for Catholic School Boards*, 2016), it does not mention being responsible for organizing fundraising activities. However, every board chair interviewed said a significant amount of the board's work was devoted to planning and running these types of activities.

As the name suggests, an advisory board will have limited authority and will provide advice to the school, rather than making decisions for it. When I asked the principals and board chairs about the worst consequence of not having a board (Chait's "no-board scenario"), the loss was most often described in terms of fundraising, expertise, and contacts in the community. While useful, these activities are not actually governing and often occur outside of the formal board meetings. If boards were encouraged to embrace and expand these functions rather than consider them inferior to their more traditional governing functions of accountability, they might be able to find renewed purpose and provide additional value to the schools (Chait et al., 2005).

And so, enriching the work of the board is a key to improving board performance, as people are more motivated when they are interested and engaged in their work. Questions of motivation are especially important as boards wrestle with how to lead a group of volunteers. Motivation theory teaches that a leader cannot motivate others but can only create an

environment where they can motivate themselves (Pink, 2009). Pink (2009) talks about people seeking autonomy (desire to be self-directed), mastery (desire to keep improving at something important to them), and purpose (sense that what they do serves something meaningful beyond themselves) in what they do.

The data demonstrated that there is a hunger for more meaningful and consequential work by advisory board members. However, boards are often expected to focus almost exclusively on fiduciary work. Ironically, the less boards are engaged and motivated by jobs focusing on fiduciary responsibilities, the less likely they are to be successful in discharging these responsibilities. Ideally, boards that are competent in their fiduciary and strategic duties will be further empowered to challenge themselves and their organizations to explore topics in new and more meaningful ways.

### **Differences Exist Between Common Perceptions of the Board's Governance Role and the Reality of Decision-Making**

As noted in Chapter 4, the boards in this study received conflicting messages about why they exist and what authority they wield as decision-makers. Differences were identified between common perceptions of the board's governance role and the reality of decision-making. These perceptions were often based on previous experience, common understanding, and governing documents. While alignment generally existed between the principals and board chairs as to the part each plays in governance, expectations regarding decision-making often conflicted with the reality of advisory board governance.

***Resources, Guidance, and Training Set Expectations that Advisory Boards Have More Opportunity to be Decision-Makers Than Is The Case in Practice***

Catholic elementary school board members are selected, trained, and expected to function in a manner similar to their for-profit counterparts. The data gathered in this study show that expectations, training, and guidance documents cast boards as active decision-makers, with the power, knowledge, and access to be effective in this role. However, there are a number of reasons why this characterization is misleading and potentially counterproductive.

For example, Catholic elementary school boards are composed of unpaid volunteers. As volunteers, board members are engaged with the organization on a very limited basis. Limited access creates information asymmetries that hamper their ability to make strategic decisions or offer sound advice. Seeing only snippets of the work being done, it is difficult for volunteers to fully understand or embrace the mission and vision of the organization. Further, board members often have little or no experience or training in running nonprofit organizations. And yet with all of these disadvantages, they are expected to oversee the organization and its leaders. Despite these lofty expectations, the notion of a volunteer can diminish the perception of the leadership role they play and limit their effectiveness. Ideally, images of a highly skilled, recurring, and sustainable form of volunteerism would come to mind, providing enormous positive impact on the nonprofit organization. Unfortunately, volunteers are often labeled as working on shorter-term, more mundane activities that fail to engage them fully.

***Differing Perceptions of Purpose and Authority Can Create Tension on an Advisory Board***

Differing perspectives can be an area of strength for principals and board chairs when it comes to tackling problems. However, seeing things differently regarding purpose and authority can create misunderstandings. Both principals and board chairs in this study were concerned

about boards that see their primary purpose as micromanaging the principal or acting in an authoritarian manner. Boards perceived as too directive created tension and were considered less effective than boards that were collaborative.

Pastors were generally identified as the executive authority in the schools (Table 12), their power coming directly from the Archbishop. However, based on the interviews, it was perceived that pastors have differing, even fluid, views of their authority and its boundaries. Thus, the leadership triangle that forms between the pastor, principal, and board chair can lead to misunderstandings and be another source of tension for an advisory board.

Limitations inherent in the advisory board governance model can create tension. Failing to recognize that board members are volunteers with unique perspectives can also create conflicting approaches to leadership. Finally, differing views of the school's mission and a board's usefulness in fulfilling that mission can create differing expectations and result in frustrations for the board members.

This study's participants generally considered open communication to be an effective approach to resolving any tensions and conflict. Having conversations about any tensions was thought to be valuable to improving board effectiveness in the long run. One board chair even referred to the value of "positive tension" as an opportunity for organizational growth. My board recognized that its oversight role would naturally cause tension with the principal and used to talk about becoming a conflict competent board, leveraging the energy around respectful disagreements to find solutions. Interestingly, one board chair in the study considered humility to be an effective mindset for clarifying issues surrounding divisions of authority and questions of purpose. Reducing group tensions with humility is an interesting approach and quite compatible with the culture of Catholic elementary schools.

## **Participants Describe the Most Valued Board Interactions in Terms of a Coaching Skills/Approach to Leadership**

I was surprised that my background as an executive coach became a critical lens through which I evaluated much of the data collected. As I reviewed the interviews, reflected on the board meeting observations, and recalled my own experiences as a board chair, I was struck by how the closely the principal-board chair relationship mirrored a coaching dynamic.

The advice and support provided to principals by boards, as well as the relationship characteristics, were strikingly similar to the interactions that transpire in coaching relationships. Coaching is a type of conversation intended to develop an individual's (or team's) capacity to be more effective and perform better. A coaching style of leadership is characterized by partnership and collaboration. In fact, the word "collaboration" was the most used descriptor when participants and survey respondents were asked to describe their leadership style. When leaders behave like coaches, collaboration and creativity are the focus. Feedback, learning, and self-motivation are the hallmarks of this leadership approach.

Both the principals and board chairs in this study spoke of these types of leadership characteristics during the interviews, using words like "help, vulnerable, humble, listen, trust, honest, inspire, bring together, and brave" to describe their view of leadership. These school leaders described how they modeled leadership characteristics that could be categorized as emotional intelligence. Dan Goleman (2005) writes that effective leadership requires the five emotional intelligence skills of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill. These emotional intelligence skills were on full display during Board B's meeting. Board B's members expressed themselves openly and respectfully, while supporting differing viewpoints. I saw resilience, patience, and flexibility as potentially contentious issues about the

COVID-19 pandemic were addressed during the meeting. Active listening was practiced, as demonstrated by the penetrating questions that were asked. It can be argued, then, that emotional intelligence and coaching are closely related. Emotionally intelligent people tend to behave in a coaching way even if they have not been formally trained in coaching skills. They develop themselves in addition to developing others, promoting a true learning organization where both individual goals and organizational goals are met (Kolb, 1984).

### ***Principals and Board Chairs Exhibited Multiple Leadership Styles That Link to a Coaching Approach***

Before data collection, servant leadership and transformational leadership were the leadership theories and frameworks expected to best describe the working relationship between the principal and the board chair. While these two leadership theories continue to inform the principal-board chair relationship, the data demonstrate that the principal-board chair relationship is dynamic and formed through multiple leadership practices (Figure 6). With the emergence of a leadership-coaching theme from the data, other leadership theories can be linked to a coaching approach (Cherry & Boysen-Rotelli, 2016). Models promoting charismatic, visionary, and transformational leadership currently dominate in terms of published articles in the premier journals (Antonakis & Day, 2018). These leadership approaches include the transformational leader, the servant leader, the authentic leader, the adaptive leader, and any leadership style that embraces deep listening, empathy, curiosity, and vision—coaching perspectives that emerged over and over again in the data.

**Figure 6**

*Multiple Leadership Models That Underpin Coaching Leadership*



*Note.* This figure illustrates additional leadership models that were found to help describe the principal-board chair dynamic in terms of coaching leadership. There are strong connections between leadership theory, coaching skills, coaching effectiveness, and goals/outcomes.

For example, both transformational leaders and servant leaders engage others, inspiring and motivating by demonstrating respect for others and building trust. The principals and board chairs all identified trust and respect as keys to their leadership styles and provided examples of how they modeled this behavior. Similarly, the principals and board chairs proved to be authentic leaders who are aware of their strengths, limitations, and emotions and are willing to be vulnerable with one another. Based on the interviews, the participants recognized that a leader's authenticity makes them more credible (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). In addition, there is an interpersonal aspect to authentic leadership that stems from the reciprocal relationships that are created by the relationship partners (Eagly, 2005). This approach offers a model for board effectiveness as it harnesses the full range of strengths of many rather than relying on one leader. Thus, authentic leadership can be utilized within a coaching approach by emphasizing the

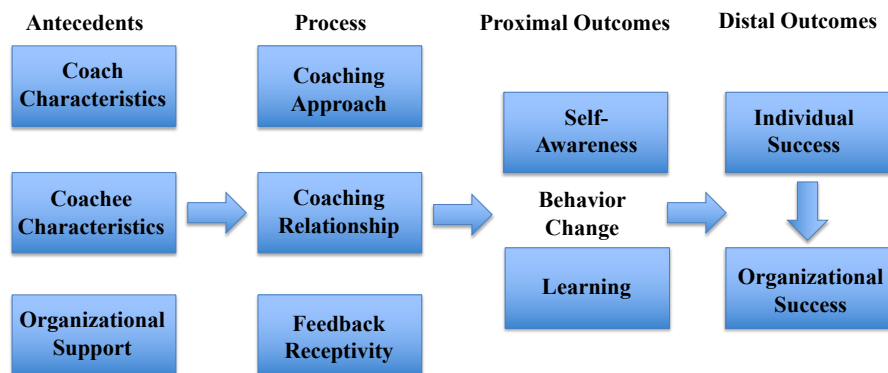


partnership relationship, with a focus on sharing, connection, and true collaboration in reaching organizational goals.

Considering adaptive leadership was also useful in the context of this study. Adaptive leadership addresses how leaders prepare and encourage people to deal with change. Central to the process of adaptive leadership are adaptive challenges. Adaptive challenges are difficult to identify and require changes in values, beliefs, roles, relationships, and approaches to work (Heifetz et al., 2009). Solutions require experimentation and new discoveries. Discussions with the study participants about the changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic illustrated the school boards' approaches to managing change and leading during a crisis. Given the breadth of the crisis and the disruptive changes it caused, it was clear that a single leader cannot be expected to have all the answers. What I observed was many principals and board chairs utilizing a coaching model in which leaders facilitate problem-solving and encourage the engagement of other board members by exhibiting coaching behaviors (Figure 7). By harnessing a coaching methodology, the boards in this study were better able to address change on personal, organizational, and relational levels (Kimsey-House et al., 2018).

**Figure 7**

*Conceptual Framework for Successful Coaching*



*Note.* This figure illustrates Joo's (2005, p. 476) conceptual framework for successful coaching.

## **Implications**

This section discusses the implications for practice and future research, in alignment with the findings of this study: (1) principals and board chairs generally reported that their roles are clear on the advisory boards, but the purpose of the boards needs clarification. (2) principals and board chairs repeatedly described the value of the boards in terms of advice and support provided; (3) there is a perception that the resources, guidance, and training provided set expectations that boards (even advisory boards) have more opportunity to be decision-makers than is actually the case in practice; (4) successful boards search for purpose and go beyond what is required in the bylaws; (5) differing perceptions of purpose and authority can create tension on a board; (6) principals and board chairs generally exhibited similar and often complementary views of leadership; and (7) a coaching approach to leadership is described by many principals and board chairs, characterized by partnership and collaboration.

### **Implications for Practice**

Implications for practice of this study are discussed in terms of the creation of a coaching culture and discussed in three categories: 1) reframing advisory school boards, 2) creating a center of excellence (COE) around board governance, and 3) leveraging the network of Catholic elementary school boards. A common theme in this discussion is the power of a coaching culture.

A coaching culture creates an environment that engages, empowers, and encourages development at all levels. In a coaching culture, everyone is encouraged to question their assumptions and seek out new ways of thinking and leading. All members of the organization are encouraged to partner in co-creating possibilities and solutions that they may have not considered individually. When coaching is connected to an organization's mission, its value proposition for the organization becomes clear. For example, principals and school boards have

limited opportunities to have meaningful conversations, so must make the most of them.

Coaching can provide the skills needed to maximize the value of those critical conversations, unlocking the potential for individual achievement, increased productivity, and sustainable team excellence.

Building a coaching culture supports generative thinking, which is a cognitive process for deciding what to pay attention to, what it means, and what to do about it. In the generative mode, a board's central purpose is to be a source of leadership for the organization, and its principal role is as a "sense maker." The board frames the problems to be solved, it determines what needs deciding, and it suggests what is worth a strategy before a strategic plan is developed.

Coaching has the potential to transform an organization into a genuine learning organization. In a learning organization, everyone is encouraged to challenge existing beliefs and seek out new ways of thinking. A coaching culture provides safe spaces where everyone is expected to ask for and receive feedback. Embracing the discomfort and learning from it and spreading that knowledge through coaching will afford the organization the greatest opportunities for growth.

Change is a fact of life, and it is accelerating. Coaching as a methodology allows organizations to work with change on a personal, organizational, and relational level. As organizations become more aware of coaching as a way to facilitate purposeful change, the potential application of coaching fundamentals continues to evolve and expand. Engagement and culture are key considerations in successful organizations, and coaching can play a critical role in any change process.

### ***Reframing Advisory School Boards***

Advisory boards, as the name implies, provide advice. However, these boards are often miscast as decision-making bodies. The data show that both principals and board chairs value the advisory role of the boards, even outside their traditional areas of responsibility. And so, advisory board members and leaders should be encouraged to embrace the role of trusted advisors, using a coaching mindset and coaching skills to best support each other and their schools.

I would recommend that the AoB reframe school board governance by building a coaching culture within the Department of Catholic Schools and throughout its school system. Specifically, the AoB can incorporate a coaching approach to elementary school board governance. Principals, board chairs, and board members would first be recruited based on their skills and experience. Then, based on a growth mindset, recruitment decisions would be made with coaching competencies in mind: presence, curiosity, judgment, powerful questions, active listening, feedback, accountability, and establishing trust.

In addition to the existing training made available to the school boards (e.g., committee structure, fiduciary responsibilities, etc.), training in various coaching techniques and skills could be developed and made available. For example, the AoB's Department of Catholic Schools offers a training webinar series for boards. This training could be expanded with coaching skills content. Interestingly, there is currently a video on generative thinking. All board members would become leaders committed to their own development and the development of the board and school. They would be encouraged to cultivate and demonstrate improved emotional intelligence and people skills that support productive relationships and increased performance. As leaders are coached around their own personal development, they learn the process of

becoming coaches for each other. Board meetings could, in part, become group-coaching sessions, designed to promote generative thinking and organizational development.

### ***Creating a Center of Excellence around Board Governance***

To address the recruitment and retention obstacles that boards face, the AoB should strive to become a center of excellence (COE) for non-profit board governance, emphasizing a coaching approach. A COE is an organization that provides leadership, best practices, research, support and/or training for a focus area, such as governance coaching. COEs build out key competencies, capabilities, and expertise across the enterprise. They can help all parts of the enterprise adopt a given model and become efficient at implementing it.

A COE model would be a boon to the recruitment and retention of engaged and enthusiastic board members. As the AoB and its schools gained a reputation for training and developing exceptional board members, versed in a compelling leadership approach, professionals of all kinds would be interested in joining the school boards. Often the path to professional success includes learning how to be a good board member. Catholic schools already have a reputation for excellence and a service-minded culture. And so, a coordinated AoB approach to the question of recruiting board members could also address the need that many communities have for exceptional non-profit and for-profit board leaders.

### ***Leveraging the Network of Elementary School Boards***

Finally, I would recommend that the AoB promote a coaching culture by establishing a network of school boards. This network would facilitate knowledge sharing and generative thinking. Each board would become a powerful node in a larger network, able to share knowledge with other school boards and help to build a larger coaching community. This effort would extend the School Board Core Leadership Collaborative model that the AoB introduced in

2017. The intent of the Collaborative model was that board leaders in each collaborative would meet regularly, with the goal to improve the quality and capacity of all school boards by sharing best practices and providing a forum for ongoing dialogue and board training to address identified needs. A reintroduction of this effort would include all board members and be an ongoing developmental process.

By leveraging a network model, knowledge from schools and boards that have already adopted coaching practices can be more easily shared with those new to the idea, reducing the learning curve for those new to the practice. Sharing knowledge serves to reinforce an enterprise approach to excellence in school governance. The creation of a coaching-governance focused COE would benefit all stakeholders in the community as the processes are designed to support the mission of the schools. A COE model would help spread the coaching mindset and coaching skills throughout the school system. In this way, all school leaders – principals, board chairs, board members, the AoB Department of Schools – would begin to speak a common governance language of coaching. They would be able to have more meaningful conversations and more generative interactions. Since the focus is on organizational health and co-active coaching, the concepts of a coach-coachee dyad give way to the idea of mutually productive and reciprocal developmental relationships. The principal, board chairs, and board members would all take turns coaching and developing one another, depending on the opportunities that arise.

### **Implications for Further Research**

In preparing for my survey and interview protocol, I had numerous discussions with FADICA and NCEA staff regarding their ongoing research projects. NCEA and FADICA have researched Catholic school governance across the U.S., as well the sustainability of the nation's Catholic schools.

For a long time, independent, site-based management has been the working model of good Catholic schools. However, based on my interviews, the complexities and challenges of sustaining a parish school are daunting. The task has become too much for one pastor and one principal to handle, even with the help of a board. And so, Catholic schools are exploring shifting some authority from the pastors and principals to other sources, allowing principals to focus on coaching teachers and pastors to focus on the school's spiritual life. These alternative governance models offer the laity more robust opportunities for leadership, but they do not offer a single, clear vision for the future of Catholic schools. My experience supports the FADICA research that indicates further exploration is needed in several areas, including governance models, success metrics, and the governance role of the pastors (FADICA, 2020, p. 25).

### ***Governance Models***

In 2018, FADICA learned through its national and local partners in Catholic education of the strong desire and need for information and guidance on school governance changes (personnel communication, A. Simon, May, 7, 2020). In addition, a desire to explore and better understand the plethora of governance models, made possible because canon law allows ecclesial officials to delegate responsibilities at their discretion, was echoed during my interviews with the AoB principals and board chairs. FADICA members and other donors are also seeking tools and data to assist (arch)dioceses with governance change determination and implementation.

Since change defines this new era in Catholic education, it is critical that future research address the governance change process. FADICA research has determined, and I concur, that near-term efforts should be aimed at identifying best practices for deciding when a change in Catholic school governance is needed, what is the best governance model to address local circumstances, and how should that change be managed (FADICA, 2020). Other related

questions include how much power should be given to the laity and what is the appropriate balance to strike between independence and collaboration among schools.

As I was scoping this study, I contacted the school offices of 12 (arch)dioceses across the U.S., in addition to the AoB. While the focus of this dissertation became elementary schools solely in the AoB, I noted that school officials in the other (arch)dioceses expressed an interest in participating in future studies to better understand the dynamics between principals and boards, the business case for the work of advisory boards, and the best approaches to engage the pastors in the work of the boards and schools. In the future, the scope of this study should be expanded to include a larger sample of Catholic elementary schools from multiple (arch)dioceses across the U.S., examining the leadership dynamics of schools that utilize a variety of governance models (e.g., consultative boards, boards of limited jurisdiction). It would also be beneficial to conduct longitudinal studies that explore the relationship between success (in terms of mission, academic excellence, and financial viability) and alternative governance models.

### ***Metrics of School Success***

Catholic school leaders should continually assess opportunities for the school, as well as potential threats, by collecting and analyzing relevant data, and establishing metrics to monitor the school's performance. Future research is needed to establish how Catholic schools can more robustly evaluate themselves. FADICA research identifies that a critical question would address which set of metrics leaders should use to track school health and viability over time (FADICA, 2020).

The impact of governance models on school quality should also be further investigated (FADICA, 2020). A first step is defining what constitutes quality. Certainly, academic criteria such as “accreditations/awards, standardized test scores, graduation rates, and high



school/college admission rates should be measured” (FADICA, 2020, p. 23). School quality may also be measured by operational considerations such as “performance reviews, financial audits, enrollment and retention, staff retention, and accessibility” (FADICA, 2020, p. 23). Finally, a governance perspective to quality would explore how to effectively assess strategic planning processes, evaluate leadership, and monitor board effectiveness (FADICA, 2020).

Determining which of these criteria are most important and how best to measure them would provide useful information for governing the schools and ensuring their future sustainability. My board tied performance metrics into the strategic planning process, assuring that progress was monitored and discussed regularly. In addition, as financial considerations impact the sustainability of Catholic schools, robust metrics are needed to identify the most useful criteria for determining when schools should close or merge. When it is determined that schools must be closed or merged, metrics can help establish best practices for managing the dynamics of these activities.

### ***Role of Pastors in School Governance***

As discussed previously, canon law is flexible about the role of the pastors as the bishops have the ultimate authority. My survey was originally sent to multiple (arch)dioceses across the U.S., in addition to the AoB. When surveyed, 86 of 142 respondents to survey question #10 said that the pastor was the executive authority over the school (Table 12). Ninety-six of 141 respondents to survey question #16 stated that the pastor is actively engaged in school governance (Table 13). Principals and board chairs from across the U.S. recognize that the pastors are significant leaders in the school, and their level of engagement is perceived to vary.

And so, the leadership dynamic between the principal, board chair, and pastor should be explored, in future research, for its implications on school governance. It would be valuable to

investigate in a more detailed manner the perceptions that each group of leaders has regarding how the different leadership positions can best serve Catholic schools. FADICA (2020) also notes that as parochial schools experiment with different governance models, future studies should identify the best practices for managing the evolving leadership role of the pastors.

**Table 12**

*Survey Responses from (Arch)dioceses to Question 10 (103 principals and 39 board chairs responded).*

| Survey Question  | Pastor | President | Principal | Other |
|--|--------|-----------|-----------|-------|
| 10. Who is considered the executive authority over the school? | 86     | 5         | 41        | 10    |

*Note.* This table summarizes the principal and board chair survey responses to Question #10. Respondents were from (arch)dioceses across the U.S.

**Table 13**

*Survey Responses from (Arch)dioceses to Question 16 (102 principals and 39 board chairs responded).*

| Survey Question  | Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|--|----------------|-------|----------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| 16. The Pastor is actively engaged in school governance. | 51             | 45    | 24                         | 13       | 8                 |

*Note.* This table summarizes the principal and board chair survey responses to Question #16. Respondents were from (arch)dioceses across the U.S.

## Conclusion

What is the pure model of Catholic education? The first schools in North America were part of Spanish missions intended to civilize the indigenous people (Walch, 2016). The earliest schools in the English colonies were not parochial, but rather independent schools supported and operated by the sisters and brothers of religious orders. Even the parish model that peaked in the

1960s was the product of earlier experimentation, as schools were built in response to 19th-century anti-Catholicism.

During the current era of experimentation in Catholic education, the Church is wrestling with a variety of ways to understand the primary mission of Catholic education. Should the goal of Catholic education be to keep Catholic families rooted in the faith or to provide high-quality education to low-income communities or to convert new people to the faith? School leaders are on the front lines as these goals need to be prioritized and notions of these familiar institutions updated.

Flexible models of school governance are needed to address these questions. But even more important than the models is the development of great leaders. The creation of a board structure to support Catholic schools has generally been considered an advance in governance. However, many schools struggle to identify, engage, and develop individuals who have the necessary skills and resources to contribute as board members. This research has, hopefully, shed light on the issue of board purpose and offered some perspectives and recommended actions to better equip school leaders of the future to meet the most important challenges facing Catholic education.

### **Afterword**

Data collection, analysis, write up of findings, and discussion were all completed in the year since the formal declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic on March 11, 2020. We are living in two different worlds now, as we get used to a new normal. While the findings of this study and their implications still stand, this Afterword further explores those implications in the context of this unprecedented time.

The NCEA (2021) estimates that by the start of the 2020 school year, 209 Catholic schools had closed, many because of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as declining enrollment and financial instability. Twenty percent of students in the nation's 6,000 Catholic schools are minorities, including Hispanics, African Americans and Asians (NCEA, 2021). The impact of these school closings on these minority students is profound and negatively impacts vulnerable communities. Catholic schools rely heavily upon charitable donations, which have fallen off in the months since stay-at-home orders went into effect. Without those funds, the schools cannot offer scholarships to families that otherwise could not afford the tuition.

Adaptation is key to survival. Catholic schools failed to adapt to the loss of a cheap labor force as the number of young priests and nuns began to fall. Between 1970 and 2019, the number of religious sisters worldwide dropped 74%, while during the same period, the number of religious brothers fell 66% (CARA, 2021). In 1960, 74% of parochial school staff were members of religious orders or clergy, but by 2019, less than 3 percent of staff were clergy (McDonald & Schultz, 2019). These religious staff or clergy were replaced by lay staff who require higher salaries and benefits. To survive, there was a need for schools to increase donations or increase tuition or both. Church leaders have urged Congress to include funding in the next pandemic relief bill for scholarship assistance for economically disadvantaged families to use at Catholic or other private schools. However, it is unclear what external support will be available to Catholic education in the U.S.

Changing times have put the primary mission of Catholic education and its sustainability into question. However, given the resilience of Catholic education throughout history, it is hoped that Catholic schools can adapt and thrive in the new normal by leveraging innovative governance models and leadership approaches. Success will be a vital system of Catholic schools

that continue to offer an experience that balances academics and religious teachings, creates an inclusive environment where everyone is welcome, and places an emphasis on character development and community service.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix A

#### Memorandum from Baltimore Archbishop Lori (July 3, 2019)

|   |   |
|---|---|
|    | <b>ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE</b>   |
|   | <small>320 CATHEDRAL STREET • BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21201 • 410-547-5437 • FAX 410-547-8234</small> |
| <small>OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP</small>   | <p>July 3, 2019</p>   |
| <p>To: Archdiocese of Baltimore Elementary School Pastors, Principals, and School Board Chairs</p>  |   |
| <p>Our Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore exist to serve as an instrument of the Church in its mission of evangelization and Christian formation. As a ministry of our parishes, the purpose of the school is to maintain an educational institution and academic program in accordance with and subject to the standards, guidelines and discipline of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Baltimore.</p>  |   |
| <p>As background, today we have 38 elementary schools – 17 Archdiocesan Collaborative Schools (ACS) under the ACS governance model (which includes 5 regional schools and 3 Baltimore City Community Schools), 1 interparish school – Resurrection – St. Paul School, and 20 Parish schools that are operating under various governance by-laws or other policies of the parish.</p>  |   |
| <p>Our schools' by-laws and other governing documents in many cases are not current, are inconsistent school-to-school and may not properly align with the schools' current operating environment. This inconsistency makes it difficult for the Archdiocese to provide the proper level of support, policies and guidance to our Pastors, Principals and School Board Chairs.</p>  |   |
| <p>Running a parish school is complex and requires a collaborative team approach. Today's principals need broad educational, financial and operational support and have the daunting task of managing a multi-million dollar enterprise in the 21st century. Our principals are often distracted from ensuring each and every student is receiving a character shaping, life changing education rooted in the Catholic faith.</p>   |   |
| <p>Operating in a silo doesn't consistently achieve excellence or sustained progress. This warrants shifting some responsibility to other support resources such as the Superintendent / Department of Catholic Schools and the School Board. The shift of responsibility and collaborative decision making allow the school and parish leadership to benefit from the specialized skills and experience that the other team members bring to the table. Creating a school system will drive efficiencies and a rigorous academic model that will attract funders and lead to academic excellence, operational vitality, and the growth of our schools.</p> |   |
| <p>Given the opportunity above, we need a consistent governance model for our parish schools that reinforces the Mission of Catholic Education and contains the following key attributes:</p>   |   |

Archdiocese of Baltimore Catholic School Governance  
July 3, 2019  
Page 2

- Reinforces that the school is a key ministry of the Parish
- Collaborative governance between Pastor, Principal, School Board and the Superintendent/Department of Catholic Schools
- Financial Support & Transparency
- Pastor collaboration with the Superintendent in the personnel management of the Principal
- Superintendent oversight and support by the Department of Catholic School's staff relative to the educational efficacy (professional development, faith formation, certification, evaluation, curriculum, and academic performance) of the school
- Common goal of sustainability and growth of the school

Attached is the new Archdiocese of Baltimore Catholic Schools Governance for our parish schools which has been approved by the College of Consultors, the Presbyteral Council and the Archdiocesan of Baltimore Catholic School Board.

The transition of our parish schools to the new governance model will begin in September 2019 and take place over the next 12-24 months. Timing of the transition will be determined based on the parish/school's readiness and collaborative planning among the Pastor, Principal, Superintendent and the School Board. Our Regional, Baltimore City Community and PreK-12 schools will remain under the current Archdiocese Collaborative School governance model.

Jim Sellinger, Chancellor of Catholic Schools, and Dr. Donna Hargens, Superintendent of Catholic Schools, will schedule a meeting with you to review the governance model, answer any questions you may have and begin the process to determine the timeline & process for the transition to the new governance model.

Thank you for your support of Catholic education and the smooth transition to our new Catholic School's Governance model.

Faithfully in Christ,



Most Reverend William E. Lori  
Archbishop of Baltimore

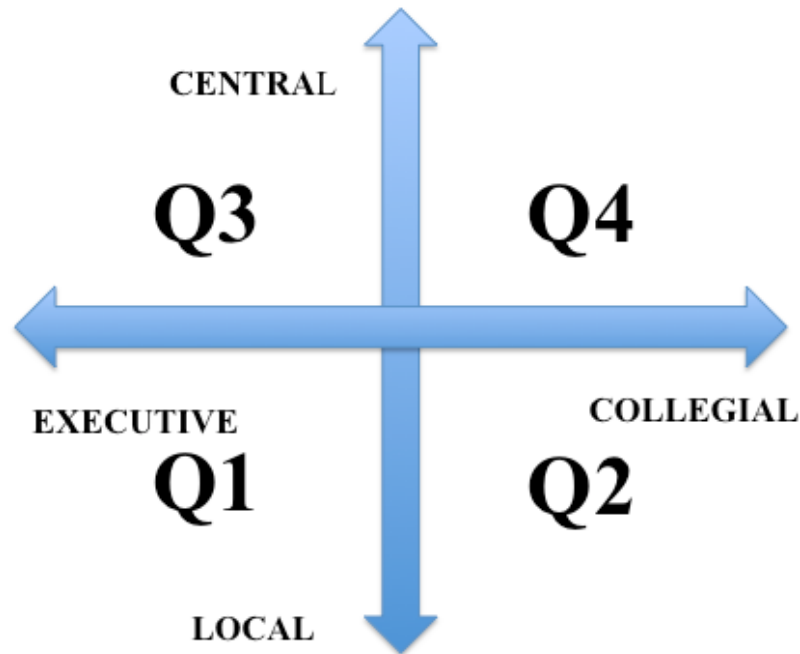
Attachment

Cc: Most Reverend Adam J. Parker  
Dr. Donna Hargens  
Mr. James Sellinger



## Appendix B

### Four Quadrant Model of Catholic School Governance Models (FADICA, 2015, p. 14)



**Executive** – governance system where authority is placed in the hands of an individual

**Collegial** – governance involves the vesting of authority with a group, such as a board

**Local** – governance that takes place on a school-by-school basis

**Central** – takes governing authority away from local actors and vests it in a single office that oversees multiple schools

*Note.* This matrix model demonstrates that there are too many possible governance configurations to list, given the flexibility allowed by canon law to distribute power.

## **Appendix C**

### **Standard 5 & 6 Benchmarks (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012)**

- 5.1 The governing body, representing the diversity of stakeholders, functions according to its approved constitution and by-laws.
- 5.2 The governing body systematizes the policies of the school's operations to ensure fidelity to mission, and continuity and sustainability through leadership successions.
- 5.3 The governing body, in collaboration with or through the actions of the leader/leadership team, maintains a relationship with the Bishop marked by mutual trust, close cooperation, continuing dialogue, and respect for the Bishop's legitimate authority.
- 5.4 The governing body, in collaboration with or through the actions of the leader/leadership team, maintains a constructive and beneficial relationship with the (arch) diocesan Education Office consistent with (arch)diocesan policy pertaining to the recognition of Catholic schools by the Bishop.
- 5.5 In the case of a parish school, the governing body, in collaboration with the leader/leadership team, maintains a relationship with the canonical administrator (pastor or designee of Bishop) marked by mutual trust, close cooperation, and continuing dialogue.
- 5.6 The governing body engages in formation and on-going training and self-evaluation for itself and the leadership team to ensure the faithful execution of their respective responsibilities.
- 6.1 The leader/leadership team meets national, state and/or (arch)diocesan requirements for school leadership preparation and licensing to serve as the faith and instructional leader(s) of the school.
- 6.2 The leader/leadership team articulates a clear mission and vision for the school, and engages the school community to ensure a school culture that embodies the mission and vision.
- 6.3 The leader/leadership team takes responsibility for the development and oversight of personnel, including recruitment, professional growth, faith formation, and formal assessment of faculty and staff in compliance with (arch)diocesan policies and/or religious congregation sponsorship policies.
- 6.4 The leader/leadership team establishes and supports networks of collaboration at all levels within the school community to advance excellence.

- 6.5 The leader/leadership team directs the development and continuous improvement of curriculum and instruction and utilizes school-wide data to plan for continued and sustained academic excellence and growth.
- 6.6 The leader/leadership team works in collaboration with the governing body to provide an infrastructure of programs and services that ensures the operational vitality of the school.
- 6.7 The leader/leadership team assumes responsibility for communicating new initiatives and/or changes to school programs to all constituents.

## Appendix D

### Board Engagement Survey

Thank you for participating in our survey. Your feedback is important.

The purpose of this survey is to better understand the relationship between the school principal and the chair of the school board, as well as other governance issues, in Catholic elementary schools during the COVID-19 crisis. It is being sent to Catholic elementary school principals and board chairs across the U.S. This is part of a doctoral dissertation research project being conducted by Christopher Currens at Hood College in Frederick, MD. Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in this research survey, you may withdraw at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you withdraw from participating at any time, you will not be penalized.

The procedure involves filling out an anonymous online survey that will take approximately 7 minutes. In addition, you may also choose to contact the researcher for a follow-up call (cjc3@hood.edu). Your responses will be confidential, and we do not collect identifying information such as your name, email address, or IP address.

We will do our best to keep your information confidential. All data is stored in a password protected electronic format. To help protect your confidentiality, the surveys will not contain information that will personally identify you. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only and will be shared with Hood College representatives.

If you have any questions about the research study or would like to discuss it further, please contact the researcher at cjc3@hood.edu. This research has been reviewed according to the Hood College Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures for research involving human subjects. The Hood College IRB Chair is Dr. Diane Graves, who can be reached at graves@hood.edu.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below. Clicking on the "agree" button below indicates that:

- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate
- You are at least 18 years of age

\* If you do not wish to participate in the research study (or your school does not have a Board), please decline participation by clicking on the "disagree" button.

☐ Agree  
☐ Disagree

Which is your Archdiocese (If a Diocese, select "Diocese, please specify" at the bottom of the drop down menu)? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your gender? \_\_\_ Male \_\_\_ Female \_\_\_ Prefer not to answer

What is your race or ethnicity?

- \_\_\_ Asian
- \_\_\_ Black or African American Hispanic or Latino
- \_\_\_ Middle Eastern or North African Multiracial or Multiethnic
- \_\_\_ Native American or Alaska Native
- \_\_\_ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- \_\_\_ White
- \_\_\_ Prefer not to answer
- \_\_\_ Another race or ethnicity, please describe below
- \_\_\_ Self-describe below: \_\_\_\_\_

What is your age?

- \_\_\_ 18-24
- \_\_\_ 25-34
- \_\_\_ 35-44
- \_\_\_ 45-54
- \_\_\_ 55-64
- \_\_\_ 65+
- \_\_\_ Prefer not to answer

Are you a Principal or Board Chair? \_\_\_ Principal \_\_\_ Board Chair

About how many years have you been in your current position?

- \_\_\_ Less than 1 year
- \_\_\_ At least 1 year but less than 3 years
- \_\_\_ At least 3 years but less than 5 years
- \_\_\_ At least 5 years but less than 10 years
- \_\_\_ 10 years or more

Which of the following best describes your school?

- \_\_\_ Parish/Parochial
- \_\_\_ Interparish (funding from several parishes)
- \_\_\_ Regional
- \_\_\_ Diocesan
- \_\_\_ Private or independent school (sponsored by a religious order or board)
- \_\_\_ Other (please specify)

Has your school been designated as a National Blue Ribbon School in the last five years?

- \_\_\_ Yes
- \_\_\_ No

Who is considered the executive authority over the school?

- ☐ Pastor
- ☐ President
- ☐ Principal
- ☐ Other (please specify)

How would you describe the role of your Board?

- ☐ Advisory (makes recommendations to executive authority but executive authority is not bound by the advice)
- ☐ Consultative (must be consulted by executive authority in designated areas but executive authority is not bound by the advice) Board of Limited or Specified Jurisdiction (has final say in designated areas)
- ☐ Fiduciary (complete governance authority)
- ☐ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis (December 2019 - February 2020), please estimate how often you communicated with the Principal/Board Chair monthly and who initiated these contacts (not including full Board meetings)? Average monthly contacts:

- ☐ Number Initiated by Principal
- ☐ Number Initiated by Board Chair

Since the COVID-19 crisis began in the U.S. (March 2020 - June 2020), please estimate how often have you communicated with the Principal/Board Chair monthly and who initiated these contacts (not including full Board meetings)? Average monthly contacts:

- ☐ Number Initiated by Principal
- ☐ Number Initiated by Board Chair

Which, if any, has the Board done due to the COVID-19 crisis? Please check all that apply.

- ☐ Cancelled scheduled Board meetings
- ☐ Held additional Board meetings
- ☐ Held additional committee meetings
- ☐ Taken on new roles or responsibilities
- ☐ Offered strategic advice
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Which, if any, of the Board Committees met during the COVID-19 crisis? Please check all that apply.

- ☐ Executive
- ☐ Finance
- ☐ Development
- ☐ Membership
- ☐ Facilities
- ☐ Catholic Identity
- ☐ Technology
- ☐ Enrollment

- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Other (please specify)

The Pastor is actively engaged in school governance.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

The roles of the Principal and the Board Chair are clear. Please select the best response.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

This Board is an effective means of utilizing the expertise of lay people to enhance the governance of the school. Please select the best response.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

The Board has been a valuable resource to the school during the COVID-19 crisis. Please select the best response.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

The most important reason to have a Board is \_\_\_\_\_.

If you could change one thing to improve the effectiveness of Board governance, it would be \_\_\_\_\_.

I would describe my leadership style as \_\_\_\_\_.

Would you be willing to talk in more depth about your responses or participate further in the study? If so, please provide your name and contact information. Thank you! \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\*If you would be interested in a follow-up conversation about the survey or participating further in my study, please contact me at [cjc3@hood.edu](mailto:cjc3@hood.edu). Thank you!\*\*\*

## Appendix E

### Request for Principals to Participate in Research and to Help in Recruiting Board Chairs

Hello Principal \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Christopher Currens, and I am a doctoral student at Hood College in Frederick. The Hood Doctorate of Organization Leadership (DOL) is designed for working adults and seeks to fulfill the needs of the scholar/practitioner.

<https://www.hood.edu/graduate/academics/programs/organizational-leadership-dol>

For my dissertation, I am doing a qualitative study of principal and board chair dynamics at elementary schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore (AoB). Non-profit boards are an area of interest for me. Also, a lifelong Catholic, I was the board chair for St. John Regional Catholic School (SJRCs) in Frederick for three years.

At Dr. Camille Brown's suggestion, I am reaching out to you to ask for your help. Once I get approval from Hood, I plan to gather data at selected schools in the AoB. This data gathering would involve (1) a survey, (2) a board meeting observation (at least part, if possible), and (3) individual interviews with the principal and board chair (1 hour each, with possible follow up). I would also like to review the board guidance documents (e.g., bylaws), if possible.

I have two requests:

- (1) Would you be willing to participate in my study?
- (2) Would you be able to share the emails for your board chair and other board members with me? I would love to send them an email to provide a little notice that I will be reaching out in them over the next several weeks to see if they would be willing to participate in my study.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thanks very much for your help!

Chris Currens  
(cell) 301-XXX-XXXX



## **Appendix F**

### **Demographics Interview Questions for Principals and Board Chairs**

- Age range (18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65+)
- Race or ethnicity (Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Middle Eastern or North African, Multiracial or Multiethnic, Native American or Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, White, Prefer not to answer, Other \_\_\_\_\_)
- Gender (Male or Female)
- Highest level of education \_\_\_\_\_ Professional background \_\_\_\_\_
- Role (Principal or Board Chair)

## **Appendix G**

### **HOOD COLLEGE INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

Catholic Elementary School Success: Governance Lessons from a Qualitative Study of Five  
Advisory Boards in the Archdiocese of Baltimore

#### **Consent Form**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

You are invited to be a participant in a research study about the similarities and differences in perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of Catholic elementary school principals and board chairs. The tension between servant leadership and transformational leadership will provide a theoretical foundation to answer the central research question: How do principals' and board chairs' perceptions of their roles, responsibilities, authorities, and accountabilities affect the schools' success with regards to mission and Catholic identity, governance and leadership, academic excellence, and operational vitality? You were selected as a possible participant because of your role in the governance of a Catholic elementary school. We ask that you read this document and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. We require that participants in this study be at least 18 years old. The study is being conducted by Hood College.

#### **2. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to understand perceptions of roles, responsibilities, accountabilities, and authorities of Catholic elementary school principals and board chairs, as well as their relationship dynamics, and explore any differences with what actually happens. Recommendations will be made for school leaders regarding alignment of roles and responsibilities in governing schools. Areas for future study may include the prevalence and usefulness of school governance documents.

#### **3. DURATION**

The period of time you will be involved with this study is up to 120 days, including allowing the researcher to observe a board meeting, participating in a virtual focus group (if principal or board chair) that will likely last approximately 60 minutes, and/or participating in an individual virtual interview (if a principal or board chair) that will last approximately 60 minutes (including 2 short written exercises). You may receive an additional request for a follow-up interview during the 120-day period.

#### **4. PROCEDURES**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to:

- Allow me to attend at least part of any web-based or telephone school board meeting in order to observe the interpersonal dynamics, especially with regard to role expectations and decision-making styles.
- If you are the principal or board chair, participate in a virtual (web-based or telephone) focus group with your peers (principals with other principals, board chairs with other board chairs) that will likely last approximately 60 minutes.
- If you are the principal or board chair, participate in an individual virtual interview that will last approximately 60 minutes (including 2 short written exercises).

I will be asking for you to answer questions about Catholic elementary school board dynamics, relationships, and your personal experience with those school boards. With your consent, the virtual meeting observations, virtual interviews, and virtual focus groups will be recorded (video and audio) for later transcription and then the recordings will be destroyed. The information collected via the short written exercises will be reported in the aggregate and no individual attribution will be made to any participant or school in the study (i.e., numbers/letters used to identify participants and schools).

You may also agree to be interviewed but not participate in the focus group.

## **5. RISKS/BENEFITS**

This study has the following risks: Participants may disclose information that, if shared with other members of their organization, may cause the participants to be seen in a negative light. A senior Archdiocese of Baltimore official sits on the PI's committee.

The benefits of participation are: Participants will potentially contribute to the improvement of the functioning and effectiveness of Catholic elementary school boards, including their own. No deception will be used. There are no technical aspects of equipment used that pose a potential hazard to participants.

## **6. CONFIDENTIALITY**

The records of this study will be kept private. All videotapes and audiotapes will be erased immediately after transcription. Participants' names will not be used. They will be assigned a number/letter in all transcriptions. All records will be kept locked in a file cabinet in a secure office on the campus of a federal research agency. Electronic records stored on a laptop will be password protected and, when feasible, encrypted. The laptop will be kept locked in a secure office on the campus of a federal research agency. In any sort of report that is published or presentation that is given, no participant or participating school will be identified. All data will be destroyed three years after the study is completed.

Please note that confidentiality in a focus group cannot be guaranteed, however, participants will be directed to maintain privacy of what is shared by their peers.

## **7. VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Hood College or any of its representatives. If you decide to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without affecting those relationships. If you choose to withdraw, your responses will be destroyed and will not be included in the study results.

## **8. CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS**

The researcher conducting this study is Christopher Currens. You may ask any questions you have right now. If you have questions later, you may contact the researcher at 301-633-2951 or at [cjc3@hood.edu](mailto:cjc3@hood.edu).

If you have questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to speak with someone other than the researcher, you may contact the researcher's Committee Chair, Dr. Jennifer Cuddapah, Doctorate of Organizational Leadership (DOL), Associate Professor of Education, Hood College, 401 Rosemont Ave., Frederick, MD 21701, 301-696-3773 or [cuddapah@hood.edu](mailto:cuddapah@hood.edu). You may also contact Dr. Diane Graves, Chair of the Hood College Institutional Review Board, at 301-696-3963 or [graves@hood.edu](mailto:graves@hood.edu).

## **9. COMPENSATION**

Gift cards (\$10) will be offered to the principals and board chairs who choose to participate in the study.

## **10. STATEMENT OF CONSENT**

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

The procedures of this study have been explained to me and my questions have been addressed. The information that I provide is confidential and will be used for research purposes only. I am at least eighteen years old. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw anytime without penalty.

I understand that I will be video and/or audio recorded for later transcription. The recordings will be destroyed upon transcription. These transcriptions will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study. My name will not appear on the transcripts. I will be assigned a pseudonym or number/letter to protect my identity.

If I have any concerns about my experience in this study, I may contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board or the Chair of the sponsoring department of this research regarding my concerns. Dr. Kathleen Bands is the Program Director of the Hood College Doctorate of Organizational Leadership Program and may be reached at 301-696-3818 or [bands@hood.edu](mailto:bands@hood.edu). Dr. Diane Graves is the Chair of the Hood College Institutional Review Board and may be reached at 301-696-3963 or [graves@hood.edu](mailto:graves@hood.edu).

**Participant signature**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Person Obtaining Consent**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix H

### Interview Protocol

Participant's Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Describe the ways you see your working relationship with your principal/chair as succeeding? [How working well?]
2. How do you interact with your principal/board chair in times of crisis? [How often do you interact with each other (not the board)?]
3. What challenges/tensions exist between principals and board chairs as they attempt to fulfill their roles and responsibilities?
4. How do you define leadership?
  - a. How would you describe your leadership style?
  - b. How would you describe the leadership style of your principal/board chair?
5. How would you describe your leadership roles and responsibilities in school governance?
6.
  - a) How do you perceive the leadership roles and responsibilities of the principal/board chair? [Do you think the roles are clear? Expectations?]
  - b) How do you think your principal/board chair perceives your leadership role and responsibilities?
7. What resources (internal or external) helped you and your principal/board chair manage your governance responsibilities (e.g., Archdiocese guidance/governing documents, technology, training, etc.)? [How do guidance documents reflect the reality of school governance?]
8. How do school boards matter to the success of the schools?
9. What advice would you give to other principal/chairs to have a successful partnership? [In what ways can they keep communication open?]
10. What can you add that would help me better understand the principal-board chair dynamic?

## **Appendix I**

### **Ranking of Personal and Professional Qualities of Successful Board Leaders**

Below are the 12 qualities of effective board leaders (Chait et al., 1993). Please select the three qualities of leaders you believe are most important to board success and order them from most (1) to least important (3). Then choose the one that you consider to be the least important.

1. Extensive leadership experience
2. Respect and confidence of other board members
3. Collaborative and restrained in style
4. Personally bonded with other board members
5. Resilient, with a drive to confront and surmount setbacks
6. Complete candor and expectation of the same in others
7. Downplays self-interest
8. Brings personal time and energy to devote to board leadership
9. Listens well and draws out ideas
10. Displays effective influence, diplomacy, and constructive guidance
11. Embodies integrity and expects it from others
12. Shows mastery of school's mission, strategy, and operating issues

## **Appendix J**

### **Self-Anchoring Scale Activity** (Kilpatrick & Cantril, 1960)

#### **Directions:**

1. Elicit phrases to describe his or her ideal working relationship between principals and board chairs.
2. Write the phrases at the top of a sheet of paper (using the exact wording of the participant).
3. Elicit phrases to describe the worst possible relationship.
4. Write these phrases at the bottom of the same sheet of paper.
5. Draw a ladder on the left side of the page connecting the bottom of the page and the top of the page.
  - a. Use equidistant slash marks for ten steps on the ladder.
  - b. Number the steps from 0, at the bottom of the page, to 10 at the top.
6. Ask the participant to think about his or her experiences in the last five years and then to indicate the step number of each of these past and future relationships (PR and FR).
  - a. Write that number to the right of the ladder and write “PR” next to the step.
  - b. Write that number to the right of the ladder and write “FR” next to the step.
7. Ask the participant to indicate at which step he or she would place their current experience. Write that number to the right of the ladder and write next “Current” next to the step.
8. Ask the participant to explain why the numbers differed (or stayed the same) for “PR” and “Current.”
9. Ask the participant to explain why the numbers differed (or stayed the same for) “FR” and “Current.”



## Appendix K

### School Board Meeting Observation Protocol

School Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Observer's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time Observation Began: \_\_\_\_\_ Time Ended: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Subject of the observation.
2. Describe the setting (e.g., room, noise level, furniture, equipment, lighting, etc.).
3. Describe how the session begins (who is present, what exactly was said at the beginning).
4. Describe the chronology of events in 15-minute intervals.

|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| 5<br>min.   |  |
| 10<br>min.  |  |
| 45<br>min.  |  |
| 60+<br>min. |  |

5. Describe the interactions that take place during the observation.
  - a. Who is interacting?
  - b. How do they interact? (Provide 1 or 2 examples)
  - c. Are there any changes in interaction during the observation?
6. Describe how decisions are made during the observation period (by answering the following questions)
  - a. Who makes decisions?
  - b. How are decisions communicated? (e.g., written, verbal)
  - c. Document examples of decisions that are made during the observation.

7. Describe nonverbal communication (How do participants get attention? How much do they fidget, move around? How do participants dress, express emotion, physically place themselves in the setting?)
8. Describe meeting activities and participant behaviors (i.e., what is happening during the session and how do participants respond?).
9. How did participants respond or react to what was happening with the program during the observation? Roughly what proportion (some, most, all) are actively engaged?
10. How does the meeting end? (What are the signals that the activity is ending? Who is present, what is said, how do participants react?)

## Appendix L

### Sample Themes Matrix and Executive Summary: Principals

**Question #1 – Describe the ways you see your working relationship with your principal/board chair as succeeding? [How working well?]**

|                  | Compatible | Motivated, Vested, Positive, Usefulness | Respect, Kind | Common Goal | Supportive, Feedback, Broader Perspective | Communicate | Confident |
|------------------|------------|---|---------------|-------------|---|-------------|-----------|
| <b>Christine</b> | x          | x                                       | x             |             |   | x           |           |
| <b>Sharon</b>    |            | x                                       |               | x           | x   |             |           |
| <b>Peter</b>     |            |   |               |             | x   | x           |           |
| <b>Janice</b>    |            | x                                       |               |             |   |             | x         |
| <b>Mark</b>      |            |   |               |             | x   | x           |           |
| <b>TOTALS</b>    | <b>1</b>   | <b>3</b>                                | <b>1</b>      | <b>1</b>    | <b>3</b>                                  | <b>3</b>    | <b>1</b>  |

#### **Executive Summary:**

Three of the five interviewees expressed that communication was an area of success in their relationship with their board chairs. Three participants saw intrinsic motivators as important to the quality of the relationship, including one that felt it important that their contribution was useful. Three principals felt that the relationship provided them with support, feedback, and broader perspectives [coaching themes].