Governing in Crisis:
Sensemaking and Sensegiving in
Virginia School Districts During
COVID-19

Myra Sawyers, M.Ed.
Peabody School
Vanderbilt University

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

COVID-19 caused the entire world to shut down. School systems especially were significantly impacted. On March 23rd, the governor of Virginia ordered schools to close for the rest of the year. Suddenly, school leaders in the entire state had to quickly adjust their decision-making process and rethink major aspects of their work and how schools should function. Existing processes and structures were not sufficient and caused many to change how they understood and adapted. The sensemaking and sensegiving taking place during the initial weeks of COVID-19, when major decisions were being made, is important to understand because school districts, while trying to manage the magnitude of the situation, were also managing the pressures to return to normal. COVID-19 is unlike any other crisis, and during the initial weeks as the enormity of the situation was unfolding, it challenged district leaders to reshape their thinking and priorities.

This conflict between managing the significant events surrounding the COVID-19 crisis and the shifting needs of school districts and the pressures to continue normal school functions, guided the literature review and provided a conceptual framework for this Capstone. Research provides a comparative view of what guides district leaders during their normal decision-making process and when a crisis happens. The literature also examines how cognitive shifts occur and change the way district leaders understand their work and the actions they choose to take. The sensemaking (Weick, K.E., 1993) and sensegiving (Foldy, E.F., Goldman, L. and Ospina, S., 2008) framework used in this research provides meaningful insight and human perspective during the COVID-19 crisis, when major decisions were being made and schools were closing. Sensemaking and sensegiving provides a deeper understanding into the connections between thoughts, emotions and actions and the internal human process involved in making decisions.

Linking the identified phenomenon, the literature and conceptual framework three research questions were established to deconstruct and seek insight into how decisions were made by district leaders during the initial weeks of the COVID-19 crisis. The first question centers on the main priorities of district leaders during the initial weeks of the COVID crisis. The second question concentrates on systems, structures and expectations that guided how decisions were made, and the third question focuses on the main message district leaders communicated. These questions provide insight on what concerns district leaders prioritized, how they made those decisions and how it guided their actions and what those actions communicated.

To better understand the sensemaking and sensegiving process guiding district leaders when making decisions during COVID-19, the **Sequential Mixed-Method approach** was used. This approach combined quantitative and qualitative data collection that allowed a systematic structure for understanding the process of school leaders' efforts in making their decisions during the initial weeks of COVID-19 when schools were closed.

The data found that there are multiple cognitive shifts occurring in school districts in Virginia. The data from this research shows that concerns about education equity and access to information due to limitations to technology and the nutritional needs of families as well as mental health of students and families are being prioritized during district leader's sensemaking and guiding their actions. District leaders are focusing on meal deliveries and using school buses to get food to families in rural areas. District leaders are directing services that provide mental health

supports to students and families. These sensemaking shifts have impacted the decision-making processes away from what the main function of school has been. In most of the statements, district leaders have consistently shared that since COVID-19 and the closure of schools, there has been greater awareness that schools do more than support student achievement. The expression, "new normal" has been adopted into the American vernacular since the COVID-19 pandemic. Though it is used frequently, few know what it really means. The construction for this "new normal" is still being considered.

It is evident that the world has changed and continues to because of COVID-19. This research has shown that Virginia school districts are changing and are responding to this change. This change will unfold over time and a change initiative is recommended that reflects this and how the external world is impacting school districts and their communities. Developing an initiative that is invested in change will guide district leaders as they develop their sensemaking and sensegiving in the future and create the new normal that many district leaders are ready for.

Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis has permanently changed the way leaders understand our world. When a crisis occurs the usual decision-making process of an organization is disrupted. COVID-19 has significantly changed the way people think about and act in the world. When decisions are made under usual[1] circumstances, a situation or problem occurs, prior knowledge and experiences are considered, and then a decision is made, and action is taken. The action taken communicates how individuals understand themselves, their work and others engaged in the work and those most affected by the decision. This usual decision-making process is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Normal decision-making process of an organization
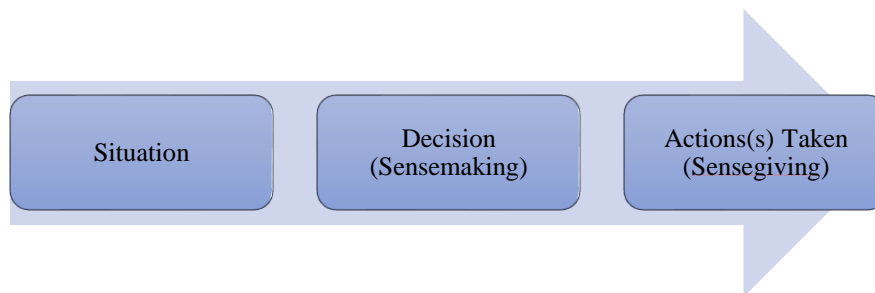
Organizations are frequently faced with difficult situations. In challenging moments of sensemaking (Weick, K.E., 1993), when leaders try to understand a situation, and sensegiving (Foldy, E.G., Goldman, L., and Ospina, S., 2008), when they share their understanding with others, they provide necessary reassurance and build confidence in their ability to make decisions effectively. Leaders are especially challenged when confronted with a major crisis, or "cosmology episode". Without prior experience or knowledge, efforts to respond can be confusing and at times frightening. Karl Weick describes a cosmology episode as something that, "*...* occurs when people suddenly and deeply feel that the universe is no longer a rational, orderly system…both the sense of what is occurring and the means to rebuild that sense collapse together (pg. 633)".

An organization's practices are guided by many forces. School systems are especially affected by multiple forces which include national and local politics, human events, and natural disasters. The way leaders make sense and give sense when things happen, shape how people understand themselves, their work, and others engaged in that work. Sensegiving is essential because it provides for people in an organization focus, direction and meaning (Foldy, E.G., Goldman, L., and Ospina, S., 2008). COVID-19 caused the entire world to shut down. The virus forced many leaders to make decisions they never imagined they would make. It has changed how they understand and respond to the world. School systems especially have been altered significantly.

---

[1] The term "normal" and "usual" are used throughout this paper to compare situations and circumstances prior to a crisis. Things are perceived "normal" when situations and problems are absent of extreme influences.

On March 13th, due to COVID-19, the governor of Virginia ordered schools to shut down for two weeks. Then, on March 23rd, the governor ordered the closing of schools for the entire year. Suddenly, school leaders in 133 districts, serving over a million students, had to adjust their decision-making process. School districts in Virginia had to consider multiple responses to the crisis and quickly rethink major aspects of their work and how schools should function.

The purpose of this Capstone project is to examine school districts in Virginia and their decision-making process during the initial months of COVID-19 crisis when school closures were announced. Using the theoretical framework of sensemaking and sensegiving this study aims to understand what main concerns were guiding district leaders' decisions when it was realized that COVID-19 was a more significant crisis and existing responses were insufficient. This work will also identify if cognitive shifts occurred during this time and did school districts reshape the way they understood the main function of schools.

Context

The state of Virginia is known for its rich history. *It is the landscape that inspired our nation* because it is the home of many of America's most famous founders, such as Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and George Washington. The proximity of Northern Virginia to Washington, D.C. attracts many business and political leaders to the area. Residents in Northern Virginia are some of the wealthiest and most educated in the nation. This includes Loudoun County, the richest county in the U.S. and Fairfax, Arlington and Prince William counties are also ranked in the top 10 (U.S. Chamber of Commerce). Virginia also has some of the top school districts in the nation. Fairfax County has consistently ranked as one of the best school districts in the U.S. It is also where the Thomas Jefferson school, a nationally recognized technology school, is located and attracts some of the top students in the state. This is in stark contrast to residents in other poorer counties located in other regions, primarily rural areas in the state.

Virginia has a diverse geographic and socio-economic landscape. The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) school system is divided into eight geographic regions: Central Virginia (R1), Tidewater (R2), Northern Neck (R3), Northern Virginia (R4), Valley (R5), Western Virginia (R6), Southwest (R7) and Southside (R8). Each region has distinct characteristics and unique qualities that serve diverse populations. [2]

The Central Region (R1) contains the state capital, Richmond. Eighty percent of the region's population lives in Chesterfield, Hanover, or Henrico counties or Richmond City. This region (next to Northern Virginia) is the second fastest growing region in the state. The population is majority white (59%), followed by black (30%), Hispanic (5%) and Asian (4%) and other (2%). The median income in this area is $60,426.

The Tidewater (R2) and Northern Neck (R3) are coastal regions with communities along the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers and the Atlantic Ocean. More than two-thirds of the Tidewater region's population lives along the ports, shipyards and military facilities located in this area. The population is majority white (56%), followed by black (31%), Hispanic (6%), Asian (4%) and other (3%). The median income in this region is $60, 275.

The Northern Neck (R3) is divided into three parts by the Chesapeake Bay: The Eastern Shore, Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula. This body of water isolates each part of the region and is why this is the most rural area of the state, having no cities and the smallest population among Virginia's region. The population is majority white (65%), followed by black (27%),

---

Hispanic (5%), Asian (1%) and other (2%). The median household income is $47,485 and 13.8% of the population in the region falls below the poverty line.

Northern Virginia (R4) is the most densely populated region and, located near Washington D.C. It includes some of the largest and wealthiest communities and school districts in the nation. The population is majority white (57%), followed by Hispanic (16%), Asian and Black (12%) and other (3%). Northern Virginia has the fastest growing population in the state and the highest median income, $102,499. Only 6% of the Northern Virginia falls below the poverty line.

The Valley (R5) includes the Blue Ridge Mountains in the West and the Tidewater in the east. This region includes Charlottesville and Lynchburg where two of the largest universities in Virginia are located. The University of Virginia in Charlottesville and Virginia Tech in Lynchburg are the region's largest employers. Beyond these two small cities, and their suburbs, Central Virginia is mostly rural. The population is majority white (77%), followed by black (15%), Asian (2%), Hispanic (4%) and other (2%). The median household income is $54,231 and 13.2% of the population falls below the poverty line.

The Western part of Virginia (R6), which borders the Central Valley, runs north and south between the Allegheny Mountains to the West of the Blue Ridge Mountains to the east. The mountainous regions are some of the least populated in the state. Most of the population live in small and medium size cities located along Interstate 81 including Winchester and Roanoke. The population is majority white (87%) followed by black (8%), Hispanic (5%), Asian (1%) and other (2%). The median income is $51,480 and 13.2% of the population fall below the poverty level.

Southwest Virginia (R7), is in the westernmost part of the state and borders on four other states. Most of its population lives in localities along Interstate 81 which runs along Radford and Bristol (bordering on Tennessee) through the southern part of Virginia Great Valley. Most of the land in this region is occupied by the Blue Ridge mountains to the east and the Cumberland Mountains in the west. Virginia's seven coal producing counties are in the western part of the region. This region has the highest white population in Virginia (93%), followed by black (3%), Hispanic (2%), and Asian and other (1%). The median household income is $37,663 and 19.8% of the population live below the poverty line. The poverty rate in some areas are 35.2%, the highest in the state.

The eighth region (R8), the Southside, is the largest geographic region in Virginia and includes the southern section of Virginia's Piedmont between the Blue Ridge Mountains to the west and the Tidewater to the east. Much of the Southside is rural, with the lowest population density in Virginia. Though the region is majority white (63%), it has the highest black population (32%) in the state. The median income is $37, 892 and 18.9% of the population lives below the poverty line. The poverty rate in some areas is 33%, the second highest in the state.

These demographics provide useful insight into each district and the population they serve. COVID-19 disrupted all of them and each district had to adjust, adapt, and make decisions that best served the needs of the communities. A complete shutdown of schools had never happened. After the Governor's school closure announcements on March 13th and March 23rd, school districts had to respond. Initial statements from districts communicated various priorities and led to the

following questions: how were these responses decided and what considerations were made regarding students? Were district leaders re-shaping their thinking about their work and the function of schools? These questions guided the initial literature review that helped direct the research.

Conceptual Framework

The literature providing the conceptual framework for this research examines the role of district leaders in different situations and scenarios. Previous research provides insight on how district leaders, under usual circumstances engage in sensemaking and make decisions and take actions that guide people. The literature also provides a framework for how the decision-making process is altered during a crisis and when cognitive shifts occur.

The research informing this work focuses on four main areas:

1. Understanding district leadership roles and impact on schools under normal circumstances
2. District leadership roles during a crisis and their usual responses during a crisis
3. Sensemaking and sensegiving and what challenges district leaders experience during a crisis
4. Cognitive shifts –district leaders shift away from "norms" and change the way they understand their work and other engaged in the work

District leadership roles and impact on schools under normal circumstances

District leaders that mainly include superintendents and school boards play a significant role in guiding decisions in school districts, mainly those that impact student learning. Under usual circumstances most district leaders are guided by student achievement when making decisions (Alsbury, T.L., 2008, Hess, F.M., 2002). When defining student achievement, school districts frequently cite student test scores, rarely considering other attributes. Though this is common practice, the impact district leaders have on improving test scores and overall student success is inconclusive (Alsbury, T. L. 2008, Land, D., 2002). Research shows that relationships among district leaders may play a role in their efficacy in determining student success. Mainly leaders who work more collaboratively and have shared common interests were more effective but did not directly impact student success (Moffett, J., 2011, Leithwood, K. and Jantzi, D., 2008).

An international literature review found noticeable differences in school boards, making it difficult to determine if and how school boards contribute to educational quality. It also highlighted that the metrics used to determine educational quality are based only on student's tests scores, raising the question that this may be too narrow a view for determining high-quality education and student success (Honingh, M., Ruiter, M., & Van Thiel, S., 2018). A historical examination on district leaders, specifically school boards, further found significant variance in effectiveness, especially among small and large districts (Hess, F.M., 2002, Land, D., 2002). However, the focus on student achievement remains consistent in all school districts, *"…no matter what kind of district they serve, today's board members report that student achievement is a pressing concern"* (Hess, F.M., 2002, pg. 42)

District leaders mainly focus on guiding policies that impact student achievement. However, because there are many variances in leadership, it is unclear whether district leaders really have an impact or not on whether students achieve. This raises the question as to why do school districts continue to primarily focus on student achievement and continue to use only test scores as the metrics for determining this success (Alsbury, T.L., 2008 and Land, D., 2002)? A growing body of research has addressed the concerns around the limitations of student achievement as the focus of schools and have called for shifting the focus and purpose of education, (Honingh, M., et al 2018, Biesta, G., 2013). Further research has highlighted other possible areas to focus on, such as student creativity, communication skills, foundations to democracy, and individual values (Biesta, G., 2013). This research brings into question, what should the main priority of district leaders be when considering the function of schools? Should these priorities be the same during a crisis?

District leadership during a crisis and their usual responses during a crisis

A historical view of crisis in schools have shown trust in leadership is critical (Sutherland, Ian E., 2017). School readiness and preparedness is often the primary concern following a crisis. (Waters-Johnson, R., 2013 and Sutherland, I., 2017). District leaders who are prepared and knowledgeable provide reassurance to others of their leadership abilities. Having structures in place, that leaders can use to guide them, are necessary.

The U.S. Department of Education has established guidelines for emergency management plans that focus on the safety of students, faculty, and staff. (Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities, 2004).

These guidelines have four phases:

1. Prevention mitigation which addresses what schools should do to reduce or eliminate risk to life and property
2. Preparedness and process of planning for the worst-case scenario,
3. Response taken during a crisis, and
4. Recovery, attention is focused on restoring the learning and teaching environment after a crisis

It further states that these plans, if executed properly, will ensure the continuity of learning and school districts' daily business operations in the face of natural and man-made disasters, criminal activity on campuses and outbreaks of infectious diseases. COVID-19 is an infectious disease and would be included. However, magnitude is not considered in these guidelines. During a crisis, research has shown that district leaders are expected to have a plan in place that will enable them to respond to a crisis appropriately; taking into consideration other concerns and needs of the community, mainly focusing on the safety of students, faculty and staff. Research has also shown that trust in leaders is important (Waters-Johnson, R., 2013 and Sutherland, I., 2017) and these guidelines communicate an expectation that district leaders will return to business as usual and bring an appearance of normalcy during a crisis. Understanding the decision-making process and influences help to better understand what main concerns and priorities are determined in a crisis.

The sensemaking and sensegiving framework used in this research provides meaningful insight and human perspective during the COVID-19 crisis, when major decisions were being made and schools were closing. Sensemaking and sensegiving provides a deeper understanding into the connections between thoughts, emotions and actions and the internal human process involved in making decisions.

Sensemaking and sensegiving and what challenges district leaders experience during a crisis

The sensemaking theory provides a guide for examining the first step in the decision-making process. It considers how district leaders interpreted, adjusted, and used prior knowledge and experiences and managed pressures caused by COVID-19 and how these deliberations shaped district decisions. Sensemaking theorists suggest that culture, routines, and system structures result from "micromomentary actions", multiple "mini" daily actions, by actors that shape expectations and influence decisions (Coburn, C., 2001, Porac, Thomas, & Baden-Fuller, 1989). The way people act is based on how they understand and choose information. These multiple actions develop routines and expectations over time. They do so by placing new information into preexisting cognitive frameworks that are called "worldviews". (Coburn, C., 2001, Porac, Thomas, & Baden-Fuller, 1989)

District leaders preexisting cognitive frameworks or "worldviews" guide their sensemaking. Existing school culture, routines and systems have continuously guided the way district leaders understand their work and the function of schools and their actions. Student achievement is imbedded in most school cultures and is predominantly considered when making decisions even during a crisis. This expectation exists so that things return to normal as quickly as possible. This priority is expected to be most important in their sensemaking. In doing so, district leaders then communicate this main priority, their worldview, and take actions that communicate this view. This sensegiving reflects how district leaders understand the purpose and function of schools, the work they do as leaders, and those engaged in the work (teachers, school staff) and those affected by their decisions (students, families, the community, etc.)

Leadership scholars have paid close attention to the importance of leaders as sensegivers (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Researchers have shown that how leaders influence people perceptions, attitudes and beliefs strengthens their connection to the organization's goals and purpose. In shaping their understanding of themselves, the work they do, and others involved in that work is critical to the work of leaders. During a time of crisis, a leader as a sensegiver is especially important. They provide meaning and deeper understanding of what is happening and how to guide those relying on them, during the crisis.

This sensemaking and sensegiving decision making process is illustrated in Figure 2. This expectation exists for most usual crisis'. COVID-19 is not a usual crisis'. Research has identified that certain crisis are so significant that existing knowledge and experience does not provide sufficient guidance. An extraordinary crisis, when sensemaking collapses is called a ***cosmology episode***. (Weick, K.E., 1993)

Figure 2: Sensemaking and Sensegiving during COVID-19 – Student achievement as main priority
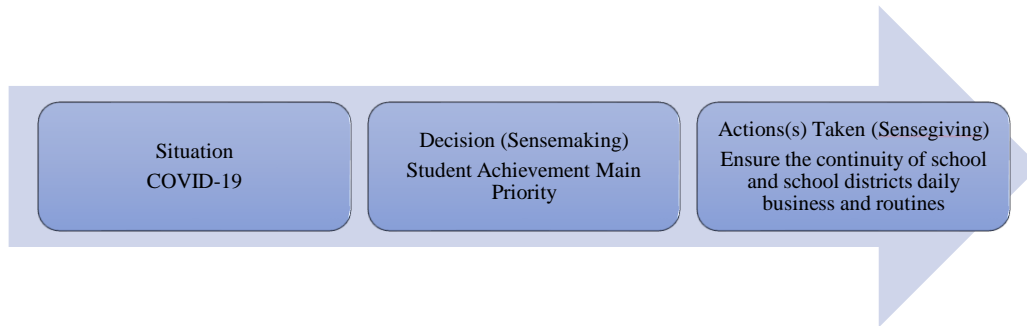
Organizations are guided by human actions which makes them vulnerable to unexpected situations. People, including district leaders, act as if events cohere in time and space and that change is orderly and can be predicted. Theses "cosmologies" are subject to disruption. When they are severely disrupted, Karl Weick calls this a cosmology episode (Weick, 1985: 51-52)

> *A cosmology episode occurs when people suddenly and deeply feel that the universe is no longer a rational, orderly system. What makes such an episode so shattering is that both the sense of what is occurring and the means to rebuild that sense collapse together*

The decision-making process is a human activity guided by experiences. Common daily experiences construct routines and expectations. How these experiences are interpreted, understood guide actions that communicates sense, meaning and purpose. When a cosmology episode occurs, this process is disrupted and the ability to make sense collapses and the ability to act is hindered. What happens in these moments are critical. In these moments, people are often forced to think differently and construct different cognitive frameworks to make sense and give sense to a situation they have never experienced.

In a study, following the shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut in 2012, 188 principals were surveyed and asked about their knowledge of preparedness, readiness, and their beliefs about what was expected of them in a crisis. The study found that although they have plans prepared, principals acknowledged that if they were confronted with a crisis, they are likely to depart from their plan (Waters-Johnson, R., 2013).

So, although guidelines exist and school leaders use them to prepare, school leaders recognize that ***the unpredictable reality of a crisis and demands of the situation, will require them to shift away from their usual work***. Research shows that, though district leaders are expected to follow a plan, when a cosmology episode happens, the way people think about themselves, their work and others engaged in that work shifts. When this cognitive shift occurs, sensegiving in an organization changes because their main concerns and priorities change. (Foldy, E.G., Goldman, L., and Ospina, S., 2008).

Cognitive shifts – the change in district leaders from "norms" and changing the way they understand their work and other engaged in the work

The Sandy Hook shooting caused a shift in how schools think about their work, following the shooting, schools were not focusing on student achievement as their main priority. Other concerns were more important. Figure 3 illustrates the decision-making process when priorities are reconsidered during sensemaking and a cognitive shift occurs during a cosmology episode. Different actions are taken, and sensegiving changes from student achievement to other concerns. Student achievement no longer is the main work of schools. When children, teachers, and staff are in significant danger, it is difficult, for any person or district leader to focus on business as usual and continuity of learning. Greater human needs become the main concern.

Figure 3: Sensemaking and Sense giving when confronted with a cosmology episode
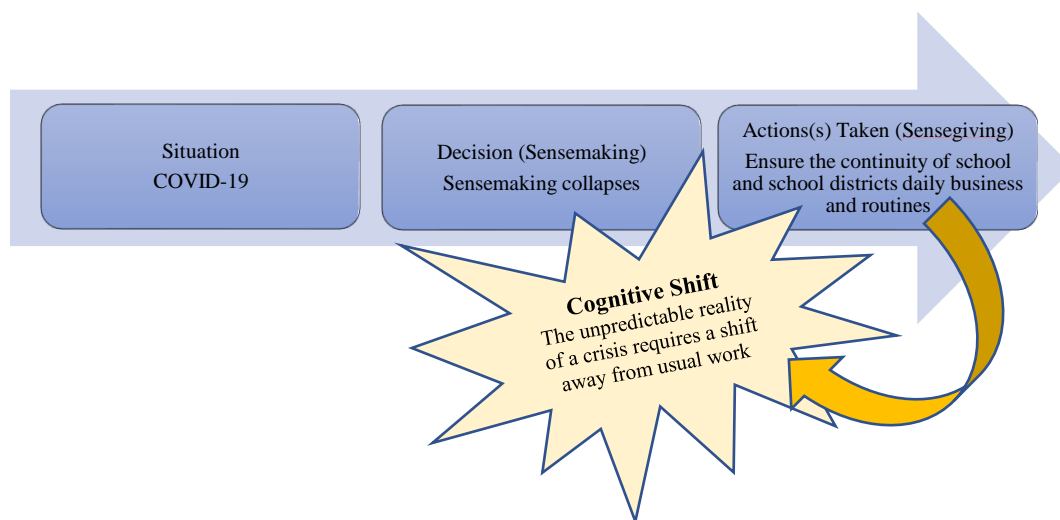
An overview of the research provides key perspectives regarding the main priority of district leaders and how these priorities shift during a crisis, and especially during a cosmology episode. The research clearly shows that, under usual school conditions, the main function of schools and district leaders and what guides their decisions is student achievement. Research also shows that there is significant variance in districts and leadership efficacy, so it is uncertain if decisions made by district leaders really do impact student achievement. Why it remains the focus is still being considered and further research questions the emphasis on student achievement and particularly the usage of test scores as the main measurement of achievement. Research questions whether this is too limiting and considers whether schools should focus on other concerns.

Further research has shown that these priorities and concerns shift during a crisis. During a usual crisis, plans are constructed and followed, but eventually the expectation of district leaders is that after the crisis, they will direct schools back to usual business and continuous learning. However, when a crisis is extraordinary, a cosmology episode, a change in the way people see and understand their work shifts. This cognitive shift changes the way people think and act. This process of sensemaking and sensegiving during COVID-19 has provided a new lens for how district leaders will understand the work of school and how they will engage in that work.

Sensemaking and sensegiving helps to better understand the struggles of district leaders while trying to find personal meaning and understanding during a time when existing knowledge and sense are absent and insufficient while trying to give meaning and sense to others. These insights provided in the literature lead to the following research questions.

Research Questions

Three research questions guide this work that will seek insight into the decision-making process of district leaders during the initial weeks of the COVID-19 crisis when schools were being closed. These questions will answer what main priorities and concerns guided their sensemaking, what structures and processes were in place when decisions were made and what main message was shared that communicated their understandings (sensegiving) and whether cognitive shifts occurred. If shifts occurred, what priorities and actions changed.

The research questions are:

1) During the coronavirus, what was the most important concern for district leaders in Virginia when responding during the initial announcements of schools closing?

2) How were decisions, primarily those that impact students, made by district leaders?

3) What main messages did district leaders send during the coronavirus?

Method and Approach

To better understand the sensemaking and sense giving process used by district leaders when making decisions during COVID-19, the **Sequential Mixed-Method approach** was used. This approach combined quantitative and qualitative data collection that allowed a systematic structure for understanding the process of school leaders' efforts in making their decisions during the initial weeks of COVID-19 when schools were closed.

Quantitative

The initial phase of the Sequential Mixed Method focused on a quantitative approach. It began with first selecting districts to focus on, then gathering, categorizing, and analyzing public statement documents from selected school districts.

Districts Selection

There are 133 districts in Virginia and eight regions that serve nearly 2 million students. Three to four districts were selected from each region for a total of 25 districts (20%). Districts were identified as rural, urban, and suburban. These classifications were established by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and selected accordingly to get a varied sampling of the school

communities being studied. The NCES locale framework has four basic classifications that relies on standard urban and rural definitions developed by the U.S. Census Bureau; each type of locale is either urban or rural in its entirety. These subtypes are differentiated by size (in the case of city and suburban assignments) and proximity (in the case of town and rural assignments).

NCES defines urban schools, not by size but proximity to a major city. This being the case, most urban districts are in the Central and Northern Virginia regions because of their proximity to Washington, D.C. (Northern) and Richmond (Central). Most of Virginia's rural districts are in the south and south west part of the state. The breakdown of selected districts is shown in the table attached (Appendix A). The following number of districts selected: 7 urban (includes small cities), 11 rural (includes towns) and 6 suburban (includes small, medium, and large) districts were selected.

Review of Public Documents: **Public statement analysis, coding and categorizing**

Once 25 districts were selected nearly 300 public documents (tracked in MaxQDA) from those districts were reviewed. Documents were curated from school district websites and local news reports dated between March and April, following the March 13th and March 23rd school closing announcements made by the Governor. The content of documents varied in length. Some statements were long and included extensive information, others were short statements announcing the closures with short statements about main concerns and reassured that additional information would be provided later (Appendix E and F). Most of the rural districts selected used statements provided by the VDOE. Statements were cut and pasted into Word documents. Each document was imported into MaxQDA and coded.

A language analysis was done for each document and five categories, based on text chunks and "word clusters", were identified. Each category was given a color and when a word cluster was identified it was highlighted with assigned color. (Appendix B)

The categories identified are:

- Student Achievement (green)
- Mental Health (yellow)
- Nutrition (purple/magenta)
- Technology (blue)
- Education Equity (red)

Figure 4: Text and Word Clusters for categories

Category	Words and word clusters
Student Achievement (green)	"continued learning" "student success" "Student achievement"
Mental Health (yellow)	"wellness" "social emotional" "mental health" "student concerns" "Overwhelming students and families" "Take care of your family" "stress"
Nutrition (magenta)	"food insecurity" "food not reaching "families' in need" "meals distribution" "food distribution"
Technology (blue)	"digital resources" "digital learning" "access to technology" "Wi-Fi"
Education Equity (red)	"children with special needs" "Access to services" "families in need" "Having a difficult time"

Once coding was complete, aggregate and district data was collected into reports generated by MaxQDA and reviewed. An analysis of language helped provide insight into district leaders personal emotions when sensemaking and sensegiving. The words used to communicate to the public what knowledge and information school leaders were using to guide their sensemaking and sensegiving during their decision-making. A review of reports and language used in statements also guided which districts and school leaders were selected for interviews.

Qualitative:

The quantitative process guided the qualitative data collection in deciding which districts were selected for interviews. The curated public statements data reports showed that most, but not all, districts communicated action in each of the five categories. Some highlighted other categories.

The selection of district leaders was based on district data showing identified priorities and language used in statements. Four districts where student achievement as the main priority were chosen. Four districts where other priorities (mental health, nutrition, technology, and education equity) were identified as their main priority were also selected. A subjective evaluation of language "tone" in statements was considered when selecting districts. Since the framework for this research is sensemaking and sensegiving, the usage of language provides useful insight.

Eight districts (one from each region) were selected. District leaders from two urban districts, two rural districts, and four suburb (one large, one medium and two small) districts were selected. The superintendent and school board leaders were invited for interviews. High level state leaders were also invited for interviews. Each were emailed a letter and invited to be interviewed. Interviews were scheduled with those school leaders who accepted.

During each interview, 19 questions (Appendix D) were asked and provided insights on school leaders background and knowledge about school, classrooms and learning as well as insights into their decision-making processes and what they considered significant. The questions provided structure, but the questions were not always asked sequentially. This was done intentionally to create a more relaxed conversational interview. Interviews were conducted with only school leaders since research questions aim to understand the sensemaking and decision-making process of district leaders during the COVID-19 crisis. Interviews were conducted with 8 school leaders. Two were high-level state leaders and five were district leaders who are members of the local school boards (one urban, one rural and three large suburb districts) and one was a Superintendent of a large suburban school district. The leaders interviewed brought insights and perspectives that were valuable in the analysis and in guiding the findings that answered the research questions.

Due to time, resource constraints and COVID-19 concerns and restrictions, interviews were done via Zoom video and recorded. Following interviews, a review of video and transcripts were done, and additional notes were taken.

The insights of school leaders were important in answering research questions as well as highlighting the human concerns that are part of, but often lost and forgotten, in the decision-making process. The tone of language was especially highlighted because it revealed how district leaders viewed themselves, their work and those engaged in the work. Many district leaders used personal language to communicate personal connections when making decisions. This analysis provided insight into variances in district priorities and possible cognitive shifts occurring. These shifts will guide recommendations and how leaders, in the future, will give meaning to the work schools do and consider more deeply the human aspects of decision making through sensemaking and sensegiving.

Research Question 1: *During the coronavirus, what was the most important concern for district leaders in Virginia when responding during the initial announcements of schools closing?*

Finding One

Most district leaders focused on student achievement as their main concern in the initial weeks of COVID-19. These district leaders also focused on other concerns.

The **aggregate data**, shown in Figure 6, from the initial phase of the sequential mixed method found that most district leaders focused on student achievement as their main priority. Other concerns were considered and are shown in order after student achievement: technology and mental health (17.5 %), education equity (16.4%) and nutrition (15.3%). This data showing student achievement as the main priority is consistent with research that has found that district leaders identify student achievement as their primary concern (Moffett, J., 2011 and Hess, F.M., 2002).

Figure 5: Aggregate data reveals student achievement as main priority
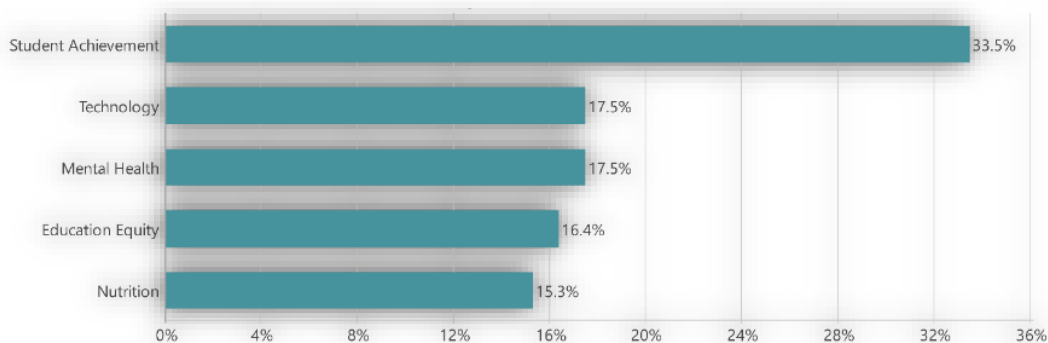
In an urban district from Northern Virginia, district data shows 47% of statements prioritized student achievement followed by education equity (21.7%), mental health (17.4%), technology (5.7%) and nutrition (4.3%). In public statements from this district, the superintendent concentrated primarily on providing information regarding school and continued learning and instruction. As the following statement clearly highlights, *"We have prepared to deliver instruction to our students during this period"*, emphasizing the aim to ensure continuity of learning. Additional information was provided regarding preparations and how instruction was going to be delivered and how work would be graded. The other main priorities were mentioned as well and showed that it was also a priority.

In a rural district in the Tidewater region, comments as focused on continuity of instruction as a main priority while also expressing concerns including technology, nutrition and mental health. "*While the health and well-being of students and staff remain the top priority, [FCPS] are*

working on plans to continue instruction for our students with guidance from the Virginia Department of Education".

In a suburban district from the Northern Neck region 31.6% of statements prioritized student achievement followed by mental health (26.3%), education equity (23.7%), nutrition (10.5%) and technology (7.9%). Statements made by the district superintendent, as in the prior district, emphasized continuity of student learning, "*Our division plan, which is intended to **provide a continuity of learning** for our almost 24,000 students for the remainder of the school year. Beginning next week, we will blend review and reinforcement activities to **set the stage for new classroom learning experiences**",* while ensuring the functions of school were continuing, this superintendent also highlighted other concerns.

This emphasis on student achievement and continuity of learning is also consistent with the expectations reflected in the guidelines provided by the U.S. Department of Education (Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities, 2004). These guidelines emphasize the importance of schools returning to continuous learning and business as usual, which focuses on student achievement.

The sensemaking and sensegiving model adopted by most school districts, concentrates on student achievement as their main concern. Districts leaders while trying to manage the challenges of COVID-19 were also trying to continue to give the impression that the functions on schools were continuing. In the model shown in Figure 6, school districts were mainly concerned with student achievement following the initial COVID-19 school closures and that guided their sensemaking and their decisions that aimed to ensure that the continuity of school and daily business as usual were ultimately achieved.

Figure 6: Sensemaking and Sensegiving Model During COVID-19- Student achievement as the main priority
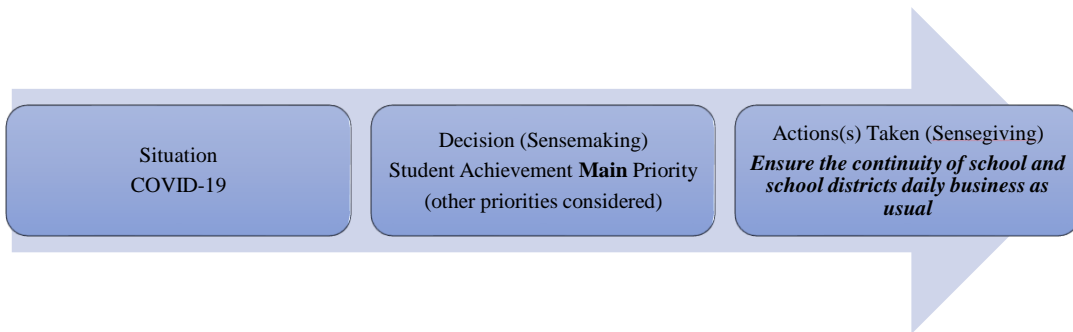
Finding Two

While most districts focused on student achievement as the main priority, there was variation by district urbanicity in their priority areas.

While most districts did prioritize student achievement and the continuity of learning, the data also show that some district leaders recognize that the demands brought on by a crisis requires them to shift away from their usual work. Research shows that though district leaders are expected to follow a plan, this changes when a crisis or cosmology episode occurs and the sensegiving in an organization changes because concerns and priorities change. (Foldy, E.G., Goldman, L., and Ospina, S., 2008).

The aggregate quantitative data reveals that student achievement was the main priority for most school districts. The quantitative data from individual school districts reveals that some school districts had other priorities as shown in Figure 7. A closer examination of districts statements and interview responses highlights these variances in priorities and provide insight into their sensemaking and sensegiving during COVID-19 and possible cognitive shifts occurring.

Figure 7: Districts main priority of selected districts

Region/District	Rural (10)	Urban (9)	Suburban (6)	Main Priority	Region Median Income (state median income $63,636.00)
Region 1 Central					**$60,426.00**
Henrico			X	Student Achievement	$68,069
Richmond		X		Nutrition	$48,084
Sussex	X			Student Achievement	$45,801
Region 2 Tidewater					**$60,275.00**
Virginia Beach			X	Mental Health	$75,623
New Port News		X		Nutrition/Student Achievement	$51,000
Franklin	X			Student Achievement	$52,639
Region 3 Northern Neck					**$47,485.00**
Stafford			X	Student Ach./Nutrition	$98,721
Essex	X			Student Achievement	$52,681
Spotsylvania			X	Student Achievement	$78,505
Region 4 Northern Virginia					**$102,499.00**
Prince William			X	Student Achievement	$107,925
Loudoun			X	Mental Health, Technology, Education Equity, Student Achievement (4th)	$139,915
Fairfax		X		Technology	$122,227
Arlington		X		Student Achievement	$117,374
Region 5					**$51,480.00**

| Valley					
Harrisonburg		X		Education Equity/Technology	$43,893
Charlottesville		X		Nutrition	$47,218
Bath	X			Student Ach./Nutrition	$29,127
Region 6 **W. Virginia**					**$51,480.00**
Danville	X			Technology/Students Ach	$32,173
Roanoke		X		Student Achievement	$23,565
Salem	X			Student Achievement	$50,590
Region 7 **South West**					**$37,663.00**
Bristol	X			Student Achievement	$33,616
Radford	X			Student Achievement	$30,284
Wise	X			Student Achievement	$38,345
Region 8 **South**					**$37,892.00**
Amelia	X			Student Achievement	$58,526
Appomattox	X			Student Achievement	$30,766
Prince Edward		X		Student Achievement	$46,189

Four districts had **nutrition** as their main priority, either by itself or tied with student achievement. Of these four districts, three were urban districts. As seven of the 9 urban districts median income levels are below Virginia's median income, this focus on nutrition may be related to the concerns about feeding their many low-income students. Other urban districts had student achievement or technology as their main priority. For example, in an urban school district in the Central Region (DRCH-R1) district data showed 25% of the statements focused on student achievement and nutrition equally. Following student achievement and nutrition were education equity and mental health at 20% and then technology at 10%. In public statements, the district superintendent, "Mr. K"'s language tone was noticeably different from other district leaders. Even in statements where basic information was being given, his communication was personal and even humorous. When communicating that food services would be provided, he thanked volunteers and bragged about how great everyone was doing, "*Again, thank you so much to RPS staff, families, and volunteers for making our food sites possible! If I may brag on our dedicated staff for a second: Los Angeles Unified, which has about 730,000 students (**30 times** the size of RPS) has 60 centers (just **3 times** as many as RPS). No shade on LAUSD; they're working around the clock like us all. Just want to make sure folks know that RPS staff are stepping up big-time*!

In another statement taken from a news report on March 16th, "Mr. K" expressed personal concerns about the stress COVID was causing families beyond school. In the following statement he highlighted financial challenges, child care challenges and didn't mention continued learning or any normal school function, *"I know this is only going to increase stress, childcare challenges, and financial hardship for many of our families, a significant number of whom already struggle on a daily basis to make ends meet,"* This statement was very reassuring. In his previous statement,

he ensured that student learning was a concern but was also aware of other issues facing families and the community.

Two districts emphasized **mental health** as their main priority, either by itself or tied with other priorities. Both districts were suburban districts with median income levels significantly above the state median income. Given the wealthy status of their community, it may have led the district leaders to focus on student mental health. In public statements provided by schools, much of the information paid attention to mental health and resources available to support families who are experiencing stress from COVID-19. Several links were provided giving recommendations on how to support students during the COVID-19 crisis. Language in these statements are personal and share concerns that are not focused on continuous instruction and ensuring that schools function as normal, instead they focus on school counselors being available and supporting students "non- instructional needs", "***School counselors are available to support our students with non-instructional needs.*** *You may contact any counselor through email or Schoology message if you have any concern or issue that needs attention"*.

Personal Twitter messages were sent frequently by the district superintendent. In one following a Student Advisory Council Zoom meeting, where he sought student ideas from students on "how to move forward", he expressed how he missed students and how happy he was to hear their voices and see their faces and to hear their "honest ideas about how we move forward…". He shared how he misses students and that it was, "so great just to see their faces and hear their voices…". He ended his message with "Stay connected. It helps", revealing concerns beyond instruction but on student's mental health and well-being. The other suburban districts focused on student achievement as their main priority.

Just had a @zoom_us call with my amazing @vbschools Supt Student Advisory Council. Man do I miss our students. It was so great just to see their faces and hear their voices and, of course, their honest ideas about how we move forward. Stay connected. It helps. #VBAlwaysLearning
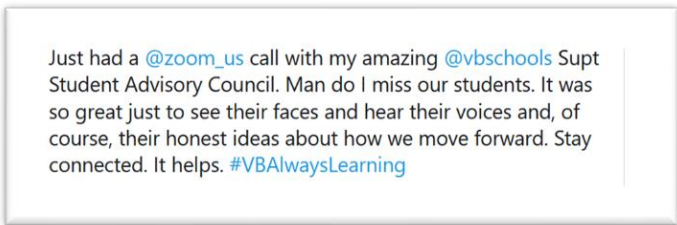
In contrast to the likelihood that urban and suburban districts had priorities other than student achievement, **all rural districts prioritized student achievement**. They all focused on student achievement in statements. While rural districts also have median incomes below the state median, like urban districts, their small size may also influence the resources they have to devote to overhauling their operations on a short notice. A more in-depth analysis of the language of the public documents shows that rural districts, where there were fewer schools, mainly repeated what was provided by VDOE rather than using more creative and personal language. An example of this language is in a statement from a rural district in the Valley that highlighted education equity. Language in the statement communicates that instructions were provided by the state superintendent, "[state superintendent] has indicated that instruction must be uniform and equitable. So, from an instructional standpoint, subject content delivery must be equitable…" In another statement district leaders from this rural district shared the expectation from VDOE, "…we cannot provide or mandate instructional activities, which exclude any of our most vulnerable children. I have asked our administrative and instructional staff to make concerted efforts to provide instructional activities for all of our children, to the extent that they are able". In another rural district in the Tidewater Region language focused on health and well-being of students while highlighting that they are working on plans for continue instruction from VDOE, "*While the health*

and well-being of students and staff remain the top priority, FCPS are working on plans to continue instruction for our students with guidance from the Virginia Department of Education".

The reliance of rural districts of guidelines from the state contrasts with more detailed language in larger districts. For example, a suburban district showed care and concern for the people most affected by his decision by saying, "*I also want to be clear that our primary desire is frankly, for students to have fun, be excited about learning each day, and to have access to the vital relationships they have with their teachers.*" This language is worth noting because it provides a glimpse into the personal human connection involved in sensemaking and sensegiving decision-making process of district leaders. It further reveals how this district leader personally understands his work and those who are engaged in the work. The statement made by a suburban district superintendent recognized the challenges of home learning but still emphasizes the goal to maintain continuity of learning and the main functions of school will continue, "*The home learning plan PWCS offers is meant to provide students with a **continuity of learning**: opportunities for them to learn, to challenge themselves, and to review and retain past lessons, given the limitations of virtual learning under the current*", but that it was not an expectation to "replicate the school day at home."

These more straightforward statements from mostly rural districts are in contrast to the personalized tweets sent by the suburban superintendent cited above, as well as the humor Mr. K injected in his messages. In addition, "Mr. K" himself planned weekly math lessons for students. In one, he was not able to prepare in time so communicated the following, "*I'm not going to lie: of everything I'm dealing with right now, this is stressing me out the most. Teaching is HARD, folks – a lot harder than being a Superintendent*". The language and tone suggest that this district leader is confident in acting more independently than others and is shifting away from focusing primarily on student achievement as their main priority and other concerns should share equal priority, which the data shows he is attempting to do.

These responses provide deeper insights and another layer to the sensemaking and sensegiving decision making process and how external influences like constituents, impact district leaders. Some school districts in the state seem to be acting more independently than others. In these districts, nutrition, mental health, technology, and education equity were ranked higher or equal to student achievement, leading to the question: what factors were influencing these variances? If it was due to the COVID-19 crisis, then it is consistent with findings from prior research where school leaders acknowledge, that "*the unpredictable reality of a crisis demands will require them to shift away from their usual work* (Waters-Johnson, R., 2013)."

An interview with the school board chair from this school district provided additional perspective on district priorities and influences guiding the decision-making process. In this interview, he shared that as a district leader, it was his main priority to make sure all schools in his district provide a, "…high-quality and equitable public education to everyone…". When asked if this has changed because of COVID-19, his response emphasized the pressures from constituents, mainly parents, "School boards are under pressure to deliver and constituents are putting a lot of pressure on us…" More insight was provided in the following statement regarding the need for

technology and how it supports continued learning and access, ***"And then as we are dealing with these challenges [safety] then the main issue becomes virtual, because you cannot do in-person learning for months. But the challenges is to ensure a high-quality product, we have to deliver virtual to everyone and that means, internet access, broadband so we can deliver something to everyone."*** The primary reason for ensuring that this need is met, was because of the community expectations. He further stated, "…***we are under enormous pressure to listen to constituents…***"

These responses provide deeper insights and another layer to the sensemaking and sensegiving decision making process and how external influences like constituents, impact district leaders. These statements made by this school board member reveals that district priorities may be influenced by the expectations from the public, suggesting that the emphasis to return to normal is an expectation that is coming from other influences and not solely on needs of children and the community.

In school districts where student achievement was their main priority, there was a greater focus on student achievement when sensemaking during COVID. Though there were other concerns, the focus primarily to ensure that schools continued to function and maintain business as usual. A closer examination and evaluation of statements revealed that district leaders were guided by other priorities and that a shift away from the usual function of school was considered. The statements made by one district leader reveals a personal concern for students and teachers during this crisis and may be signs of a more significant cognitive shift. However, pressures from the public to return to normal, as suggested in comments from school board member, may be playing a more significant role in these districts where student achievement is the main priority. In other school districts, data reveals variances in priorities.

Some school districts in the state, seem to be acting more independently than others. In these districts, nutrition, mental health, technology, and education equity were ranked higher or equal to student achievement, leading to the question: what factors were influencing these variances? If it was due to the COVID-19 crisis, then it is consistent with findings from prior research where school leaders acknowledge, that "*the unpredictable reality of a crisis demands will require them to shift away from their usual work* (Waters-Johnson, R., 2013)."

A cognitive shift seems to be guiding some, but not all, district leaders. Those who have changed have acknowledged that COVID-19 has heightened awareness that things are different and are behaving independently. Normal does not work anymore and have adopted the decision-making model in Figure 8. In doing so, they are reconstructing the way decisions are being made and the rethinking the efficacy of old structures and processes.

Figure 8: Cognitive Shift in Sensemaking
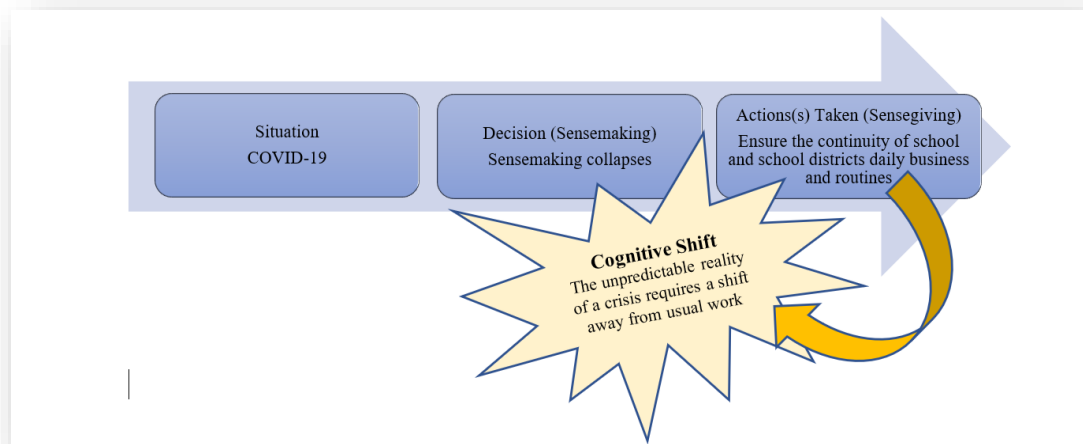
Research Question 2: *How were decisions, primarily those that impact students, made by district leaders?*

The interviews with district leaders provided clear insights on the decision-making structures and processes. There was clearly a shift from the initial closing announcement on March 13th to the March 23rd. During the first announcements, schools were closed for a certain period and there was an expectation that things would return to normal. When the second announcement was made that schools were going to be shut down for the remainder of the year, there was no returning to normal and challenged existing structures and processes.

Finding three

During the first closing announcement made on March 13th, district leaders attempted to rely on existing decision-making structures, even as some began to realize these would not meet their needs.

In interviews, district leaders shared how their initial responses, following the initial March 13th announcements, were shaped by the belief that things would eventually return to normal. They relied on prior experiences and existing structures and process to guide their sensemaking and sensegiving to make decisions and acted accordingly. One superintendent shared that his main priorities are guided by the school district's mission and how this lays the foundation for their decisions. He stated that their mission is, "*first and foremost, to provide an outstanding*

educational experience for the children, ...that is at the core of our mission. This mission is further built upon, "*…the role of a school district is to **inspire confidence and its community** in the school system that they have.* He expressed the limitations of education, more specifically the over emphasis on attaining an outstanding education and those engaged in it not truly connecting and understanding what it is and its purpose.

There were consistent responses by most district leaders that decision-making processes and structures were in place which relied on accessing and interpreting information. In an interview with a high-level state leader he shared, "*[it] is essential to being a successful superintendent to be detailed focused in a crisis. It is important to build the knowledge base that they didn't have before this started and try to navigate using as many sources as possible. Providing information and [knowing] which sources are providing inaccurate information".* In addition, gathering information and interpreting it, he also noted that taking into consideration the way the information will be interpreted by the community is important, "*...spending the time to understand what your communities perceptions of your implementation and understanding what it takes to either move people towards only the goal or whatever the health metrics, say, or you know whatever the factor is that you're dealing with that time".* This structure for making decisions is accepted by district leaders under normal circumstances even when it is not successful. COVID-19 caused many to reconsider the efficacy of the process and whether it is reliable.

Knowledge regarding COVID-19 was inconsistent which lead many district leaders to speculate. While following existing processes was expected and most followed, there was recognition by some district leaders that suggested COVID-19 was not a usual crisis and that there were significant and unusual circumstances that needed to be considered. There was some recognition that the current existing worldview that centered around student achievement and maintaining "business as usual", may not be sufficient in understanding this crisis and that COVID-19 may potentially become a significant crisis was looming over many district leaders and causing them to begin to shift.

In an interview with a school board member from a large suburb in Northern Virginia, he confirmed that he and other district leaders were aware that this crisis was going to be different and that sticking to the normal decision making process that focused on student learning and business as usual was not going to work. He very honestly sated,

> *The discussions behind the scenes were different. [let's] talk about really what happened. In those closed session meetings for obviously numerous reasons, it really went to shift dramatically. The majority of the public knew what was happening and together [board members] we knew there was really no way to make sense of what the outcome was going to be. At that point, most leaders, no matter how we interpret this, it could go anywhere. The role of district leadership and superintendent in a pandemic and unprecedented times is to present a level of confidence to the community in regard to whatever plan, we move forward. It should all focus on what is facing our kids. Going back to school was not going to happen.*

Based on this district leaders' statement, in the beginning of COVID-19, most district leaders sensemaking focused on maintaining the appearance that structures were in place, despite

doubts and guided decisions to respond that communicated the main priority was on continued learning and to maintain the functions of school. There were some signs of a cognitive shift, but it was not until after the March 23rd announcement that most district leaders realized that any expectation to go back to normal or business as usual was not possible.

Finding four

Following the March 23rd announcement district leaders stopped relying on existing structures and constructed different ones

When the announcement was made to close schools for the entire year, the gravity of the moment took precedence and seemed to change the way district leaders thought about their work and the impact and importance of their decisions. The worldview that many relied on, shifted. Suddenly everyone questioned their work and that there was more to focus on than student achievement and test scores.

It was immediately understood that they were in crisis and that existing plans and structures on how to respond were insufficient and limited. A district leader in the Valley shared that COVID-19 has provided school districts with an opportunity to remove, "push away", these limited structures. He emphasized that there are other concerns that schools need to be focused on and COVID-19 has elevated this awareness. He explained,

> *[we need to] understand that the physical well-being, is essential to the process of education, the process of learning. We also understand that mental well-being, is an important component of the process of learning and then achieving … has so many different dimensions to it and what you mean by academic achievement is multifaceted and they're all kinds of different ways that people including state legislators and legislators decide what the measure of achievement will be and we can quibble over those … people outside the system [referring to external influences but not specific] want to reduce things to the simplest way of charting that and we understand that that's NOT a good idea. Assessing learning and assessing children's progress in learning…[that's all school has been] so yeah, COVID-19 has given us the opportunity*

He further acknowledged that his school district was already shifting, "…*we've been in that mode for a while and COVID has enabled us to be in that even more deeply and with more external support than when I first came on the board in 2015*"

The superintendent from a large suburban region was immediately aware that things changed and that the old way of making decisions was gone. He stated, "*When the governor said, close your schools, it all went out the window. I mean, it just, it just went out the window.*" This was a challenge in this district because of existing tensions among other district leaders. He was very candid about the conflict and this insight is helpful to understanding how district leaders overcome internal conflicts to make important decisions during a crisis. In this case, a cosmology episode. "*I'll just say that like it's conflict. What you see on the national scale in terms of conflict orientation and politics has found its way into school boards. The fundamental reality was when we were told to close our schools.* **I stopped [worrying] about trying to convince anybody about**

anything". It was clear, that suddenly, all sensemaking had collapsed and that the main concern of schools was no longer continued learning and business as usual. The superintendent's sensegiving reveals a cognitive shift. The actions he took communicated priorities and concerns will be different. "It *was right then in the moment. We didn't have the luxury of time. **We had kids sitting at home and teachers wondering what the hell are we supposed to do.** So, there was no let's wait and go talk to the school board about what we might do".* In this moment when he realized there was no more time he had to create a new sensemaking process to make decisions because existing ones were inadequate,

> *We didn't abandon decision making. We enhanced it. We increased collaborative decision making in the district, we broke down all the silos and said, we don't have time for information to flow up and down through these silos. Everybody, take the rank off at the door and speak your voice right here because we have to make decisions and we have to try to make the best ones we can, and I don't have time for you to sit and wonder if you should say something.*

In addition to the recognition that decision-making structures needed to change, the interviews also revealed greater recognition among district leaders that priorities themselves needed to shift. For example, one leader shared what guided his decisions to move away from student achievement as the main priority. He shares his concern for those children who are not having positive experiences in school and the impact it is having on them. He states, "*How do we become an incredible school? A vision for all children. You must believe that that matters.* He further stated, "*I think that the educational experience is kind of the sum total of our experience when [a child is] in our schools. Do [they] feel welcomed. Do [they] feel invited into the learning. We're all human beings. **But if [they] don't feel like [they're] supposed to be there**. How much [are they] going to learn? **How …. important is that last hour in my life".***

In an urban small city district, technology and education equity was equal as their main priority (28.6%). Public statements focused on student learning and emphasized the importance of students having access to technology to achieve continued learning. Statements specifically stated that education equity was linked to access to technology and the distribution of Chromebooks was a main priority, "…*This is new territory and …to carry out the learning needs [of students] should be carefully considered and done in an **equitable and fair way**,".*

An interview with the school board Chair, provided additional and valuable perspective and insight and several responses to questions focused on the importance of technology. There was more focus after COVID-19 because families needed it not only for learning, but to access information for food and mental health services. When asked what main priority was after COVID-19, he responded that it was safety but elaborated to include the social and emotional safety and access to the internet played an important role in making that happen. "*The physical safety and the emotional safety of children and staff became top priority. We understand that keeping some people safe is harder than keeping other people safe and we needed to be equitable in how we went to that. Making available to households that didn't have access to the Internet. We needed to give them all access as soon as possible.*"

In other districts where technology was a high priority, statements also linked student achievement with access to technology. Statements also consistently made a connection to education equity. In an interview with a district leader on a school board they shared how this became a greater priority following COVID-19 but he was also aware that COVID-19 elevated concerns regarding equity in his district "*…Why I ran for school was some of the inequities that I told about us, you know, different schools, you know, and in our community and different things like that so, equity in education is important, you know, making sure our kids are learning, making sure kids are being treated, in our buildings, their environments, we're always discussing what equity look like. Prior to COVID-19 we were doing good things. Now we have be concerned…*"

The attention to all categories remains consistent in these districts as those with student achievement as their main priority. The difference is the appearance that they are choosing to act more independently and are intentionally shifting away from returning to usual business. They seem to be acting with the awareness and acceptance that COVID-19 is more significant, a cosmology episode, and that they realize the need to act differently.

The research on sensemaking has consistently shown the decision-making process is a multi-faceted, complex personal experience. These district leaders sensemaking is guided by other main priorities that still focus on student achievement but emphasize additional concerns that are linked to students achieving such as mental health, nutrition, and access to technology and equity through technology or from policies that provide opportunities so learning gaps are closed. They reveal efforts by district leaders to meet the needs of their communities while also trying to support the learning of students. This change in the main function of school impacts the decisions they make and actions they take. This sensegiving communicates that they see school as more than just student achievement but also considering what else matters in their lives and families. This recognition is also occurring on the state level.

In interviews with high-level state leaders, the awareness that student achievement is the main priority for schools and expressed concern, "*Instead of talking about achievement first, we really need to flip things upside down and we need to focus on social-emotional supports in our schools*". In another statement, he shared recent state-level efforts such as professional developments, have focused on additional needs of students in schools and move away from only focusing on student achievement mainly on social-emotional needs, "*I think it's working well in Virginia. I think that philosophical shift is occurring. We're noticing professional development is changing and I feel for the long term it will have a much [more] positive impact on our school districts. Achievement is going to work out fine, but we can only close the achievement gap if we focus on the social and emotional supports*".

The realization that there was a collapse of sensemaking, a cosmology episode, required district leaders to think and act differently about themselves, their community, their work and those engaged in the work of schools. The structures, expectations that previously existed were vanishing, but decisions still needed to be made because people's lives were depending on them. The main concerns being communicated, the sensegiving, was especially important because it provided focus and meaning when what existed before was gone. Though, many were still trying to create a semblance of normalcy, what was once normal, no longer existed. This was evident in the conflicted messages explained in the findings for research question 3.

Research Question 3: *What main messages did district leaders send during the coronavirus?*

Finding five

Safety was the main message school and district leaders sent when decisions were made during COVID-19 while also communicating that learning and business as usual was continuing

During a crisis, a leader as sensegiver is especially important because they influence people perceptions, attitudes and beliefs and strengthens their connection to an organization's goal and purpose. In public statements and interview responses, were acting as sensegivers and the language and tone communicated the message leaders wanted to send during COVID-19 and in the initial weeks of COVID-19, most district leaders main message was safety of students, teachers, and staff. In interviews with district leaders the following statements reveal focus on the safety and well-being of students, teachers and staff from getting sick from COVID-19. Several statements from district leaders used similar language to articulate this message, "*...the **health and well-being** of students and staff remain the top priority...*" and from another district leader "…*that's the priority right [now] to bring [students back] into our buildings and **so safety as a first priority**.*" , and then another, "***So, when we talk about free access to public education. Access means safe, right? They [students] need to be safe in the situation of the school and with the teachers we hire. Right now, safe means not getting the virus.***"

While the majority of statements and interview responses emphasized the importance of safety as the main message during COVID-19, there was also the acknowledgement that there were efforts aimed to bring learning back and continue to support student achievement and progress as highlighted in the next finding. Several statements made by school and district leaders communicated that they believed it was important to communicate that structures and leadership was in place during COVID-19. In one statement from a school board member, he expressed that the main role of district leaders was, *"...the primary role of district leadership and superintendent in a pandemic [during this] unprecedented time is to present a level of confidence to the community in regard to whatever plan, we move forward.*

In doing so, they provide a sense of stability. This appeared to be an important message to send during the initial weeks of COVID-19 when schools were closing. So, though safety and other concerns were important, they also needed to communicate that efforts were working towards plans for continuity of learning, as the following statements reveals, "…*FCPS **are working on plans to continue instruction***"

Finding six

District and state leaders were also communicating more concerns as priorities for districts other than student achievement revealing a cognitive shift occurring in school districts in Virginia

While school leaders were mainly communicating safety and bringing back continuity of learning and business as usual, district leaders were also communicating other concerns. The statement from superintendent from the Tidewater region most poignantly reveals the shift in the cognitive framework that seem to be guiding most district leaders during COVID-19. In his statement, he acknowledges that the previously existing decision-making process is no longer sufficient to guide the future of schools. His statements strongly suggest that there needs to be a new way of sensemaking and sensgiving and that requires a new worldview of what the purpose and function of schools. The excerpts reveal a cognitive shift that seriously questions efforts attempting to bring normal back,

> *How can we create continuity of learning, but also understand it will not look like what we've always done?*
>
> *How can we have learning experiences for children every day but also understand it isn't going to be eight hours a day in front of a screen?*
>
> *How do we do all this in a way that does not disenfranchise any child?*
>
> *I have no interest in going back to the way we were doing school. People keep saying, "Let's get back to normal".* ***I have no interest in getting back to normal, because normal was under serving children***.

The evidence provided from these findings clearly reveals that there are multiple cognitive shifts occurring in school districts in Virginia. The data from this research shows that concerns about education equity and access to information due to limitations to technology and the nutritional needs of families as well as mental health of students and families are being prioritized during district leader's sensemaking and guiding their actions. District leaders are focusing on meal deliveries and using school buses to get food to families in rural areas. District leaders are directing services that provide mental health supports to students and families. These sensemaking shifts have impacted the decision-making processes away from what the main function of school has been. In most of the statements, district leaders have consistently shared that since COVID-19 and the closure of schools, there has been greater awareness that schools do more than support student achievement. Is this cognitive shift permanent or will school districts return to the pre-existing cognitive frameworks, the previous worldviews, that existed before COVID?

This research highlighted the thoughts and actions of district leaders' efforts to understand and respond during the COVID-19 pandemic. The theoretical framework of sensemaking and sensegiving, provided a lens for examining the decision-making process as a human experience – not just a check list of actions – but as a thoughtful activity where meaning and action are linked not separate.

What is the "new normal"?

The expression, "new normal" has been adopted into the American vernacular since the COVID-19 pandemic. Though it is used frequently, few know what it really means. The construction for this "new normal" is still being considered. Especially in our schools. Virginia schools districts may have begun and if leaders pay closer attention to their decision making structures and specifically examine what influences their sensemaking and sensegiving and how they understand themselves, their work and others engaged in their work, they may be able to construct a new worldview of schools and better serve children and families. These recommendations are the first steps that will help district leaders on their journey in constructing their "new normal".

Recommendation

Incorporate a post COVID-19 change initiative structure to build, implement and measure efforts to ensure change initiative is sustainable

1. Develop new COVID-19 leadership vision
2. Identify Change Readiness Leaders
3. Construct Logic Models to create a change culture

It is evident that the world has changed and continues to because of COVID-19. This research has shown that Virginia school districts are changing and are responding to this change. This change will unfold over time and this initiative should reflect this and how the external world is impacting school districts and their communities. Developing an initiative that is invested in change will guide district leaders as they develop their sensemaking and sensegiving in the future.

Virginia's high-level state leaders made evident in their statements they were signaling, prior to COVID-19, a change – a cognitive shift - in the way they understood the work of schools and others engaged in this work. Their sensegiving to school districts focused on other main concerns other than student achievement. These main concerns included mental health, nutrition, education equity and technology. Quantitative findings found that student achievement remained their main concern in most school districts but also found that some districts had other main concerns. Further examination of expressive language used in written public statement, and comments made in interviews, revealed that these other concerns were also guiding district leaders during their sensemaking. School and district leaders should continue to build on this cognitive shift and make these concerns permanent in how Virginia school systems move forward. Starting this change initiative now is important for the future of Virginia.

Adopting change models that provides structure focus and meaning are necessary to guide the sensemaking and sensegiving caused by COVID-19. These models will create structures and processes that will make the decisions of district leaders more intentional and deliberate regarding the shifts away from student achievement. Most effective models aim to build vision, coalitions, develop goals for change, implementation, measurement and expanding effective ideas and efforts.

*Develop new COVID-19 leadership vision to direct change initiative*

Creating a post and future COVID-19 vision that will direct the change initiative must re-examine and re-shape how leaders engage in the changing of attitudes and perceptions of the function of schools and include other priorities and not exclusively student achievement. The findings revealed district leaders used different decision-making models in their decision-making. Most understood that they were expected to maintain some semblance of normalcy and many made that their primary focus student achievement and the continuity of learning. When things changed and the final announcement of school closures were made decision-making became more confusing. Some district leaders immediately shifted while others continued to focus on student achievement. The new COVID-19 leadership vision must recognize these possible shifts and be willing to construct new school models that meet the needs of students and the community.

Identify Change Readiness Leaders

The leaders who are ready for change will build this foundation and help continue to build the leadership capacity that will sustain the change initiative. Developing post COVID-19 leadership trainings and professional developments are necessary to build leadership skills that recognize the explicit shifts of district leaders in their decision making after COVID-19.

> *Relationship building and trust building and listening and collaborative vision development to say this is what we could be and what we should do. Then you can say, and as a result of that, this is where we're going, as a community, and then help your community, understand that. So it's not just talking about it, it's also like getting on the floor with people and playing in that in that environment to learn what we need to do.*

As shown in this research, the variance in district responses provided insights on which district leaders were already shifting and creating structures that were changing. These district leaders should play a key role in constructing the initial model for future change initiative logic models for districts that may potentially be expanded. Leaders who are not ready for change may become the most significant hurdle in a change initiative. This process-based model highlights the importance of change readiness.

(Stevens, 2013, p. 346)
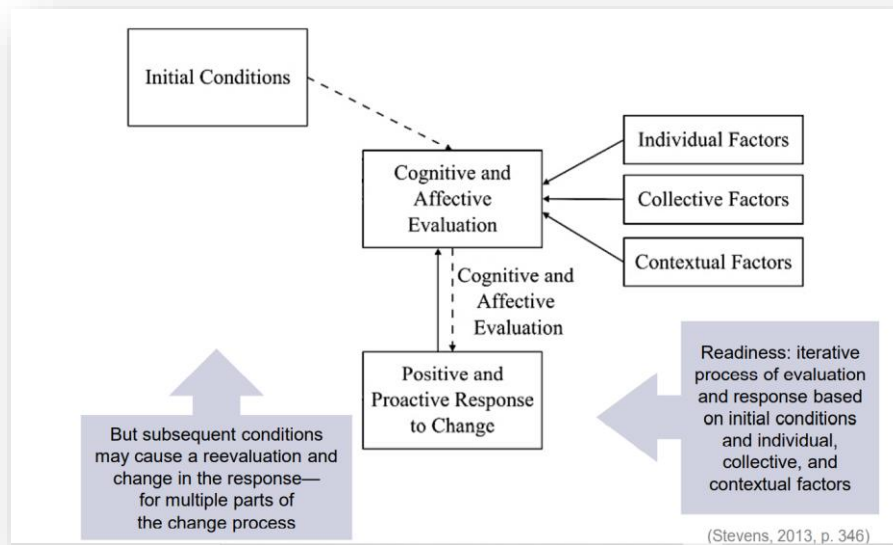
It is important to ensure that districts have the foundation for a positive and proactive response to change. Conducting a readiness assessment will provide useful information and insight into how district leaders think about change and efforts they wish to pursue and allow for considerations on what is feasible and realistic. It is key that leaders guiding these change efforts accept that this work is ongoing. People change. The success of the initiative, the difficulty of the initiative, changes. So, in constructing a culture of change requires systems that continually re-evaluate readiness and are prepared to take steps, take interventions to improve readiness where hurdles may be arising.

Construct Logic Models to create a change culture in districts

The district data reveals that cognitive shifts are occurring in all districts but there is variance. Regional data shows that Virginia's geography and demographics are unique and impact what main priorities guide their decisions and should be considered when constructing a change culture that is sustainable.

Change often is constructed using a linear approach that focuses on the situation, the response, and then expecting results. The impacts of limited thought process is that change does not factor important assumptions about what is already happening in the organization, so that diagnosis of the situation, and assumptions about what resources we will actually have to bring to the table are not often considered.

This is important to consider because looking at prior COVID-19 sensemaking and sensegiving decision-making models, they did not factor other important assumptions and influences that were also influencing decisions. It is important to factor in those externalities. This has become especially evident post COVID-19. Previously existing decision-making approaches

have not incorporated other externalities that are necessary for an effective change initiative. Districts have continuously focused on student achievement as their main priority. This research has revealed that districts have other concerns and are beginning to pay closer attention to them and their influence on student's ability to achieve. Student's ability to achieve is influenced by more than schooling and their success is measured by more than tests.

| Situation COVID-19 | Decision (Sensemaking) Student Achievement Main Priority | Actions(s) Taken (Sensegiving) Ensure the continuity of school and school districts daily business and routines |
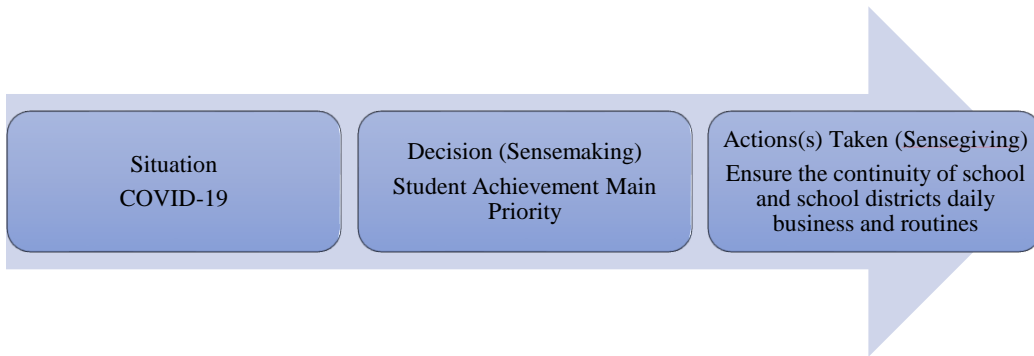
Incorporating a systems approach is more complicated and complex than a simple linear approach but it provides context and makes the decision-making process effective. COVID-19 has created more externalities to the decision-making process and so a new more effective process is necessary. In considering the context of what is happening in school districts, listening to what messages are being communicated consistently helps to better understand the situation so better diagnosis are made at a district level so better decisions are made.

Systems Approach (Evans &Glover, 2012) (connected to Sensemaking and Sensegiving)
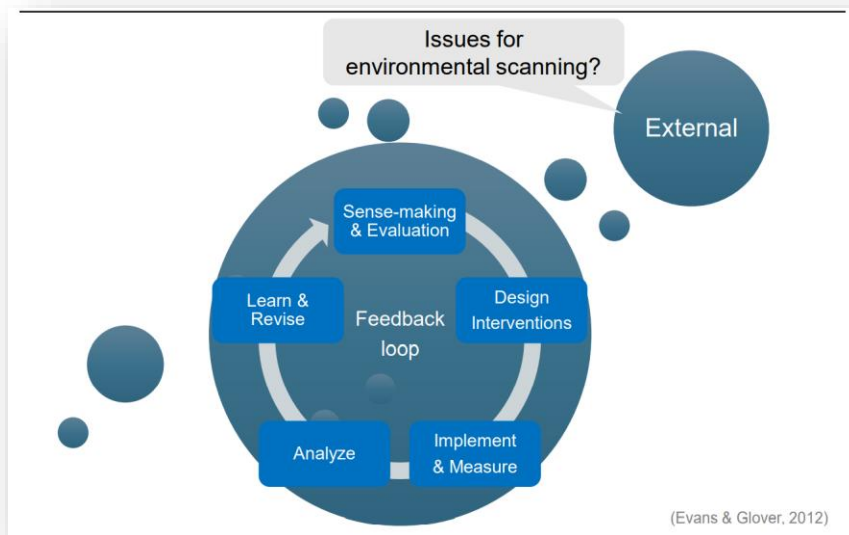
In putting these systems in place, district leaders will be able to make better sense of what's happening. They will be prepared to design, implement, analyze, learn, and revise change initiatives. In doing this with an explicit recognition and understanding of how the external world

is influencing efforts, and constructing systems to manage them, will make change initiatives successful.

Creating logic models will provide these structures that will create an explicit understanding of the challenges ahead, the resources available, and the timetable in which to achieve and reevaluate goals. It also will help leaders implementing change initiatives, with a balanced focus on the big picture as well as of its parts.

Logic Models
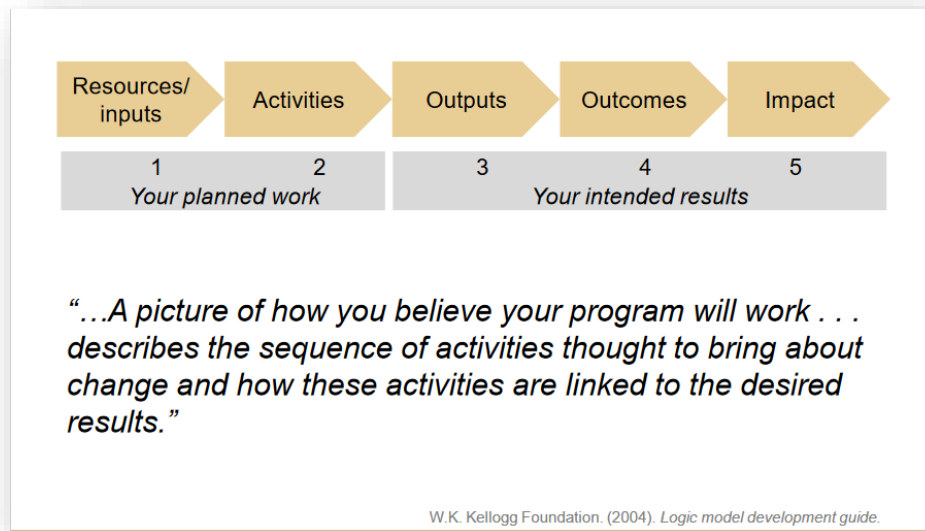
Additional benefits of program logic models mainly provide leaders with the logic and the theory of change associated with their initiatives and be intentional in achieving results The logic model allows leaders to make connections so that those managing can follow and understand why they need to do to achieve desired results. Logic models are also an effective way to engage stakeholders. This research examined COVID-19 responses in Virginia's districts to continue building on the cognitive shifts occurring in the work of schools and how that work is understood and those engaged in it, stakeholders will play an important role is a sustainable and successful change effort.

The most important role of a logic modes is that it clearly differentiates the difference between actions and outcomes. Developing multiple logic models within each region and school district will help leaders connect their actions to outcomes. District leaders have clearly indicated that there are other concerns guiding their decisions beyond student achievement. A cognitive shift has occurred in what the main purpose and function of schools are, and it is not exclusively student achievement. They are also focusing on other priorities that are significant to the success of schools.

As district leaders focus on other concerns and school priorities away from only student achievement, moving forward with a successful change initiative will require considering other metrics for determining student success. Contemplating other outcomes that consider student success and wellness rather than only achievement that only uses test scores as a primary measurement.

In recent years, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), one of the world's largest and most reliable sources of comparable statistical economics and social data, elevated concerns regarding certain metrics in economics such as GDP, do not provide information on the life experiences of ordinary people. While these concerns were already evident during the years of economic growth, recent financial and economic crisis has further amplified them. COVID-19 will likely elevate these concerns even more. The OECD maintains that,

> *Societal progress is about improvements in the well-being of people and households. Assessing such progress requires looking not only at the functioning of the economic system but also at the diverse experiences and living conditions of people. The OECD Framework for Measuring Well-Being and Progress shown below is based on the recommendations made in 2009 by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress to which the OECD contributed significantly. It also reflects earlier OECD work and various national initiatives in the field.*
>
> ***This Framework is built around three distinct components: current well-being, inequalities in well-being outcomes, and resources for future well-being.***
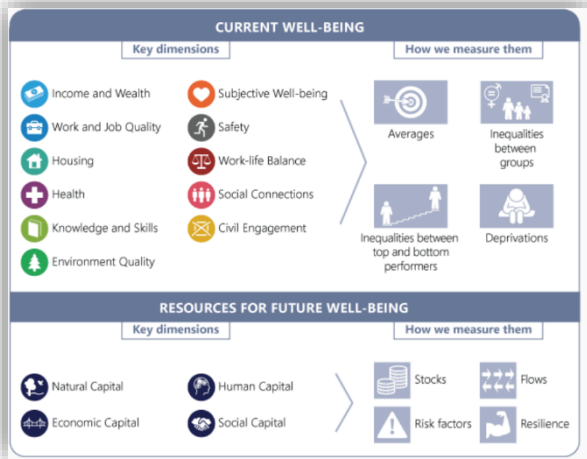
Schools are a microcosm of these global concerns. The identified cognitive shifts in Virginia and the efforts to reconstruct cognitive frameworks guiding sensemaking and sensegiving in decisions in school districts should begin by reexamining the measurements traditionally used to determine student achievement. Districts should consider metrics developed by OECD and other organizations (provided in resources) to create new frameworks to measure student success and wellness instead of only student achievement and test scores.

Post and future COVID-19 Logic Model for school districts – Constructing New Normal

Inputs (those engaged and affected by the work)	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact (short term)	Impact (long term)
District leaders Principals Students/Families State leaders Policy makers **Beginning**	Shift in district leaders' main function and priorities regarding students Develop a deliberate and intentional decision-making models that engages is Sensemaking and Sensegiving Reexamine and re-shape the priorities of schools to include other concerns that include nutrition, education equity, mental health, access to technology Restructure existing school metrics focus on student success instead of only student achievement and tests scores as primary metrics of achievement **Planned Work**	Re-structure quarterly student report cards Create student dashboards with metrics that focus on student success Create district dashboards using additional metrics not only relying on student achievement – test scores	**Student Success**: **Short term outcomes**: Attendance (how frequently is student in school). Discipline – number of suspensions. Grades and classroom engagement ***student surveys provide insight* **Long term**: high-school completion and enrollment in post HS education, pursuing a career path **Metrics:** test scores, student/guardian survey responses, course grades, discipline incidents, attendance, and demographics **Intended Results**	Student achievement not the exclusive measurement of student success Districts focus on other priorities that impact student and family success	School district communities that engage in collaborative sensemaking and sensegiving when making decisions about schools and student success. Students thrive in schools that are committed to their long-term success in their community.

Key Assumption Cognitive shift occurred in schools: COVID-19 changed how district leaders see the work of schools. Student Achievement is no longer the only priority of school leaders

These identified components could be implemented in logic models developed for each school district and school. The most important role of logic modes is that they clearly differentiate the difference between actions and outcomes. Developing multiple logic models within each region and school district will help leaders connect their sensemaking and sensegiving to specific actions to outcomes. District leaders have clearly indicated that there are other concerns guiding their decisions beyond student achievement. Developing these models will help them lay a foundation for changing their sensegiving and developing a new cognitive frameworks, worldviews, of schools and their main purpose.

Conclusion

  The findings that have guided these recommendations will help in building Virginia's future. During COVID-19 cognitive shifts occurred in its school districts. The evidence reveals that Virginia's leaders are already re-examining the work of schools and shifting the way leaders act as sensemakers and sensegivers. In statements from district leaders there was a craving for a different and better for children. Many district leaders no longer accept that the main function of schools should be student achievement. School districts are focusing on other priorities that are significant to the success of schools.

  These recommendations will lay the foundation to the change that many district leaders are ready for. It is meant to enable district leaders to change existing decision-making processes and construct a new cognitive framework, a new worldview for the "new normal" schools are facing. This is a monumental opportunity to create schools and communities where **all** children will thrive. Virginia must seize this moment.

Appendix A: School Regions in Virginia

Region 1 Central	Urban	Rural	Suburb (large, medium, and small)
Henrico			**Pop: 330,818**
Richmond	**Pop: 227,032**		
Sussex		**Pop: 11,159**	
Region 2 Tidewater	Urban	Rural	Suburb
Virginia Beach			**Pop: 442,707**
New Port News	**Pop: 179,611**		
Franklin		**Pop: 8,588**	
Region 3 Northern Neck	Urban	Rural	Suburb
Stafford			**Pop: 146,649**
Essex		**Pop: 10,919**	
Spotsylvania			**Pop: 136,215**
Region 4 Northern Virginia	Urban	Rural	Suburb
Prince William			**Pop: 470,335**
Loudoun			**Pop: 413,538**
Fairfax	**Pop: 1.01 Million**		
Arlington	**Pop: 236,842**		
Region 5 Valley	Urban	Rural	Suburb
Charlottesville	**Pop: 48,117**		
Harrisonburg	**Pop: 49,973**		
Bath		**Pop: 4,292**	
Region 6 W. Virginia	Urban	Rural	Suburb
Roanoke	**Pop: 96,714**		
Danville		**Pop: 39, 455**	
Salem		**Pop: 24,261**	
Region 7 South West	Urban	Rural	Suburb
Bristol		**Pop: 17,750**	
Radford	**Pop: 16,414**		
Wise		**Pop: 2,959**	
Region 8 South	Urban	Rural	Suburb
Amelia		**Pop: 13,145**	
Appomattox		**Pop: 15,911**	
Prince Edward	**Pop: 156,947**		
TOTAL:	**9 Urban**	**10 Rural**	**6 Suburban**

District Selection: Locale Classifications and Criteria The NCES locale framework is composed of four basic types (City, Suburban, Town, and Rural) that each contains three subtypes. It relies on standard urban and rural definitions developed by the U.S. Census Bureau, and each type of locale is either urban or rural in its entirety. The NCES locales can be fully collapsed into a basic urban–rural dichotomy, or expanded into a more detailed collection of 12 distinct categories. These subtypes are differentiated by size (in the case of City and Suburban assignments) and proximity (in the case of Town and Rural assignment.

Appendix B: Example of coding in Max-QDA

Code: **Word Clusters**

Interview and focus group questions:

1. How long have you been in this position?

2. What was your background prior to coming into this position? How much experience have you had teaching or working with children?

3. If you could describe an effective [state position] in just three words, what would they be?

4. What do you see as the most important role of school districts?

5. In your role as [state position], how do you think about issues of educational equity?

6. Before COVID-19, how would you describe the way that decisions in the district were made?

7. What was the relationship between the school board and district administrators like?

8. Can you describe how you began to be aware of COVID-19 as something you needed to pay attention to?

9. What were your first thoughts about what you should do in your role as [state position]?

10. Once COVID-19 began, how were decisions being made?

11. When it was announced on March 13 that schools would be closed, how did you respond? Did you agree with that decision?

12. When it was announced on March 23 that schools would be closed for the rest of the year, how did you respond?

13. Can you please describe any decision-making structures or processes that were created in response to COVID-19?

14. How would you describe your priorities during this time? The district priorities?

15. In looking at the public statements and newspaper articles, your district appeared to prioritize (X). Does that sound right to you?

16. How did this decision come to be made?

17. Do you remember when this press release/public statement was made? What was the process like to put it together? What was the public response?

18. To what extent were there any disagreements between individuals in the district about how to respond to the school closures?

19. Is there anything about district decision-making during COVID-19 that we have not yet talked about?

Dear **#RPSStrong** Family,

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! We continue to be in awe of your support for RPS!

Before I get to today's updates, a quick housekeeping note: To streamline and organize the information in these messages, I've collapsed the Resources and FAQ sections into a revamped (and better organized) set of FAQs. I'll keep these updated every day so they can be your go-to source for answers. Please email me at jkamras@rvaschools.net if you feel something important is missing. Thanks!

Today's Updates:

School Closure – As I shared yesterday, **RPS will be closed through Spring Break**. That means we will be closed, **at a minimum**, until Monday, April 13. My request of the RPS Family: if you can provide childcare for someone, can you please let us know through our volunteer sign-up page? Thank you!

SOLs – I've gotten a ton of questions about whether students will have to take SOLs this year. Here's the latest: The VDOE just put out a press release indicating that they are **seeking permission from the Commonwealth and the Federal Government to waive testing** for this school year. Kudos to Dr. Lane for taking this step! As soon as I have further information on this, I'll be sure to share it.

Food Distribution – Again, thank you so much to RPS staff, families, and volunteers for making our food sites possible! If I may brag on our dedicated staff for a second: Los Angeles Unified, which has about 730,000 students (**30 times** the size of RPS) has 60 centers (just **3 times** as many as RPS). No shade on LAUSD; they're working around the clock like us all. Just want to make sure folks know that RPS staff are stepping up big-time!

Learning at Home – You don't need to figure this out on your own. We have a TON of resources on our website. Big thanks to the entire academic team for pulling everything together so quickly. Check it out here! Also, have you seen some of the amazing things our teachers are doing to support their students?! If you have a shout-out for an RPS teacher you'd like me to share, can you please email me a sentence or two at jkamras@rvaschools.net? Thanks!

Mr. K's 30 Minutes of Math – I'll be **kicking off my 30-minute math lessons tomorrow** (Wednesday, March 17). I know I said they'd start today, but the truth is I just haven't had a second to prep. The lessons will be live-streamed every day, Monday – Friday, at 2 pm. Here's the link to tune in. We'll also record them and make them available on our website.

I'm not going to lie: of everything I'm dealing with right now, this is stressing me out the most. Teaching is HARD, folks – a lot harder than being Superintendent. I imagine a whole bunch of families and caregivers are beginning to realize this as they suddenly become subs. So please take a minute **RIGHT NOW** to call, text, or email a teacher in your life and say **THANK YOU**! For real, do it. Now.

Wishtree Read-Aloud – Yesterday, we kicked off a community read-aloud of the Wishtree. Click here to see me reading the first two chapters. Mayor Stoney recorded Chapter 3 and School Board Chair (and former Librarian!) Linda Owen recorded Chapters 4 and 5 (see below). Huge thanks to them both! Stay tuned to see who our celebrity guest readers will be tomorrow!

With great appreciation,

LCPS Begins Distributing Chromebooks to Enable Distance Learning

On Wednesday, March 25, (LCPS) began distributing approximately 12,000 Chromebooks to students in grade 3-12 who do not already have them.

Distribution began at J. Michael Lunsford and Brambleton middle schools. Primary distribution is scheduled to take place through Tuesday, March 31, with make-up distribution days of Wednesday, April 1, through Friday, April 3.

School principals have been communicating with their communities regarding this process. If your grade 3-12 student does not have an LCPS Chromebook and you have not heard from your principal, please contact them to learn more about the plan.

LCPS has been implementing a three-year rollout of Chromebook computers to all students in grade 3 through 12 since the 2018-2019 school year.

To support distance learning by students in those grades during the COVID-19 school closure, LCPS has accelerated the third-year deployment plan from the 2020-2021 school year to now. The Chromebook distribution will support students' distance-learning needs as LCPS teachers begin providing distance-learning lessons, both digital and non-digital, on Monday, March 30.

"We are enthusiastic about the distribution of the Chromebooks because it is a key part of our continuation of learning opportunities during the school closure," said LCPS Superintendent [name] during the Chromebook distribution at Brambleton Middle School. "It means students will have the opportunity to continue to develop the math skills, reading and writing skills and their knowledge across a variety of content areas. Besides intellectual growth, I think it is going to be good for positive mental health for students to be engaged in learning initiatives during the school closure."

On March 10, the [name of school district] School Board authorized the use of $5 million to purchase additional Chromebooks in the event of a need to accelerate the program, and LCPS immediately ordered the devices. LCPS closed its schools on March 12, and Governor Ralph Northham ordered all Virginia schools closed for the remainder of the academic year on March 23. LCPS started receiving the Chromebooks last week, and its Department of Digital Innovation began preparing the computers and organizing the logistics to allow their distribution.

"The members of the Department of Digital Innovation truly are community care heroes," said Williams.

LCPS also has purchased approximately 1,500 internet hotspots for distribution to families that need assistance in accessing the internet for instructional purposes. Distribution of those devices will take place over the next week to 10 days to support the distance-learning needs of families across the county.

References:

Alsbury, T. L. 2008. "School Board Politics and Student Achievement." In *The Future of School Board Governance*, edited by T. L. Alsbury, 247–272. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Barrett, F. J., Thomas, G. F., & Hocevar, S. P. (1995). The central role of discourse in large-scale change: A social construction perspective. The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 31(3), 352-372.

Biesta, G. 2013. The Beautiful Risk of Education. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.

Biesta, G. J. (2015). *Good education in an age of measurement: Ethics, politics, democracy*. Routledge.

Carver, J. 2006. *Boards that Make A Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Public and Nonprofit Organizations*. 3rd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Coburn, C. E. (2005). Shaping teacher sensemaking: School leaders and the enactment of reading policy. *Educational policy*, *19*(3), 476-509.

Coburn, C. E. (2001). Collective sensemaking about reading: How teachers mediate reading policy in their professional communities. *Educational evaluation and policy analysis*, *23*(2), 145-170.

Foldy, G., Goldman, L.S., & Ospina, S.M. (2008) Sensegiving and the role of cognitive shifts in the work of leaders. The Leadership Quarterly, 19: 514-429

Fusarelli, L. D., T. J. Kowalski, and G. J. Petersen. 2011. "Distributive Leadership, Civic Engagement, and Deliberative Democracy as Vehicles for School Improvement." *Leadership and Policy in Schools* 10 (1): 43–62. doi:10.1080/15700760903342392.

Henderson, Joyce et al., (2013) "A Mixed Methods Study: Principals' Perceived Leadership Styles and Ability to Lead During a School Violence Crisis." ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2013. Web.

Hess, F. M. 2002. *School Boards at the Dawn of the 21st Century: Conditions and Challenges of District Governance*. National School Boards Association.

Land, D. 2002. "Local School Boards under Review: Their Role and Effectiveness in Relation to Students' Academic Achievement." *Review of Educational Research* 72 (2): 229–278. doi:10.3102/00346543072002229

Leithwood, K., and D. Jantzi. 2008. "Linking Leadership to Student Learning: The Contributions of Leader Efficacy." *Educational Administration Quarterly* 44 (4): 496–528. doi:10.1177/0013161X08321501.

Marlies Honingh, Merel Ruiter & Sandra van Thiel (2018): Are school boards and educational quality related? Results of an international literature review, Educational Review, DOI: 10.1080/00131911.2018.1487387

Meier, K. J., and L. J. O'Toole. 2004. "Multilevel Governance and Organizational Performance: Investigating the Political Bureaucratic Labyrinth." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 23 (1): 31–47. doi:10.1002/pam.10177.

Moffett, J. (2011). Perceptions of School Superintendents and Board Presidents on Improved Pupil Performance and Superintendent Evaluation. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, *6*(1), n1.

Porac, J. F., Thomas, H., & Baden-Fuller, C. (1989). Competitive groups as cognitive communities: The case of Scottish knitwear manufacturers. *Journal of Management studies*, *26*(4), 397-416.

Saatcioglu, A., S. Moore, G. Sargut, and A. Bajaj. 2011. "The Role of School Board Social Capital in District Governance: Effects on Financial and Academic Outcomes." *Leadership and Policy in Schools* 10 (1): 1–42. doi:10.1080/15700760903511780.

Sutherland, Ian E. "Learning and Growing: Trust, Leadership, and Response to Crisis." *Journal of Educational Administration* 55.1 (2017): 2–17. Web.

Waters-Johnson, Renee et al. "How Do Principals Perceive School Crisis: Lending Their Voices." ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2013. Web.

Weick, K.E. (1993) The collapse of sensemaking in organizations: The Mann Gulch disaster. Administrative Science Quarterly, 38: 628-652

Links:
The U.S. Department of Education's Web site: www.ed.gov
Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Communities and Schools

School District in Virginia Website links:
Virginia Department of Education: http://www.doe.virginia.gov/