How Past Informs Present: Identity, Mission, and Authenticity in American Independent Schools

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Dedication

To Paula Pipoli Erickson, an educator and shaper of young minds, who in her forty years of service in the Hartford, Connecticut Public School system, was recognized countless times for her compassionate leadership, exuberant positivity, relentless empathy, and unbridled selflessness. Generations of students, teachers, staff, and school leaders have been inspired by her example.

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I am grateful to the countless friends and family who never stopped asking me about my study. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for making my education non-negotiable – this accomplishment is as much yours as it is mine. Thank you, Kara, for paving the way in all you do. And thank you, Siobhan, for supporting me on this journey. Together, grander ones await us.

Lastly, this study, from its inception, has left me enraptured with the enormity of the past and the reverberations it impresses upon us today. As such, I must humbly acknowledge that I stand on the shoulders of giants. This work was not possible without generations of scholarship and educators who dedicated their lives in service to their students. Your pursuits inspire me still. With these acknowledgements in heart and mind, I invoke:

Considerate la vostra semenza:
fatti non foste a viver come bruti,
ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza

Consider well the seed that gave you birth:
you were not made to live your lives as brutes,
but to be followers of worth and knowledge.

Dante Alighieri

Abstract of Dissertation

How Past Informs Present: Identity, Mission, and Authenticity in American Independent Schools

In 2018, the impetus for this research study was to explore the intersection of history, identity, and mission at independent schools at a time when these types of institutions faced a supposed existential crossroads. This paradigm was predicated on the assumption that many independent schools, boasting decades or even centuries of institutional history, needed to reassess and reassert their values to remain relevant in a rapidly shifting 21st century educational landscape. Fortuitously, during the research, events of historical magnitude, ranging from political and social upheaval to the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, with implications that remain yet in motion and yet unknown, pushed back, and extended the scope of this study even further into areas previously ignored, overlooked, or unforeseen.

To explore these paradigms, this study was designed as a multi-case study with the intent of analyzing three independent schools, their histories, their mission statements, their leadership, and their respective community members. From this data, narratives emerged. The findings from this study reveal that the geography and institutional history of private schools are decisive in their trajectory and ultimate identity; during their tenure, a head of school is often the primary determinant of an independent school's ethos and identity; the school mission, as dictated in the mission statement, serves as a pivotal guiding force in the daily operations of the school; and in 2021, the greatest challenges and opportunities at independent schools remain centered on the historical and contemporary shortcomings of each institution regarding race, privilege, and elitism.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Simply, and even redundantly stated, independent schools are built on the framework of independence. This foundation, with its origins in the earliest days of parochial education in the United States, has defined the historical trajectory of independent schools up until today. Understanding U.S. independent schools and the challenges they face requires significant overview of the history of private education in the United States since its inception. Today, unprecedented external forces, including severe economic downturn and cataclysmic national public health crises, threaten the very fabric of American education. Independent schools, despite their autonomy, are not immune to these existential challenges. Rather, independent schools arguably face additional pressures to simultaneously offer their unique style of instruction at the behest of their stakeholders while also effectively navigating the financial and critical health demands of the current moment. The limited literature that exists does suggest that responses to these contemporary and extraordinary issues can be partially informed by past debates addressing school choice, voucher systems, elite reproduction and privilege, and educational inequities. These topics are not new but instead recurrences, informed by similar changes and crises that have occurred since the emergence of a uniform system of education in the United States (Glenn, 1998; Levine, 1980; Potter, 1987; Saveth; 1988). The past can help inform the tumultuous present.

Private education in the United States has existed since the colonial era when most schools were organized locally by church communities and charities. The arrival of the common school movement in the nineteenth century threatened private institutions, which were further alienated by nativist, and typically anti-Catholic sentiments that were

widespread in the years leading up until the American Civil War. With the establishment of the national public school system at the start of the 20th century, private schools had identified a unique niche: providing education and social grooming to the children of American political and economic elite or serving alienated populations through the generosity and benefaction of affluent members of American society (Glenn, 1998).

Only in the 20th century were there concerted efforts by small circles of independent schools to centralize and even standardize their identities. NAIS, the National Association of Independent Schools, the largest organization of independent schools in the United States, was formally created in 1962 when delegates from smaller, regional groups, such as the Independent Schools Education Board (ISEB), and the National Council of Independent Schools (NCIS), comprised of 660 member schools, agreed to merge. Upon its creation, the goal of NAIS was to combine the best aspects of each of these organizations and create a centralized space for discussions surrounding independent schools and their role in the educative landscape of the United States (Esty, 1992).

Today, independent schools face challenges that mirror the political, economic, and social realities of their time. Financial crises, emerging in the early 1990s, highlighted in 2008, and compounded in 2020, threaten the stability of all private schools that rely on tuition and fundraising to remain open and pursue their institutional missions. Furthermore, in the aftermath of national conversations regarding police brutality and racial disparities in America, heightened dialogue regarding independent schools and their historical marginalization of minority students have once again challenged the model of private education and its place in American education. As such, more targeted

literature addressing the identities and missions of independent schools and how they may thrive in the current, historical moment would be beneficial on a national scale.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the steady trickle of scholarship over the last fifty years, private schools have remained a largely overlooked topic in education research. Even facing recent downturns in enrollment (Tawnell, 2017) and existential financial crises linked to both the 2008 recession and the COVID-19 pandemic (Cumbo, 2020), United States independent schools represent 10% of the country's educational landscape today, comprising over 32,000 schools, 500,000 teachers, and approximately 5 million students (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). As such, there are many potential areas for inquiry, starting simply with a common definition of these institutions, their historical evolution, and how, if at all, these schools and their unique position in American education remain impactful today. Given their uniqueness, answering larger questions about the identities and functions of private schools is increasingly important during times of economic instability and elevated national debates surrounding the issues of school choice, social inequities, and privilege. Therefore, the problems this study addresses are twofold: 1) there is a clear need for scholarship of any type in the field of independent schools – the current offering insufficiently addresses many of the dire issues that independent schools must solve to thrive in today's educational environment; and 2) independent schools, which rely on tuition and fundraising to remain open, must excel at providing exceptional, distinct, mission-driven offerings to remain relevant and operational, especially at a time of great political, economic, and social upheaval.

Independent school scholarship is lacking in comparison to its public counterparts. The autonomous nature of these institutions has directly led to a lack of consistent and collective quantitative and qualitative data. This dearth of material can most commonly be attributed to lack of access by outside scholars to private institutions and the lack of generalizability of scholarship given the unique identities of any given independent school. Resultantly, there are fewer publications and a less robust community of scholars in this field. However, in recent years, organizations such as NAIS, and private school specific graduate programs, have pushed for greater field research, resulting in a small but expanding circle of independent school scholarship. While literature in this niche of educational institutions remains limited, what does exist offers critical insight that can help scholars better understand this greater educational ecosystem and the changes that have occurred within it over time. Specifically, scholarship exploring the utility of mission statements is robust (David, 1989; Ireland & Hitt, 1992; Morphew & Hartley, 2010; Mullane, 2002; Organ, 2010) however there has been very little research committed to the mission statements of elite private schools (Boerema, 2006; Boerema, 2009) and no literature that directly addresses mission statements in private schools in the United States. Thus, a focused study of U.S. independent schools, their mission statements, and the role of leadership and community in authentically implementing these missions, could help to better understand these institutions. Additionally, exploration of this topic could help identify the ways in which these schools have been shaped by their environment, and the tools they use to outwardly project and inwardly cultivate their specific identities.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

This study will focus on U.S. independent schools, their mission statements, and the role of leadership and community members in implementing these missions. By better understanding the ways in which historical experience has shaped school mission, leadership and school community alike could better guide their institution to authentically address the many challenges that face independent schools today. For this study, and to better understand how schools may best outwardly project and inwardly cultivate their mission, the following research questions were developed:

1. How does a school's historical experience shape its mission statement?
2. How does a mission statement inform authentic actions, considering the history of a school and the current context?
    a. How does institutional leadership authentically operationalize a school's mission & identity, if at all?
    b. How do community members contribute to reinforcing school mission and identity, if at all?

Statement of Potential Significance of the Research

This study was important to the field of independent school research for many reasons. One benefit was the addition of qualitative research in the field of independent school scholarship, and specifically in the subfield of independent school mission statements. These are topics that are currently underrepresented in the field of education research. Publication of any level of scholarship in this field would encourage additional research to the benefit of these institutions. At the school level, leadership at independent schools may benefit from these collected qualitative data to better organize their

institutional goals and align their programming with their mission statement. The economic and public health crises presented by the COVID-19 pandemic have further emphasized the need by independent schools to formulate, review, and deliver consistent, mission-based instruction in a time of unparalleled disjointedness. Additionally, scholarship detailing the relationship between school identity, mission, and authenticity is useful for community members who want to create curriculum and programming that most authentically delivers their school's stated goals, whether the state of the classroom and institution is principally physical or digital.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

For the purposes of this study, I synthesized several theoretical models that collectively acknowledge the important intersection of identity and historical experience in understanding observable phenomena. Mishler (1979) argued that historical context is critical to accurately deriving meaning from human experience. Building on the works of Louch (1969) and Winch (1958), Mishler contended that field research must properly recognize the environment in which a phenomenon occurs to truly extract, define, categorize, and interpret meaning. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) built on Mishler's ideas and argued that appreciation for the history of a particular setting is in fact critical to holistically researching and interpreting its subjects, their values, and their behaviors. These two concepts compliment Selznick's (1957) theory of *institutionalization*, which stated that organizations, in response to internal and external crises, develop distinct organizational cultures over time, and with the imbuement of these values evolve from organizations to institutions. Lastly, in the context of schools and their formation of values, Schein (1984) argued that values can be understood by their layers of visibility,

ranging from the unseen, unspoken knowledge and beliefs to outwardly expressed and measurable school programming and initiatives.

In total, these theories help to organize a conceptual framework that posits the following: historical context informs how schools develop their identity and mission, which is ultimately operationalized in formal and informal ways by both leadership and the community at large. This process is iterative and occurs both intentionally and unintentionally over the course of a school's history.

Summary of the Methodology

Given their central emphasis on autonomy and aversion to standardization, independent schools do not receive considerable scholarly focus within the field of education. The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) infrequently releases national data, and these numbers only represent its member schools, not the larger population of private schools across the country. As such, most scholarship pertaining to independent schools is qualitative in nature: these institutions stress authentic relationships between students and faculty, encourage teachers to assist in coaching or supervising a dormitory, and simply put, tend to focus less on mandated data collection and standardized achievement metrics than their public counterparts. Because much of the independent school culture is centered on experience, scholars have largely focused on investigating these institutions via qualitative studies. Therefore, a qualitative approach best addressed the phenomena explored in this study.

This case study incorporated multiple sites to assess how independent schools' missions are formed, operationalized, and influenced by historical experience. A diverse set of school sites also provided a more encompassing analysis and ultimately best

answered the stated research questions. Specifically, semi-structured interviews were conducted with heads of school, who best understand how school mission and strategy best intersect to represent the collective values of the institution. Additionally, a head of school has considerable institutional knowledge, to help to better contextualize the school being studied. Secondly, to represent the community-driven endeavors that represent a school's mission, I also interviewed a member of the school who possessed institutional knowledge based upon time served and who could best capture the school's ethos. This figure was a school archivist or historian, or a long-tenured member of the faculty or staff.

Additionally, documents relevant to school mission and strategic planning served the triangulate any data collected from the participant interviews as well as formulate the narrative description of each institution. Specifically, I sought out, when available, documents that detailed the evolution of the school mission at each site. Also, when available, the most recent strategic planning documents were analyzed to inform interview protocols and assess how school leadership has operationalized their mission and identity. These documents were analyzed prior to the interview process to best inform the subsequent discussion.

Data collected were coded. Saldana (2016) argued that a large majority of researchers consider the process of coding, both during and after data collection, to be an effective form of analysis. Coding allows researchers to categorize their data, and through this process of dissection, identify themes and trends. Through open coding, the researcher can better understand the phenomena of the study (Saldana, 2016). In this study, in vivo and descriptive coding were utilized to define emergent themes and more

accurately characterize the essence of the interviews and documents. This is an iterative process that required multiple reviews of transcripts and documents to ensure that the codes were accurate, and representative of the participants and sites studied. This repetition and grouping of themes allowed for the emergence of higher-level theoretical constructs (Saldana, 2016).

Limitations and delimitations

Given the scope of this study, there are limitations and delimitations. Independent schools are not uniform and as such, the ability to generalize the findings to all independent schools is not realistic. While no qualitative study is generalizable, the transferability of this study to other independent school contexts may be challenged by their unique nuances. This study focuses on independent schools in the mid-Atlantic and Northeast regions of the United States, and geography, in addition to many other environmental factors, can heavily impact the historical experience of a school. As such, the results of this study, while contributing to an admittedly lacking area of scholarship, will only go so far as to address the many challenges independent schools face in authentically delivering their mission. Additionally, access to documents at independent schools presents its own unique set of challenges. Given their autonomous nature, independent schools are not obligated to share internal data that public schools are mandated to publish. Accessing historical documents that may portray a school in a negative light, were difficult to obtain. Therefore, publicly available documents, including a mission statement or strategic plan helped to inform the study but may never fully explain the identity of a school to the extent that internal documents could.

Furthermore, participant profiles were limited to adult members of the school community, with specific focus on school leaders and faculty of varying levels of tenure.

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic presented additional challenges to traditional educational research. Specific to this study, on-campus observations of school culture and in-person interviews with designated participants were impossible. Therefore, this study utilized videoconferencing and telephone interviews to acquire testimony from members of the independent school community and digitally access any relevant school documents.

Definitions of Key Terms

1. An *independent school* is defined as follows: The entirety of non-public schools, with distinct emphasis on their autonomous governance structures, which are almost always comprised of a board that creates and dictates policy (Boerema, 2006; McCormick, Barnett, Alavi, & Newcombe, 2006). (The concept and term are given additional analysis on page 15.)
2. *Private schools* are also non-public, but may ultimately answer to a greater bureaucratic system, such as religious schools, and most commonly Catholic schools (Boerema, 2006; McCormick, Barnett, Alavi, & Newcombe, 2006). (The concept and term are given additional analysis on page 15.)
3. *Mission statements* are documents that succinctly forward the purpose of the organization, with a distinct aspirational vision for its future (Davis & Glaister, 1997; Irland & Hitt, 1992) (the concept and term are given additional analysis on page 50.)

4. *School ethos* is the prevalent or characteristic tone, spirit or sentiment informing an identifiable entity involving human life and interaction such as a nation, a community, an age, a literature, an institution, an event and so forth. (McLaughlin, 2005, p. 311). In school settings, ethos is both the informal and formal expression of prevailing cultural norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions, as communicated by members of the school community (Donnelly, 2000)
5. *Authenticity* is the ability to accurately understand one's own weaknesses and strengths, without bias, and act faithfully to uphold these innate ideals, unhindered by external pressures (Erickson, 1995; Maslow, 1968; Maslow, 1971; Rogers, 1959)
6. *Authentic leadership* is a leadership style that incorporates components of authenticity, including self-awareness, transparency, balanced process, and an internalized moral perspective (Walumba et. al, 2008)

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Independent schools, like their public counterparts, are directly impacted by the social, political, and economic realities of their time (Kane, 1992). Successive economic crises, compounded by an unforeseen and unprecedented global health catastrophe, have further highlighted the need for intentional and impactful instruction, both in-person and remote, within the independent school world. This chapter presents a review of literature that contextualizes and supports the conceptual framework and explores both the process and necessity for developing mission-driven education. I also provide clarity on the definition of independent and private schools. This review also charts the historical development of independent schools, focusing on the role of autonomy, school choice, governance, leadership, efficacy, social reproduction, and the "private school effect" within the context of American education. This review defines, then explores the utility of missions and mission statements within organizations and public and private schools. Lastly, this review explores the concept of authenticity, both broadly and within education institutions, to better contextualize how authentic leadership may lead to more effective implementation of mission. This chapter concludes with an overview of independent schools and contemporary challenges they collectively face.

This study addresses two significant problems that independent schools currently face: 1) there is a clear need for scholarship of any type in the field of independent schools – the current offering insufficiently explores many of the complex paradigms nor addresses the many dire issues that independent schools must solve to thrive in today's educational environment; and 2) independent schools, which rely on tuition and fundraising to remain open, must provide exceptional and distinct offerings to remain

relevant, especially at a time of great political, economic, and social upheaval as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent shockwaves that have reverberated throughout American education.

This literature review incorporated sources of literature from 1957, with the emergence of Selznick's seminal work *Leadership in Administration*, to 2021, using key terms and phrases, including mission, school mission statements, mission statements and organizations, independent schools, independent school mission statements, Catholic school mission statements, independent school culture, independent school identity, organizational identity, private school history, independent school history, organizational statements, private school choice, authentic leadership, organizational authenticity, and school ethos. I gathered scholarship using the following databases: JSTOR, Google Scholar, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost, and ProQuest. This search, while exhaustive, demonstrated the need for greater research in this field. Given the lack of data specifically targeting independent schools, concepts were intentionally layered within this literature review from general, theoretical discussion, which often had more robust sources, to fewer, yet more focused independent school scholarship. In addition to databases, further literature was gathered utilizing the reference lists of Boerema (2006), Boerema (2009), Ireland & Hitt (1992), Mullane (2002), Organ (2010), Morphew & Hartley (2010), and David (1989).

This review of literature created a common understanding of the definition of an independent school by charting how these institutions have been shaped by historical circumstance over the course of U.S. history. It demonstrated how their autonomous position within the U.S. education system has allowed for a diverse evolution of

institutional identities, policies, and practices. Furthermore, given the scale and intent of this study, with its central emphasis on the historical experience of independent schools and the impact of that experience on the formation and operationalization of a school mission, this review has prioritized the history of independent schools as a central tenet of the study, rather than simply a brief component included in the introduction. This review also explored the organizational impact of a shared mission, its formal embodiment in a mission statement, and how public and private schools utilize mission statements to reinforce their institutional identity. Additionally, scholarship exploring authenticity, leadership in independent schools, and its centrality in implementing an institutional program that is true to its identity will be reviewed. This review of literature lastly presented a conceptual framework model for understanding the relationship between historical identity and mission and the process by which independent schools capture these concepts, formalize them in mission statements, and ultimately operationalize them.

Independent School Identity

The National Association of Independent Schools, or NAIS, reported in its 2018 annual report that its membership included 1,862 schools across the United States and Canada (NAIS, 2018). This robust number of member schools has increased over twenty percent since Kane (1992) projected that the "golden age" of independent schools had not passed but was instead only just arriving. Since that time, the public debate over equitable school choice and private education has not quieted, evidenced by a consistent and growing field of literature surrounding independent schools, efficacy, and their place in the larger educational ecosystem. To best understand the state of the independent school today and the many characteristics that differentiate it from its public counterparts,

one must assess key features of its evolution and how its identity and defining components have been profoundly shaped by history.

Definitions

There is no conclusive characterization of independent schools, given the myriad forms that they take, ranging from boarding, Catholic, Calvinist, evangelical, British-style, international, and non-public, to name a few. Generalizations are problematic and only contribute further to the erroneous or sensationalized image of these institutions that is often captured by the broader public imagination. However, similarities in philosophy do exist in certain forms and these likenesses are constructive in establishing a common foundation on which to improve definitions, organizational norms, and more cohesive strategic aims. Kane (1992) argued that a common classification of these institutions is inherently stymied by the institutions themselves, who have been given the freedom to self-define. Within those definitions come myriad descriptors and components that comprise the world of independent schools. Kane (1992) categorized them extensively: Schools can be highly traditional or progressive, boarding or day, or a combination of the two, single-sex or coeducational, highly academic and selective or "second chance" schools for those who have struggled elsewhere, free or inexpensive or income-dependent scaled tuition, inclined towards financial aid or exclusionary and costly, steeped with generations of alumni or relatively new, comfortably fortified with financial endowment and impressive campuses, or entirely dependent upon tuition and fundraising campaigns with limited space and resources (p. 2). However, despite these many characteristics, which span across the spectrums detailed above, Kane (1992) ultimately asserted that all independent schools share six common characteristics: self-governance, self-support, self-defined curriculum, self-selected students, self-selected faculty, and small size.

Kane's explanation proves useful in demonstrating the vastness of the independent school space: these schools have extensive range in the choices they make, allowing for the evolution and emergence of dozens of types of independent schools. Her choice of common characteristics can still be found today in the verbiage used by NAIS, who on their website claim that these types of schools validate their independence through their unique missions, the way in which they are governed and financed by autonomous boards, and their accountability to state-approved accreditation groups (NAIS, n.d.). This model, Kane (1992) asserted, created an "absence of bureaucracy" (p. 2) by which these institutions could operate more fluidly and subsequently avoid overly prescriptive state and federal regulations.

Yet, the more one attempts to focus in on a clear definition of the independent school, the more the profile begins to blur. In fact, the terminology surrounding these schools is often interchangeable, leading to further confusion, particularly in scholarly settings. Are independent schools and private schools one and the same? The simple answer is no. Scholars would contend that despite the often fluid use of these two terms to describe the same profile of school, there is an important distinction (Cooper, 1988; Boerema, 2006; Kane, 1992). *Independent schools* encompass the entirety of non-public schools, with distinct emphasis on their autonomous governance structures, which are almost always comprised of a board that creates and dictates policy. This system differs slightly from *private schools*, which are also non-public, but may ultimately answer to a greater bureaucratic system, such as religious schools, and most commonly Catholic schools (Boerema, 2006; McCormick, Barnett, Alavi, & Newcombe, 2006). However, this difference is often lost in both scholarship and common parlance, with the terms

independent school and private school used interchangeably to designate a school that makes decisions outside the purview of state and federal regulations. In the case of this review, both terms are used commensurately, as is the general practice in this field of study. In unique cases, such as religious schools, denominations will be used to differentiate these institutions from their independent and non-faith based counterparts.

Within this framework of independent or private education, there are further distinctions that carry significant connotations for this study. Synthesizing years of literature on independent schools, Gaztambide-Fernández (2009) explored the implications of the word "elite" in the context of private schools in the United States. Central to this endeavor was the question: What does it mean to be "elite?" Does the word "elite" demonstrate excellence in regard to a school's academic curriculum and extracurricular offerings or does it connote the social prestige and regenerative affluence regularly associated with these schools? Or is it both? To accomplish this, the author categorized elite into five distinct dimensions: typology, scholastics, history, geography, and demographics. For typology Gaztambide-Fernández (2009) utilized the characteristics of Kane (1992) to define the components of an independent school. Elite scholastics represent robust and advanced curricular offerings, often directly linked to absence of purportedly overly stringent state and federal standards. Elite history represents the social prestige that many of these institutions have accumulated over the years, dynamics that will be further discussed in this review.

According to Gaztambide-Fernández (2009), elite geography indicates schools located in rural New England, allowing in the late 19th and early 20th century for the creation of spaces where elites could escape the forces of immigration, industrialization,

and urban decay and learn amongst their social counterparts at the exclusion of others. Lastly, elite demographics represent the historically white, privileged student bodies at these institutions. However, in recent decades, substantial efforts have been made by private schools to diversify their student body, faculty, and learning experiences and further promote social justice at institutions that have largely excluded certain racial and socioeconomic groups. Since 2000, students of color as a percentage of total student enrollment at NAIS member schools has increased from 16.8% to 33.3%, faculty of color as a percentage of total faculty has increased from 8.3% to 20.2%, and administrators of color as a percentage of total administrators has increased from 8.2% to 22.6% (NAIS, 2001; NAIS, 2020).

Gaztambide-Fernández (2009) concluded that the dearth of attention paid to these exclusive institutions contributes directly to their often undefinable identity. Furthermore, it has only been in the last twenty years that analysis of independent schools, and particularly boarding schools, has turned critical. Too often, Gaztambide-Fernández (2009) argued, have scholars celebrated the character, success, and grandeur of these elite schools without assessing the social and financial inequities that they often reproduce. Only with this focused attention will scholarship be able to accurately portray these schools and more conclusively identify areas for positive change. Additionally, scholars must create intentional characterizations to separate these very distinct institutions from one another. Although elite boarding schools are a fractional subgroup of independent schools, the larger public often perceives this image, popularized in literature and film, as a larger representation of private education (Barbieri, 1992).

Despite the many types of independent schools, there are essential components that all of these institutions share. Scholars have agreed that autonomy, often embodied in the decision-making of a governing board or in adherence to a non-governmental entity such as the Catholic Church, alongside limited accountability to state-approved accreditation, are fundamental to independent school structure (Kane, 1992; Cooper, 1988; Barbieri, 1992). However, terminology remains vague and the terms independent, private, elite, and preparatory (amongst many others) are often used interchangeably to denote dissimilar types of institutions, leading to vagueness in a field of study that needs greater specificity.

History

Understanding American independent schools today requires a significant overview of the history of private education in the United States. Scholarship suggests that much of the debates surrounding school choice, school vouchers, elite reproduction, and educational inequities are not novel but rather recurrences with distinct ties to earlier transformations and crises in American education (Glenn, 1998; Levine, 1980; Potter, 1987; Saveth; 1988). However, a historical overview of private institutions in the United States cannot simply be an expression of dates with teleological implications – the study of these schools must be intentional and expansive, highlighting the unique trajectories of these institutions in response the larger American historical narrative.

Glenn (1998) charted the history of private education in the United States, providing noteworthy context for more contemporary debates surrounding school choice. Specifically, Glenn highlighted the emergence of the "common school agenda" in the early nineteenth century, or a collective effort by intellectuals in the Northeast to establish a common set of attitudes, values, and beliefs, under direction of the state, to be

imbued in the nation's youth. This utopian vision of centralized schooling, absent of traditional biases and beliefs most commonly linked to religions, was soon threatened by widespread immigration from Europe and the emergence of Catholic schools across the East coast. Soon enough, legal efforts at the local, state, and federal levels aimed to regulate, and even remove, parochial schooling, institutions that represented "nurseries...of factions, cabals, agrarian laws, and contests of force" (p. 432). As such, for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Catholic schools, and by extension, independent non-parochial schools, were the targets of criticism, until Supreme Court efforts such as *Pierce vs. Society of the Sisters* (1925) dictated that democratic values of education must exclude efforts by the state to standardize instruction and mandate public education on its citizens.

Glenn's (1998) history of private schools in the United States, with a specific emphasis on Catholic institutions, is an effective snapshot of how these schools have been perceived over time by those who have championed public education or criticized the concept of school autonomy. While the greatest existential threats to private schools were initially fueled by mid-19th century nativist sentiments, Glenn argued that in recent years, private schools were most vulnerable to new internal and external phenomena, including rising costs of tuition, the emergence of charter schools, and most relevant to this study, "the loss of nerve and conviction about their educational mission" (Glenn, 1998, p. 441). Glenn referenced an argument from Powell (1996), who stated that "[without] some overarching sense of purpose, it is difficult for schools to put in place procedures, expectations, and traditions that together send a clear and constructive message to all students, teachers, and families" (Powell, 1996, p. 20). Ultimately, Glenn

predicted that all independent schools that strongly projected a distinctive ethos, would be effective at "educating children...[and] attracting like-minded parents" (Glenn, 1998, p. 443).

Carpenter and Kafer (2012) posited that school choice was central to the educational experience in the early American colonies, when independent schools were organized by churches, charities, and the local communities that populated them. The common school movement of the nineteenth century challenged private institutions, specifically targeting any religious schools that posed a threat to the inculcation of a national, Protestant ethos in the country's youth. By the 20th century, despite the emergence of a largely established national public school system, independent schools had also created a unique niche, serving a market for those who could afford private education or those who were the beneficiaries of scholarships and the generosity of others (Carpenter & Kafer, 2012). Beginning in 1972, voucher programs became the focus of the school choice debate and President Ronald Reagan's support for this system during his time in office only elevated the prominence of this topic on the national stage. The authors argued that while school choice was always a constant in the history of American education, it evolved slowly through many failures and iterations into its current form in the 21st century. The debate over school vouchers rests largely on the assumption that choice and competition will ultimately lead to efficacy (Carpenter & Kafer, 2012). However, Carpenter and Kafer (2012) claimed that central to this debate is also the idea of freedom, which regardless of the success of the current voucher debate, will remain a constant in American education and as such, guarantee its permanence in any substantive conversations about private school choice moving forward.

Much like Catholic schools of the 19th century, the emergence of elite American boarding schools and day schools were in response to a quickly shifting political and social landscape of the era (Saveth, 1988). Affluent political theorists such as Godkin, founding editor of *The Nation*, and Sargent, creator of the influential and still active *Handbook of Private Schools,* believed that these elite schools could help to educate a new generation of political and social elite that drew on an earlier time when educated, property-owning patricians exerted their principles and charisma on the national zeitgeist rather than succumb to party loyalties of the day.

> Victory of the North in the Civil War led to the triumph of the national idea and the emergence of an upper class that was becoming national in scope…an aspect of [which] was the attempt to impose upon the disparate nation the hegemony…of those who Edwin L. Godkin called 'the educated and the cultivated.' (Saveth, 1988, p. 368)

However, this historical and political imperative never authentically embedded itself in the American upper class. Since Godkin's aspirations in the late nineteenth century, fewer graduates of elite prep schools ultimately assumed positions of power in government and public life (Saveth, 1988). Interestingly, most prep school graduates today select business careers over positions in public office – the result being a disproportionately large number of students from the most elite schools entering the best college, acquiring the most competitive jobs, serving in leadership on corporate executive boards, and becoming leaders of eminent foundations and organizations (Saveth, 1988).

The failure of American boarding schools to meet these idealistic civic expectations speaks to the significant transformations these types of institutions have experienced over the last hundred years and the more the immediate threats to their sustainability in the 21st century. More recent criticism of boarding schools incorporates

both the disillusionment of earlier national aspirations alongside more contemporary disapproval of the rising costs of these institutions and the common perception that these schools further entrench elitism and inequity (Hicks, 1996). Importantly, American boarding schools have reached a watershed moment, initiated by extreme social upheaval in the 1960s, and encompassing larger changes in education that have compounded existing stresses on their educational model. Specifically, Hicks (1996) identified a problem echoed by other scholars – namely, these institutions are increasingly confounded by how to best maintain, or modify, their mission at a time when their traditional student body and educational practices are not definitively linked to scholastic achievement or the production of a new generation of civic leaders (Glenn, 1988). Hicks (1996) offered strikingly similar advice to that of Glenn (1988), positing that these schools:

> Must offer their students and teachers a compelling vision of their obligations to one another and to the community - a vision that in many respects will be at odds with the assumptions and entitlements of current popular culture…They will save themselves individually, not collectively; yet if they succeed in doing so, they will revitalize one another. At the same time, it is not hard to imagine that the boarding school with the best chance to prosper will be the one that reclaims the key elements of its original mission. (p. 535)

Both authors agreed that the autonomy, independence, and unique missions that characterize these institutions are how these schools will ultimately find success, despite the significant changes to education since this model was first introduced in the United States. Echoing the commentary of Kane (1992), the independent school, while struggling to maintain enrollment numbers in the wake of financial uncertainty and pressures to further standardize, Glenn (1988) and Hicks (1996) offer a positive, if

potentially overly aspirational assessment of the place that independent schools, and particularly elite independent schools, occupy in American education.

Governance

Independent schools identify as institutions of autonomy. Inherent in that identity is an established structure of governance best suited to manage and operate that institution (Bohen, 1995). However, unique to independent school governance is a school board - or a collection of senior executive staff and the head of school who work in coordination on a variety of tasks. This unique format provides the independence from state and federal regulations that allows independent schools to pursue their own unique missions. Kane's analysis (1992) of independent school boards provided an expansive summary of the challenges facing these types of institutions and how effective shared governance is critical to their survival. Kane (1992) conducted interviews with dozens of people directly and indirectly connected to boards of governance, including trustees, board chairs, heads of school, and consultants who were tasked with strategic guidance for these schools. Based on interviews with 47 people both directly and indirectly involved with board of trustees' functions, she concluded that independent school boards face considerable challenges in four key areas: commitment, composition, structure, and board/head relations. Her commentary of the relationship between heads of school and their boards is echoed by McCormick, Barnett, Alavi, and Newcombe (2006), who also stressed that a commitment to shared authority, with dual intent to dispel any role ambiguities is essential for a healthy partnership between trustees and the head. In fact, Kane's (1992) conversations with independent school consultants confirmed that head/board chair relations were ranked the highest in skills necessary for effective head leadership. Furthermore, Kane (1992) concluded that new heads of school and members

should be trained for their respective roles, as approximately 20% of board members are new to the position each year.

McCormick, Barnett, Alavi, and Newcombe (2006) argued that the board has many important responsibilities, including: 1) determining and defining the school's mission and purpose, 2) selecting the appropriate head of school, 3) supporting and routinely evaluating the effectiveness of the Head, 4) periodically assessing and designing the strategic direction of the school, 5) ensuring that school programming supports and is supported by the school mission, 6) managing the school's resources, and 7) maximizing the school's performance (McCormick, Barnett, Alavi, & Newcombe, 2006, p. 439). McCormick, Barnett, Alavi, and Newcombe (2006) determined that despite scholarly interest and specific institutional importance in this field of study, there remains a need for greater investigation and analysis into independent school board governance. Their theoretical framework illustrates a first step in developing an organized model for inquiry, emphasizing the importance of factors such as environmental context, school context, and board context, all of which ultimately contribute to board effectiveness (McCormick et al., 2006). Importantly, the authors concluded by arguing that independent schools are titled as such because they do not adhere to traditional systems of educational authority and reject the notion of bureaucratic governance. It is within this context of autonomy and collective, board-driven leadership that independent schools can still effectively provide an alternative to public education that stresses mission, curricular independence, and other school-specific practices.

In recent years, researchers have conducted the rigorous empirical research that was advocated for by McCormick, Barnett, Alavi, and Newcombe (2006). Scholars such

as Baker, Campbell, and Ostroff (2016) have utilized national survey data collected by NAIS in 2012 to further explore the linkages between board governance and institutional efficacy. By building a strategic effectiveness metric to address perceptions of board effectiveness and an institutional performance metric to assess sustainability, the authors were able to make some larger conclusions about how independent school boards should strategize and manage their institutions. Specifically, boards should develop policies to make the onboarding and cultivation of potential trustees a priority, favor long-term strategic needs over tactical matters, remove their potential concerns as parents of current and former students from their oversight roles, and place the interests and goals of the school over any personal motivations and interests (Baker, Campbell, & Ostroff, 2016). The authors conclude that a strategically effective board of trustees will directly contribute to the long-term sustainability and proficiency of a school. This determination speaks to the importance of identifying, recruiting, and cultivating strong leadership within a school board, as these structures, often behind the scenes, remain a pointedly critical and unique characteristic of independent schools.

Leadership

Unique to independent schools is the position of head of school (or more traditionally, headmaster or headmistress). The most senior administrative role in a private school, the head of school, while charged with many of the same responsibilities as a public school principal or even superintendent, is often also given additional roles related to the financial management of the institution. Yet, beyond the daily operational demands of the role, heads of school must also serve as the face of the institutions, espousing its values and implementing them thoughtfully through programming and

strategic initiatives. In the 2013 edition of the NAIS's *The Trustee Handbook,* DeKuyper described headship responsibilities as:

> The professional, institutional, and educational leader of the school... authorized to oversee all administration. The head serves in the same capacity a CEO would in a for-profit corporation (although some major differences exist between nonprofit and for-profit organizations). The head works with board and staff to implement board policies. The head has complete authority for faculty, staff, and student selection, evaluation, and dismissal. (DeKuyper, 2013)

As evidenced above, a head of school must appropriately balance the formal and informal roles of the position. Alongside management skills, heads must also showcase empathy and inspiring relational skills.

Juhel's qualitative study (2016) of 16 heads of independent schools in the New York Metropolitan area aimed to identify the effective and constructive leadership qualities that heads of private schools need in today's economically uncertain landscape. Juhel utilized interviews of heads of school, to understand how these leaders organize and run their institutions, as well as to identify best practices for prospective leaders of independent schools. Specifically, Juhel addressed the evolving qualities necessary of a successful independent school head, based on many years of scholarship addressing leadership paradigms. Juhel introduced the term "the new normal" to describe the shifting landscape for independent schools and their leadership teams in the 2010s; specifically, he identified "a lingering economic climate of uncertainty; a shrinking pool of applicants…rising costs without much elasticity left in pricing…and increased competition from other types of schools" (Juhel, 2016, p. 589). These emergent challenges have changed the way in which heads of school must manage their institutions and resultantly also changed the skill sets that many heads of school must master to

effectively handle the role. Now, heads of school must adopt increasingly technical approaches for the day-to-day dilemmas of an independent school, favoring the style of CEO, transactional leader, and manager over that of the pastoral, transformational, schoolmaster (Bassett, 2012; Gross, 2002; McPhee, 1966; Pidgeon, 2003; Price, 2005). However, Juhel's interviews with these heads of school demonstrated otherwise: despite significant changes to the educational ecosystem, heads dictated the same time-tested characteristics remain vital to leading these types of schools. They collectively identified that a "leader's ability to manage the school's leadership team and board of trustees, communicate effectively and empathically with all constituents, and build meaningful relationships based on trust" were all fundamental to being an effective head of school (Juhel, 2016, pp. 603-604). Juhel's study, while instructive, also contained certain limitations: all 16 heads of school were white, and all the schools were limited to the New York metropolitan area. To better understand the challenges heads of school face nationwide, more comprehensive studies, across greater geographic extents, would be useful in the future.

Given the centrality of the head of school to the operation, stewardship, and identity of an independent school, scholars have also focused on the importance of how new heads of school inherit this role and the necessity for guided and intentional transfer of leadership. Kane and Barbaro (2016) addressed this issue, citing that 68% of heads plan on retiring or changing jobs by 2026. The purpose of their study was to identify best practices for transitionary teams and governing boards to ensure the greatest outcomes for schools experiencing these considerable shifts in leadership. Referencing extensive interviews with both incoming and outgoing heads of school, they concluded that the

most important factors in the transition were increased contact with outgoing school leaders, greater familiarity with their new school's fiscal health, and more assistance from board chairs and administrative teams in the first 90 days (Kane & Barbaro, 2016). Additionally, they noted that all but one of the subjects interviewed acknowledged that they needed better fluency in school finance, which speaks to the large number of heads that emerge from teaching and school administrative roles and lack formal business and managerial coursework prior to assuming the role (Kane & Barbaro, 2016). The authors recommend that given the far-reaching responsibilities that a head of school assumes, there should be better mechanisms, including improved communication between the new head of school and the board, in addition to finance training, in place to ensure that this critical time of transition prepares these leaders for their new positions. The authors' important emphasis on the skills often lacking in new heads, this article would benefit from the identification of which key skills, beyond simple financial acumen, would have the greatest positive impact on leaders transitioning to new independent schools. However, the data presented by Kane and Barbaro (2016) does contribute to this study by demonstrating the immediate and emergent need for independent school leadership in the coming years, which has only been compounded by recent economic and public health crises.

The unique responsibilities of independent school leaders bring into focus how they differ from their public counterparts regarding autonomy. Shakeel and DeAngelis' comparative study (2017) of public and private school leaders was important at a time when school choice was a central topic in the national conversation. Utilizing data collected from the 2011-2012 National School and Staffing Survey, Shakeel and

DeAngelis hypothesized that private school leaders have greater autonomy, based on responses to survey questions that addressed themes of decision-making and perceived influence on school performance standards, curriculum, professional development, evaluation, hiring, discipline, and budget (Shakeel & DeAngelis, 2017, p. 446). Their findings confirmed their hypothesis but also identified distinct differences in leadership styles at these differing types of schools. Private school leaders did indeed identify that they had more autonomy in every category, except for teacher observation and feedback. These conclusions make sense: independent school administrators and teachers exercise autonomy in their daily practice, which explains why private school leaders would experience potential roadblocks to being more active in assessing their teachers' instructional routines. The authors conclude by suggesting that public school leaders should consider pushing back against central office recommendations, ultimately allowing them to be more directly and authentically involved in the daily maintenance of their school and faculty. This study would have benefitted from additional exploration of how school leaders best utilized their autonomy and specifically which areas of school life were most impacted by this perceived independence. In the context of this study, Sheek and DeAngelis (2012) further contextualized the autonomous nature of independent schools and leaders' own perception of the impact of autonomy on their roles.

Comparative research by Jorgenson (2006) highlighted the many similarities and differences of leaders from public and private education. Despite several obvious distinctions, Jorgenson noted, through his interviews with both heads of school and

public school principals that there were many characteristics that both leaders share. Specifically,

> Many of the same skills and attitudes are required in each setting: hiring, evaluation, and termination decisions are also similar; understanding curriculum and instruction; students, teachers, and parents are the same everyplace. In fact, when I'm in a class, or at a ballgame or musical production, I forget whether I'm in a public or private school. My experience [from public school leadership] in curriculum, instruction, finance, staff development, personnel, negotiations and working with all kinds of communities served me well in this role and made the transition relatively easy. I think it would be much tougher to go the other way. (p. 266)

These similarities speak to the generic leadership skills that all school leaders must possess to be effective. Having a deep understanding of a school and the many constituencies that comprise it is critical for anyone in an administrative role. However, testimonials from leaders who made the switch also point to potential shortcomings. Some of the more procedural and bureaucratic tasks associated with public education may seem daunting and even laborious to some private school educators, as demonstrated in the quotation above. And in the same vein, those who shifted away from public schools recognized their immediate departure from many regulatory concerns such as negotiating with unions, handling local media as a superintendent, maneuvering local politics with town councils or the governor's office, or addressing concerns at the public board meetings (Jorgenson, 2006). A critical detail that emerged from Jorgenson's research, was the centrality of the head of school to the character and ethos of their institution, which he characterized as a significant departure from public counterparts. Ralph Sloan, headmaster of the Dwight-Englewood School in New Jersey, encapsulated this idea:

> The head of an independent school truly, truly matters in ways that can shock someone who has recently been transplanted from public school administration. If this is not a cliché, it should be: *the school and the head become almost indistinguishable*. That is, the head's values and priorities inevitably become deeply woven into the school and shape it to a much greater extent than is true in a public school setting. (Jorgenson, 2006, p. 266)

The quote above perhaps best communicates the justification for interviewing and categorizing the experiences of independent heads of school. The headmaster's character and leadership style have the potential to inevitably, and drastically, influence the mission, direction, and identity of their institution. Another head of school detailed that being a head of school signified being the driving force behind that chapter in the school's history. These assertions speak to the unique character of independent schools and the central role the head of school may play in that shaping of that identity. As the job duty of a headmaster does not explicitly include molding the character and values of their school, the actions, and initiatives that a school leader takes will ultimately shape the institution in profound ways. For this reason, authentic leadership is paramount; there must be trust established between the head of school and all those beneath, whether they are faculty, staff, students, or parents. This sentiment is echoed by several school leaders from Jorgenson's article, who stress that new independent administrators must "sincerely believe in [the] school's mission" and "be [themselves], ask a lot of questions…[and] respect the school's history, traditions and mission" (Jorgenson, 2006, pp. 269-270). Moving forward, more studies such as this, in which heads of school testify to the distinct and directly impactful nature of their work on the school they lead, will help to better inform how independent schools can benefit from authentic and informed leadership.

Furthermore, this review has also exposed the absence of scholarship as it pertains to the role of independent school faculty, who broadly comprise the community at many of these schools, and their relationship with those in leadership. In a field that is already drastically under researched, the rapport between the head of school and those who operationalize their strategic vision daily, namely the faculty, is a key gap in the scholarship.

School Community

Independent school communities comprise a vast network of internal and external stakeholders, starting with students, faculty, staff, and administration but also including parents, boards of trustees, alumni, and in some cases, parochial orders. Like their public counterparts, the daily machinations of a community, and the interaction between its stakeholders, often dictate the direction and success of the school. For the purposes of this study, this section will explore two distinct aspects of school community, within the broader context of independent schools: 1) the interactions between school communities, particularly faculty, and school leadership; and 2) the role community stakeholders, particularly faculty, play in delivering on leadership's vision or school mission statement.

Broadly, communities at independent schools represent the multiple layers of stakeholders who impact daily life at the institution. Most independent schools, and particularly boarding schools, stress that "community" is a central component of the private school experience. This belief is predicated on the emphasis by many independent schools that the faculty and staff at these institutions adopt an *in loco parentis* model of teaching and advising. Furthermore, this approach in independent school communities is strengthened by "a shared belief in and commitment to the

school's mission and core values" (What are independent schools?, n.d.). Over time, the identity and direction of independent school communities has changed, to represent both the ongoing demands for greater diversity of communities in private education as well as the increasing bureaucratization of independent schools. For example, the emergence of the term "affinity groups" within private education explains the attempts by independent schools to bring together people, typically students, faculty, and staff, of shared experiences and identifiers such as race, gender, or sexual orientation to further integrate them into institutions of historically privileged groups (Batiste, 2006; Douglas, 2008).

The way internal school communities and their leadership teams interact is of critical importance to the context of this study and broader understanding of the machinations of independent school identity. In the public school space, Ediger (1997) conducted a qualitative study to explore how collective efforts by school leaders and teachers contributed to a successful school community for all. Specifically, Ediger examined a school where there were conflicting messages about the cultural importance of academic versus non-academic achievements; specifically, athletic success was perceived by students, as evidenced in student communications to leadership, and some parents as receiving greater recognition over student honor roll. To address this perceived inequity, the school principal, in collaboration with their teachers, adopted a more intentional acknowledgement of academic achievement that spoke to the "necessity for all students to receive the recognition for their achievements" (pp. 37-38). According to Ediger, the principal is the "key individual" to initiate the shift in cultural attitudes at a school, but the school staff represents the most importance piece for implementing those changes, because school culture is ultimately defined through "the vision of many, not

just the vision of one" (p. 40). Therefore, successful school staff, including both faculty and leadership, who promote a cohesive institutional culture must adopt a shared approach to enacting school improvement plans.

This emphasis on collaboration is echoed by additional research in public schools. Teachers are more likely to buy into school improvement plans if they are active in that process alongside administrators (Hinde, 2004). Furthermore, strong interpersonal relationships between faculty and school leaders, centered around trust, contribute to a more positive school culture that is centered around success and adaptability (Eilers and Camacho, 2007; Gray et al., 2015; Moye et al., 2005; Louis, 2007). Ingersoll, Sirinides, and Dougherty (2018) highlighted the relationship between faculty and leadership regarding decision-making and school performance. Utilizing data collected from the Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL) Survey, the researchers focused on survey questions that emphasized the rapport between school leaders and their staff, such as the ability of teachers to raise concerns to their principals, whether there is an atmosphere of trust at their school, if teachers are recognized for their achievements, or if teachers and leaders have a shared vision for their school (p. 14). Their findings suggested that faculty feel empowered to establish classroom climate, manage student behavior, and impart school values within their established space. However, teachers also overwhelmingly commented that they felt they had little input into grander institutional decisions – those were perceived as "reserved" for school leaders. The researchers also determined that schools who prioritize faculty input in the larger decision-making process often demonstrate higher levels of student achievement. Therefore, it can be determined from this study that greater collaboration between

leadership and community members such as faculty can contribute to a more positive and authentic learning environment for all.

Beyond student achievement, there are additional benefits to a positive relationship between faculty and their administrators. Specifically, within the context of independent schools, two studies demonstrate that positive relationships between faculty and leadership directly contribute to faculty job satisfaction (Sönmezer & Eryaman, 2008) and faculty retention (Shah & Jumani, 2015). Sönmezer and Eryaman (2008) surveyed teachers who had made the shift from public school to private school, using the Minnesota Job Satisfaction Scale to shape a survey that was sent to over 1,000 teachers across Turkey. The data collected from this quantitative study suggested there was a statistically meaningful difference between teachers in private and public settings. For the purposes of this doctoral study, one finding was particularly relevant: teachers surveyed indicated that the administrator-employee relationship, and specifically "good administrators" who exhibited "kind behaviors" was a top reason for why public school teachers transferred to a private institution (p. 210). These findings suggest that healthy rapports between faculty and school leaders are one attraction for teachers to pursue careers at independent schools.

Utilizing survey data from over 13,000 participants, Shah and Jumani (2015) conducted linear regression analysis to determine the relationship between job satisfaction and the intent to pursue alternative professions amongst private school teachers in Pakistan. Predicated on the belief that senior staff play an important role in promoting trust and self-esteem, the researchers found that there were a variety of factors that impacted faculty job satisfaction, and additional factors that ultimately influenced

decisions to leave the teacher profession. Shah and Jumani highlighted that there is a significant relationship between supervision and staff turnover intention. Specifically, the higher the faculty satisfaction was with supervision, the higher the retention rate was amongst teachers (p. 320). This category ranked among the top in the study.

When assessing the formal and informal roles that private school faculty have in implementing school mission and other strategic initiatives, literature both within and outside of independent school scholarship helps to inform this study. To start, Hinde (2004) established that creating a school climate where there are high levels of trust is critical to initiating and sustaining school improvement efforts. Additionally, school leaders can more effectively roll out initiatives to faculty if they provide robust reasons and evidence for why it will ultimately benefit the institution (Langley et al., 2009). These determinations can be extended into the private school space and help to inform the context of this study, which seeks to better understand the role, if any, that faculty have in implementing the missional objectives of their school. Ideally, independent school leaders create a climate of trust and authenticity that allows their faculty to live out the mission of the institution in ways that better the experience for all community stakeholders.

The role of leadership in cultivating a school culture open to initiatives was explored in a multiple case study by Hollingworth, Olsen, Asikin-Garmager, and Winn (2018). The researchers analyzed four public school principals who had been identified as "excellent leaders" by the Midwestern state's Department of Education and superintendents, and sought to understand how principals promote a positive school climate that supports change initiatives. Leveraging data from observations, interviews,

and documents, the study identified three major findings among the four principals: they all created a culture of trust, knew their staff well, and engaged in explicit and purposeful communication (p. 1021). These practices empowered faculty to increasingly embrace healthy levels of professional autonomy that remained in line with the broader initiatives of the institution.

Similarly, in their 2021 study, Cabral, Verdasca, and Alves (2021) researched the engagement of faculty in strategic planning initiatives. Recognizing a lack of literature in this subfield, the researchers sought to identify the ways in which teachers participate in the decision-making and strategic action planning process in a variety of Portuguese schools. Data were collected from 804 teachers, who reported moderate to high levels of participation in institutional initiatives but also indicated that they felt little sense of ownership or recognition for their work in these projects. Additional factors influenced a teacher's sense of ownership in their school's programmatic decisions: level of education, length of tenure, additional formal and informal titles at the school impacted the degree to which teachers voluntarily immersed themselves in their institution's strategic plan (p. 170). Yet again, the researchers stressed that school leadership plays a critical role in creating the conditions for faculty to participate in broader, institutional visions for school improvement.

Farmer-Hinton's study (2010) further complicates the relationship between leadership, faculty, and embodiment of school mission, specifically in a non-public school context. Focusing specifically on an urban charter that adopted a "college preparatory" mission, Farmer-Hinton interviewed teachers and staff over four years to better understand how educators at this school engaged in promoting the "college for all"

school vision over time. The study's findings suggested that faculty attempts at living out an institutional mission at a school that lacks the formal structures to implement that mission is destined for failure (p. 589). Faculty collectively understood that their goal was to stimulate "college preparedness" as a construct at the school, but over time recognized that this approach needed to be drastically modified to meet the logistical capacities of the school (p. 590). Simply put, faculty demonstrated high levels of mission awareness but were hamstrung by the economic, social, and demographic determinants of the charter school itself. The vison was there, the resources and leadership were not.

Though scholarship on independent school communities remains inconsistent, broader research into the relationship between faculty, school leadership, and mission-driven school improvement plans helps to explain organizational culture at private institutions. Research on public schools suggests that school communities, particularly faculty, respond positively to leadership teams that exhibit characteristics of honesty and authenticity (Gray et al., 2015; Moye et al., 2005; Louis, 2007; Eilers and Camacho, 2007. A healthy rapport between principals, and by extension, heads of school, with faculty leads to greater teacher job satisfaction (Sönmezer & Eryaman, 2008) and higher retention rates amongst the staff (Shah & Jumani, 2015). Resultantly, when a school leader who is honest and demonstrates clear communication, then commits to an improvement plan or strategic plan, the research shows that satisfied faculty are more likely to buy in to the process (Cabral, Verdasca, & Alves, 2021). For this study, one can also assume that when addressing school mission and espousing the values of a school in their daily routine, faculty will similarly embrace this component of school culture more willingly if leadership demonstrates the positive traits detailed in the scholarship.

However, the literature in this area of independent school culture is admittedly lacking, further justifying the need for researching the role that community, and specifically faculty, play in cultivating and actualizing the school mission in formal and informal capacities.

Efficacy and the "private school effect"

Comparisons of public and private schools have been a lively arena of scholarly debate for the last four decades. Coleman's (1982) empirical study initiated a series of publications over the validity of a private school or Catholic school effect, even resulting in release of a special issue of *Sociology of Education* (1982). Coleman attempted in this study to empirically explore the contention that private schools provide a better education than their local counterparts. Utilizing results from a 1980 longitudinal study organized by the National Center for Education Statistics entitled *High School and Beyond*, Coleman (1982) concluded that students from Catholic and over private schools scored better on achievement tests than their public school counterparts (p. 68). The findings were immediately contested (Alexander & Pallas, 1983; Goldberger & Cain, 1982; Jencks, 1985) and jumpstarted years of further investigation into the topic (Gamoran, 1991; Lee, Croninger, & Smith, 1997).

Coleman's study accounted for family background factors to isolate student achievement differences by school type. By adopting this process, Coleman attempted to explain the factors for why private schools (both parochial and non-parochial) produce students with higher achievement scores. Coleman concluded that of his five designated categories (coursework, homework, attendance, disciplinary climate, and student behavior), student behavior "appeared to make the most difference" (p. 75). Coleman

did not define student behavior as an individual characteristic but rather the overall behavior of the student body based on their perceptions of the school. This designation speaks to a collective understanding by students of their schools' values and expectations and a measured and voluntary choice to abide by these stated rules. Coleman argued that this collective behavioral advantage contributed to student learning and ultimately helped to explain the achievement disparities between private and public schools.

Building off of Coleman's work, Bryk, Lee, and Holland's study (1992), which consisted of sustained observation of St. Madeline's school and other Catholic institutions, addresses the long held debate over the key differences between private and public education. They argue, as evidenced in the title of their work, that the ethical component of parochial education cannot be overstated. Utilizing the same *High School and Beyond* data sets, they concluded that there is "a pervasive sense, shared by both teachers and students, of the school as a caring environment...[with] an inspirational ideology that directs institutional action toward social justice in an ecumenical and multicultural world" (p. 10). Catholic schools have transformed significantly in the last sixty years - a direct result of major reforms established by the second Vatican council. Schools such as St. Madeline's in Los Angeles, one of the many subjects of Bryk, Lee, and Holland's study, fell squarely into this evolution. During their exploration of the many changes that have been instituted at St. Madeline's, the authors also addressed the unique characteristics of parochial schools in the United States and their place in the world of independent schools. Specifically, they summarized the key characteristics of private, faith-based education: formal academic offerings, communal school structure, and most importantly, an ideology, centered on the pursuit of the common good, that

informs operations and significantly contributed the school's overall effectiveness (Bryk et al., 1992). Bryk, Lee, and Holland contrast these qualities against those of the modern public schools, which they describe as heavily influenced by market forces, individualism, and missions directed towards economic rewards. While parochial schools only represent one type of independent schools, the results of this study emphasize the ideological, cultural, and mission-based emphases present in many private institutions of learning.

Most studies testing the differences in student achievement across public and private schools have largely focused on adolescents (Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; Bryk et. Al, 1993; Martinez-Mora, 2006; O'Brien & Pianta, 2010). For this reason, Carbonaro's (2006) study of kindergarten achievement scores, utilizing Early Childhood Longitudinal Study from 1999 further complicated an already contested scholarly debate. Based on his findings, Carbonaro concluded that public and private students differed significantly ($p > .05$) in achievement levels prior to entering kindergarten; however, his results also indicated that there were no significant differences in kindergarten student achievement across sectors. These findings stand in stark contrast to prior research which heavily suggested a Catholic school, and to a lesser extent, private school effect, on student test scores. In fact, Carbonaro suggested that his findings demonstrated that the Catholic school effect *could* exist but is simply less prevalent at the kindergarten level, and that any argument surrounding these effects cannot be generalized. This contention by Carbonaro (2006) is significant: public and private differences in achievement scores must be assessed within their appropriate context and consider "not sector per se…but how sector interacts with specific academic contexts across the K-12 educational system"

(p. 56). This conclusion must be considered moving forward as scholars continue to assess whether a significant scholastic difference exists between private and public schools.

Rarely are studies conducted on a scale large enough to make broad conclusions about the scholastic achievement differences between private and public schools. However, Dronkers and Robert (2008) synthesized testing results from the 2000 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) to conduct cross-national comparisons across school types. Their results are once again indicative of trends stated in earlier literature. Specifically, private institutions, which they characterize as either private government-funded schools (typically religious schools) or private independent schools, scored higher than their public counterparts, after accounting for the social and cultural compositions of these institutions. This latter determination, the authors argue, is a result of the "different historical trajectories and the social and cultural makeup of these societies and their educational systems" (Dronkers & Robert, 2008, p. 547). These conclusions, which emphasize the importance of historical experience on the development of a school's identity and subsequently, the impact of that identity and ideology on its students, are particularly relevant in the case of this study.

Dronkers' and Robert's cross-national study is expansive and the use of PISA data, while limited to first-world countries and only a snapshot of student achievement, is some of the most comprehensive testing data of this size and scale. As a result, the authors drew conclusions about the achievement differences between public and private institutions, while still accounting for the vast social and historical forces that separate these types of schools. The authors effectively stated that "Private schools have more

opportunities to become more effective than do public schools because of their more effective schools administration and better school climate" (p. 548). They concluded that this climate and composition advantage gives private schools more flexibility in their instructional time, allowing for "acquisition of qualifications other than purely scholastic ones...[including] leadership, [and] cultural capital" (p. 571). Admittedly the authors recognized that the PISA report only addresses achievement scores for 15 year-olds, greatly limiting any larger conclusions about public and private institutions at the middle and lower school levels.

Coleman's (1982) study did little to silence the debate over the inherent differences between public and private schools. Ever since, scholars have attempted to identify how independent schools have may a certain edge in achievements scores, school climate, college acceptance rates, and other categories. For the purposes of this study, these comparative publications have further solidified the notion that independent schools emphasize a distinct style of education that is grounded in their unique missions. As such, the formation of these missions, often influenced by the historical experience of each institution, is a critical component of understanding why independent schools compete with, and regularly surpass public schools, in both achievement scores and perceived levels of school climate.

Elites and social reproduction

One criticism of the independent school model is that elite private institutions are inaccessible to most American students and further amplify the social hierarchies that exist in United States. The average cost of independent day schools in 2019 was $26,866 while average tuition at boarding schools in 2019 was $60,600, a result of a 42% increase

in tuition over the last ten years (Daughtry et al., 2016; NAIS, 2020). Despite efforts by these schools to offer financial aid packages, the cost prohibits many from access to these institutions. The result of this educational exclusivity may be the entrenchment of elitism that manifests itself in myriad ways both at the secondary and undergraduate level and subsequently into the professional workforce. Bourdieu termed this "social reproduction" (1977) and argued that privileged groups pass on more than material wealth, or economic capital to their children. Alongside those benefits, elites also gift social and cultural capital, which can comprise beneficial networking with others in the upper class as well as various forms of knowledge and skill that predispose them to maintain their privileged status (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 4-5). Given that these institutions stand at an important crossroads regarding enrollment and accessibility, during which they must reassess and even redefine their distinct identities as hubs of intellectual, economic, and cultural capital, scholars must seek to identify and analyze the mechanisms by which these schools address and potentially harbor these phenomena.

Persell and Cookson (1990) explored the characteristics of these elite private schools and the relationship between privilege and college admissions. Persell and Cookson focused on elite reproduction, or the process by which the students at these elite schools, which comprise less than 1% of the American student population, disproportionately end up in the "inner circles" of Fortune 500 businesses and other privileged groups (Persell & Cookson, 1990, p. 26). To explore this, the authors analyzed college admission numbers, with specific focus on elite independent schools that historically had chartered relationships with Ivy-league colleges and universities. While continuous matriculation numbers have declined over the last seventy years due to

a more diverse and competitive admission field, there continues to be a distinct advantage for private school students, who can leverage substantial interpersonal resources and let their college advisors "barter" and lobby with admissions officers. These "highly developed social networks," the authors conclude, do not exist, or rarely exist, in public schools and as a result, help to fortify a system of "elite maintenance and reproduction" (Persell & Cookson, 1990, p. 41).

Zweigenhaft (1993) conducted similar research, further exploring social reproduction at Harvard College based on whether its alumni had previously attended public schools or prep schools. Zweigenhaft (1993) contended that alumni of the St. Grottlesex schools [a term developed to describe a small group of elite New England boarding schools, specifically St. Mark's School, St. Paul's School, St. George's School, Groton School, and Middlesex School] had considerably lower college-board scores than their public counterparts who attended the same college or university. Once admitted to the schools, Zweigenhaft (1993) argues that public-school graduates committed themselves more intensely to the accumulation of cultural capital through achievement in the classroom, while private-school graduates placed less importance on scholastic achievement and instead focused on the accumulation of social capital through networking means.

Zweigenhaft's research demonstrated that students who attended elite private schools utilized their undergraduate education to further accumulate the social capital that would help them in careers that more pointedly emphasize networking and social class – St. Grottlesex alumni were especially like to become lawyers, as opposed to their public school peers who were much more likely to pursue doctoral degrees (Zweigenhaft, 1993).

Although these distinctions may appear minute, they do represent different approaches to how students from different socioeconomic and educational backgrounds utilized their time and resources at Harvard College: Zweigenhaft argued that private school students, already educated at institutions where elitism was prevalent, often continued to accumulate social and cultural capital to further entrench their standing.

Studies of social reproduction have also been conducted outside the scope of American education, offering further insight into how elite independent schools both combat and embed these values in their students. Early work by Maxwell and Maxwell (1979) concluded that Canadian private schools have often compounded privilege. Further work was conducted by Maxwell and Maxwell (1995), in which authors carried out extensive site visits, analyzed school documents, and interviewed heads of school at 38 different elite private schools across Canada. They soon recognized that these schools had common characteristics in relation to their student body, specifically that "The voluntary rather than compulsory enrollment in the schools, the nature of students' social class origins, the small size of the schools…distinguish the dynamics of these schools from many of the state schools, particularly those in working class areas" (Maxwell & Maxwell, 1995, p. 318). This allowed for the social and cultural grooming prevalent in equivalent American elite independent schools.

Reeves, Friedman, Rahal, and Flemmen (2017) indicated that the social and cultural grooming that occurs in elite private schools, often cited by many as an informal benefit of these institutions (Bourdieu, 1986; Wakeford, 1969), remains a relevant force in independent education today. However, the degree of continuity of this social reproduction has declined over time, as evidenced by their study of over 120 years of

biographical data in *Who's Who*, a catalogue of the British elite. While this study demonstrates how British preparatory schools have slowly democratized, and resultantly produced less and less members of their society's elite, it also asserts that graduates of these highly selective and isolated secondary schools are still 94 times more likely to reach "elite" status (Reeves et al., p. 1141). This study, although focused on private education in Great Britain, may have implications for independent schools in the United States. Specifically, the authors argue that a similar process of democratization occurred during the reform movements of the 1960s, when American independent schools began admitting more women and students of color. Although increasingly meritocratic, these schools "continued to admit individuals from privileged backgrounds and continue to be powerful vehicles for elite recruitment" (Reeves et al., p. 1143). Khan (2011) argued that this "ruse of elite rhetoric", in which private schools market their commitment to a more diverse student body, in fact serves to obscure the fact that these schools continue to reward privilege. Furthermore, the elite destinations of private school graduates continue to be a product of the students as opposed to the deeply engrained characteristics of the school (Khan, 2011).

The collective scholarship indicates that independent schools, particularly those classified as "elite", have historically reinforced and amplified the social and class inequities in the United States. Cost of tuition, admission requirements, engrained social qualifiers, and other less formal criteria have resulted in generational exclusivity that has only been challenged in recent years. In the last twenty years, economic upheavals, in addition to critical appraisals of racial and economic inclusivity, have pushed these institutions to slowly democratize and better represent the larger population of the United

States. As such, the espoused historical identities of these institutions, while important, may also need to be thoughtfully, and when appropriate, radically, reassessed. Therefore, leaders of these schools must better understand the process for how to reimagine their school's mission, and how to best actionize that mission in curriculum, programming, and strategic planning.

Conclusions

Despite their often intentional isolation from the greater educational ecosystem, independent schools have played an important role in American schooling. Their historical development since colonial times, often under pressure from federal, state, and local governments, contributed to a distinctly autonomous identity that allowed for individual schools to maintain their own missions and programs. Their governance structures, heavily reliant on independent boards and the head of school, further distinguish these schools from their public counterparts. In the latter half of the twentieth century, dialogue intensified over the exact benefits of America private education, leading to intensive research and debate over whether there exists a "private school effect", further accelerating the national conversation over school choice. These discussions were complicated further by growing criticism, born out of the Reform era, that the practices of many elite independent schools were in fact counter-productive to the democratization of education in the United States. Emerging from this set of literature is a clear need for further research into how independent schools, with their many unique and distinguishing features, can create a path forward that both celebrates the autonomous nature of these institutions while also effectively accommodating, and in extreme circumstances, safeguarding students against the new and challenging realities of American education in the 21st century.

Mission Statements

Unlike the largely barren scholarly landscape of independent schools, literature on mission statements is both robust and diverse. Both within the field of secondary and higher education and the greater fields of business and organizational theory, mission and mission statements are a well-researched and popular topic. Drucker's early research in the field of mission statements explored mission within the larger umbrella of organizational management (David, David, & David, 2014). Drucker (1974) argued that mission and identity are often one and the same, positing that companies who ask "What is our business?" are simultaneously asking "What is our mission?" While Drucker emphasized this reflective habit within the field of business, others have argued that this approach can also be applied with success in the realm of public and independent schooling (Davis, Ruhe, Lee, & Rajadhyaksha, 2007). Therefore, a detailed review of literature surrounding mission and mission statements provides a holistic assessment of their efficacy in addition to their centrality in both organizational management and the many layers of education, both public and private.

Definitions

Despite the rich field of scholarship, there is no clear consensus on the exact definition of a mission statement or its correct composition. A mission statement may be characterized as an organization's defense of its own existence or a way to distance one company from its competitors (Campbell & Yeung, 1991; Pearce & David, 1987). Ireland and Hitt (1992, p. 35) offer an encompassing description, proposing that,

> an effective mission statement describes the firm's fundamental, unique purpose…This proclamation indicates what the organization intends to accomplish, identifies the market(s) in which the firm intends to operate, and reflects the philosophical premises that are to guide actions. Mission statements are also intended to provide motivation, general direction, an

> image of the company's character, and a tone, or set of attitudes, through which actions are guided. Furthermore, because mission statements embody a company's soul, they are often inspirational.

This definition, while expansive, could also be applied to a school setting: schools as organizations also need to formally espouse their values and character in official documents. Therefore, schools often create various forms of documents, ranging from vision statements to school philosophies, to mission statements, to best characterize the unique purpose of their curriculum and program. In independent schools, where mission and identity may be the driving force for curriculum, hiring practices, or strategic initiatives, the statement above may best explain why mission statements can best communicate a school's character.

Davies and Glaister (1997) attempted to simplify the definition, characterizing mission statements as a document forwarding the purpose of the organization, with a distinct aspirational vision for its future, in the most succinct way possible. Both Davies and Glaister (1997) and Ireland and Hitt (1992) argued that mission statements must be aspirational or forward looking, with inherent language that suggests what the organization strives to be, not simply what it is. This study did not directly address mission statements in a school setting, or even more specifically, in a private school setting. However, the translation is possible: educational institutions do not merely focus on the student in their current state, but most often incorporate language that projects what skills and knowledge their students will acquire because of their time in school. At independent schools, aspirational language is critical as it communicates to prospective families how a school can deliver instruction that is unique to that student.

Providing a more technicalist approach, David, David, and David (2014) argued that there are distinct components that must be included in this type of document, such as

customers, services, technology, concern for survival and growth, self-concept, and concern for employees. While potentially appropriate for organizations, this recommendation may not accurately address (or possibly overemphasizes) the needs for a mission statement at the school level. Arguably, there are schools that may want to accentuate the centrality of technology or other services however that language is be best reserved for documents beyond the mission statement. This prescriptive approach also addresses optimum length. Several scholars have argued that the most effective mission statements are succinct and exclude numbers (David & David, 2003; Davies & Glaister, 1997) This scholarly discussion surrounding the definition and role of mission statements at the organizational level and how schools, both public and private, ultimately utilize this strategy, is critical to understanding best practices moving forward. Specifically, independent schools face the challenge of balancing their role as both an organization and an institution. Therefore, these types of schools are compelled to consider market forces that dictate enrollment and identify how to best utilize a mission statement to self-promote.

Mission statements and organizations

The study of mission statements more broadly can start at the organizational level. First, understanding the foundational and organizational components of a mission statement will help to deconstruct the school-specific characteristics. While definitions vary, accumulated scholarship over the last thirty years has concluded that mission statements are an indispensable component of an organization's structure and overall strategic management process (Bain et al., 1996; Bart et al., 2001; Darby, 2010; Mullane, 2002). David, David, and David's content analysis (2014) helped to further understand the centrality of mission statements to organizations through the lens of the consumer.

The authors argue that their "customer-focused perspective…is new to the mission statement literature and is vastly different than the typical manager and employee-focused perspective evident in prior research and practice" (David, David, & David, 2014, p. 9). Looking at four randomly selected mission statements from companies in the Fortune 500, the authors applied their nine components of an effective mission statement to critique, analyze, and ultimately modify these statements to best target customer satisfaction while remaining loyal to greater organizational philosophy and values. The authors conclude that mission statements should remain a primary step in the strategic planning process and with more informed research, should better reflect the demands of the consumer while also and still enabling statements to "accomplish their mission" to the benefit of the business (David, David, & David, 2014). This study, while focusing on successful, private companies, does offer applicable suggestions for schools. Specifically, the suggestion that mission statements are effective marketing tools implies that independent schools may be able to operationalize their mission statements to target prospective families. One can conclude that in the context of private schools, the mission statement can serve multiple purposes: it can succinctly encapsulate the vision and ethos of an institution, while also marketing the unique identity and offerings that school can leverage against its competitors.

Ireland and Hitt (1992) observed that the content of mission statements has remained static since the 1970s and attempted to further deconstruct the reasoning behind why companies (successful and otherwise) choose to forego an essential periodic component of strategic planning. Ireland and Hitt (1992) emphasize that

> Several factors may account for the failure to develop mission statements…[including] the amount of work required to develop an

> effective mission statement; the tendency for some stakeholders to become comfortable with a firm's current position (the status quo is viewed as being acceptable or preferable); the controversy that can be created through development of a mission statement; the historical formality of strategic planning processes. (p. 37)

Specifically, the contention that the development of mission statements can create internal controversy is illuminating; the authors cite that the commitment by a company to review and revise a document that defines "who we are" can lead to combative and even existential debates over the identity of an organization. This conclusion yet again can be appropriately expanded beyond the scope of business management and into the world of education: in the case of independent schools, the stakeholders range from members of the board of trustees and faculty to parents and students, all of whom may have conflicting views on how to best articulate the identity and purpose of that institution.

Stallworth Williams's study (2008) utilized a similar content analysis based on David's (1989) original model to look at Fortune 1000 companies and identify if their mission statements also embodied the nine essential components. Stallworth Williams (2008) similarly concluded that the content of corporate mission statements has remained unchanged over the last 25 years. Building off of David's (1989) earlier work, Stallworth Williams (2008) produced some fascinating results: Forty-two of the forty-six (91.3%) Fortune 1000 firms analyzed used a mission statement, of which eleven had one-sentence statements, six had statements of two or three sentences, and twenty-five had mission statements of four or more sentences. Furthermore, David's template for analyzing mission statements in 1989 remains largely relevant today, indicating that corporations still consider the same verbiage and values to be relevant 20 years later, despite

considerable social, geopolitical, and demographic changes across the United States and the world (Stallworth Williams, 2008). This final observation is particularly impactful for the exploration of this study on how independent school mission statements changed over time, as a depiction of the shifting national landscape.

Mission statements and schools

Schools qualify as organizations and as such, emulate or adapt many of the broader organizational practices in that field. Morphew and Hartley (2006) identified that every effective educational institution must create a document of shared values. This is evidenced by the fact that within the last 25 years, 80 % of all colleges and universities were making major revisions to their mission statements and goals, demonstrating a collective commitment, in contrast to relatively stagnancy in corporate America, by many of America's top institutions to improving their aspirational documents (Morphew & Harley, 2006). This work was complimented by Schafft and Biddle's (2013) content analysis of 480 school district mission statements from Pennsylvania to understand the relationships between school, place, and the locally articulated purposes of schooling. This study was done to better understand the influence of local actors on public schools and their designed missions. One finding was that district mission statements may not be representative of locally articulated visions of schooling given the incredibly similar language regardless of location or school profile. Given the shared language across these documents, the authors suggest that "Further work is needed to understand where this language comes from and, if not locality, the influences that inform district adoption" (Schafft & Biddle, 2013, p. 73) It worth noting that public schools have great similarity in their mission statements, and it appears that this language is adopted from higher level policy either at the district, state, or national level. In contrast, independent school

mission statements (with the exception of certain parochial or nonpublic institutions, i.e. Montessori schools), typically create mission statements that are unique to their school.

Speaking to the efficacy of school mission statements, Davis, Ruhe, Lee, and Rajadhyaksha (2007) addressed whether or not universities that directly state their ethical orientation in their mission statements had students who perceived these values and resultantly incorporated those values into their scholarship and school activities. Specifically, the authors did not investigate the effect that these statements had on faculty but instead focused on students' adoption of ethical values during their time at the institution. The authors found that college seniors graduating from religious schools had higher scores in the heart and confidence categories, which were most closely linked to the values the test associated with religious schools (Davis, Ruhe, Lee, & Rajadhyaksha, 2007). The results of this study indicate that mission statements at educational institutions that incorporate language that exemplifies the school's values, or as Drucker (1974) may label it, "character," are more effective at instilling those ideas and values in their student body. Therefore, one may conclude that is advantageous for schools with a religious affiliation, to be explicit in writing their values into their mission statements.

Gurley, Peters, Collins, and Fifolt's study (2015) dug deeper into the relationship between constructed institutional values and their embodiment in daily school life. These researchers, utilizing content analysis, studied educational leadership students' familiarity with shared mission, vision, values, and goals statements and the impact these concepts have had on their school practices. They found that their students had limited memory of school mission statements and those that did stated that these documents had limited effect on their regular practice (Gurley, Peters, Collins, & Fifolt, 2015). In both studies

above, it is important to note that these students were in undergraduate and graduate programs, which may have had a profound effect on the results. Further study at the private, secondary level would be advantageous to determine whether this efficacy, or lack thereof, is also present in independent schools.

One study that further complicates arguments about the centrality of mission statements to effective educational institutions is Organ's (2010) article on institutional pluralism. His article explores how law schools have defined their missions to reflect their distinct approaches to legal education. Interestingly, over one quarter of the ABA-certified law schools in the country did not contain a mission statement. Under certain assumptions, these schools are less communities and more so "a bunch of independent contractors who share space but have no discernable coalescing purpose or goals" (Organ, 2010, p. 164). These findings demonstrated that many elite law schools in 2010 operate without a formal mission statement, how might this affect our understanding of mission and values, and their role as building blocks of an effective organization moving forward? Just *how* important are mission statements if so, many prestigious schools do not have them? Given the lack of scholarship on this topic, particularly at the secondary level, there must be more work done to determine how effective these documents are at delivering a shared message of purpose and values to an independent school community.

A component worth considering when analyzing mission statements is school ethos. After all, according to the organizational literature, a mission statement should embody in some form the ethos of its organization. Therefore, a better understanding of what a school ethos is will help inform conversations about effective mission statements at independent schools.

Defining ethos in a school setting is not straightforward. Donnelly (2000) suggested that it is "a fashionable but nebulous term…resistant to satisfactory definition and, thus, effective empirical explorations" (p. 134). Descriptors of this concept have included 'climate', 'culture', 'environment', 'values', 'morale', 'spirit', and or 'code'. However, none of these labels convincingly and wholly embody ethos and often, they overlap and resultantly cloud its meaning further. As such, the subjective nature of ethos makes it difficult to describe and even more difficult to measure (Glover & Coleman, 2005). Solvason (2005) argued that ethos is the product of the school's culture, allowing for analyses of school culture, or concrete instruments of an institution, to open the way to explaining this idea. McLaughlin (2005) also accurately denoted that one cannot directly investigate an ethos of a school but instead must deconstruct its various components. Referencing Ryle (1949), McLaughlin (2005) demonstrated that in a game of cricket, there is no formal position on the field for a player to exercise *esprit de corps*. Instead, every player, or in the context of schools, every student, teacher, staff, and formal mechanism, from programming to athletics, collectively inherits and reflexively expresses an institutional ethos. As such, McLaughlin's (2005) definition of ethos proves useful for this study of independent schools:

> An ethos can be regarded as the prevalent or characteristic tone, spirit or sentiment informing an identifiable entity involving human life and interaction such as a nation, a community, an age, a literature, an institution, an event and so forth. (p. 311).

This explanation agrees with Donnelly's (2000) own definition, which claimed that ethos was both the informal and formal expression of prevailing cultural norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions, as communicated by members of the school community. Donnelly's contention indicated that schools also communicate their ethos through

formal mechanisms, one of which could be a mission statement. Furthermore, it allows for further study into how one ultimately understands a school's ethos and for the purpose of this own study, how might a school's historical experience shape its "spirit".

While a unanimous definition is elusive, discussing school ethos does clarify the organized and structural character of an institution and how it best aims to carry out its goals. Yet, there may be a disconnect between the aspirational values a school prescribes and the social realities in the classroom, the hallways, or on the athletic fields. Donnelly categorized ethos into these two camps: the positivist and the anti-positivist. He posited that a positivist ethos can be described as the intended outcome, or the wishes of those in leadership roles for what they envision the organization to be (Donnelly, 2000). Conversely, an anti-positivist ethos is one that is more decidedly organic and emanates from the interactions between group and individual, resulting in a more informal, yet genuine embodiment of the organization's values. Divergences between a formal, aspirational ethos, i.e., a mission statement, and the actual, experienced ethos at an independent school are common and do not indicate grave institutional shortcomings. Rather, they serve to inform school leadership of how to effectively imbed the formal agreed-upon values within the community. This process is ultimately negotiated between administration, faculty, staff, students, and parents (Donnelly, 2000). The objective is to create an ethos that "speaks for itself and does not require constant and extensive articulation" (Allder, 1993, p. 69). Ethos, while varying in definition, does offer insight into the greater machinations of school mission and the documents that attempt to formalize it. Schools that have mastered authentic practices are those that both cultivate

powerful and productive anti-positivist ethoses while also effectively communicating them in positivist documents such as the mission statement.

Mission statements in independent schools

Literature on independent school mission statements is concerningly sparse. Except for Boerema's research (2006, 2009), little scholarship exists that directly addresses mission statements at independent schools. Boerema's study (2006) of private school mission statements highlights the diversity of these documents and how they may explain collective values across different independent schools. His definition of this concept is decidedly aspirational:

> The school mission arises from a set of values that answer fundamental questions about the purpose of education and how the educational program should be carried out…based on beliefs about the nature of the good life, the human task, and the role that education should play in preparing for that life and task. (Boerema, 2006, pp. 182-183)

After deconstruction of these mission statements, Boerema (2006) concluded that the top concepts mentioned were intellectual growth, academic excellence, service for others, and social or spiritual development. However, akin to Donnelly's (2000) observations, Boerema also noted the disparities that arise from what is specified in the mission statement and what steps are intentionally taken to forward that mission. Mission statements are "ideas and hopes of what they want their school to be…[and] do not indicate the degree to which the statements represent reality" (Boerema, 2006, p. 199). Interestingly, Boerema concluded by stating that a mission statement does provide an accurate snapshot of what is closest to the heart of the people that constitute and lead school communities.

Building from his previous scholarship (Boerema, 2006), Boerema's (2009) research into school missions and student achievement attempts to deconstruct this

confusing correlation. The results of his study indicated that in fact, mission does heavily influence student achievement: in some cases, British-style school student achievement deviated as much as 31% from the public school average (Boerema, 2009). Interestingly, Boerema concluded that school mission also affects areas of school life beyond student achievement. At a time when school choice is front and center in the debate for American public education, Boerema suggested that both public and private institutions would benefit from adopting structural changes, which would ultimately "allow them to express their mission and vision in more powerful ways" (Boerema, 2009, p. 134). Boerema's targeted research of mission statements in private schools carries with it considerable implications for the role of these documents in independent school life however, the scope of his study is limited to Canadian schools. As such, there is a need for studies of this type to be done in American independent schools so that more accurate conclusions can be drawn about the relationship between mission, values, school autonomy, and identity.

Conclusions

The collective articles discussed above demonstrate the centrality, and at times, necessity of mission statements at the organizational and school level. Mission statements contribute to a collective sense of purpose amongst members of an organization (Bain et al., 1996; Bart et al., 2001; Darby, 2010; Mullane, 2002) and in the right circumstances, contribute to an effective reception of school values by students (Davis, Ruhe, Lee, and Rajadhyaksha, 2007). However, the literature also shows that there has been little research into mission statements in secondary schools, with even less scholarship on independent schools in the United States. A more focused effort on how

mission statements are formed in the independent school world, how they are influenced by school identity, and how they are ultimately operationalized in genuine ways would be critical to understanding the efficacy of these documents on students, faculty, and all shareholders alike.

Authentic Leadership

The demand for greater authenticity across multiple sectors of society by both the public and academia has led to its increased focus at the theoretical and practical levels, from corporate boards to institutions of education. Recent financial crises triggered by executive mismanagement and greed, in conjunction with failed leadership both in the political and educational spheres has furthered the need for authenticity in the workplace and centers of learning. In fact, Cranton and Carusetta (2004) argued that humanity's desire for authenticity most frequently emerges at times when modern civilization presents profound moral and ethical dilemmas. In schools, this need for genuine guidance and structure is decidedly apparent: school leadership and the decisions made by those in power need to be faithful to leaders and the organizations they lead. In the context of independent schools, where governance of the institution is entrusted to the head of school, who often comes to represent the very character of the school itself, authentic traits of leadership and empathy are of the utmost importance. Furthermore, school leaders have an obligation to authentically mirror the espoused values of their institution, so that members of the school community can also embody the school mission. By doing so, authentic leaders can best serve their stakeholders and deliver a genuine education based on institutional values. To better understand the concept of authenticity, within the

context of leadership, organizational theory, education, and mission, one must explore the emerging field of scholarship that has addressed these topics.

Definitions

Authenticity, despite its widespread acceptance as a desirable trait amongst organizations and individuals, is not a straightforward theoretical concept. In fact, authenticity as an ascribed ideal rest on a precarious tension of internal and external perception. Authentic traits can be self-evaluated but are also a product of the assessment of others, which is often a more accurate evaluation (Peterson, 2005). However, Swann (1987) and Bovens (1999) argued that authenticity is initially a self-sourced quality; one must be sincere to the self before they are perceived by others to be authentic.

Definitions of authenticity predictably vary in tone and content. Etymologically, authenticity originates from the ancient Greek *autos*, or self, and *hentes*, or doer, which crudely renders a translation of "mastering oneself". In fact, philosophers such as Aristotle surmised that to achieve the highest good, or *eudaimonia*, one must live an examined life by avoiding earthly pleasures and embracing thorough self-inquiry (Ryan & Deci, 2001). This approach by classical thinkers came to define the Western conception of authenticity and self-realization. Psychologists such as Rogers (1959) and Maslow (1968, 1971) understood authenticity as the ability for individuals to reach self-actualization, which they described as the recognition of the self, the other, and the ideal. Erickson (1995) offered similar language, arguing that authenticity lies in the ability to accurately assess oneself and their lived condition, without external pressures forcing them to act otherwise. In layman's terms, authenticity is the ability to accurately understand one's own weaknesses and strengths, without bias, and act faithfully to uphold these innate ideals, unhindered by external pressures.

The definitions above help to better explain the desire by organizations and leaders to implement authentic practices. Researchers now regularly explore the impact that *authentic leadership* (AL) may have on the efficacy of their company or school. As such, there have been efforts in recent years to better define authenticity within the context of leadership. Chan (2005) argued that given the complex role that perspective plays in claiming authenticity, there is no singular definition that holistically yet accurately describes the practice within the field of leadership. Northouse (2016) compiled multiple definitions within the separate models of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and developmental perspective.

Intrapersonal, as described by Shamir and Eilam (2005), adheres closest to classical interpretations described above, emphasizing the authentic leadership is sourced from within. Leaders need to be "originals, not copies" and lead with conviction based on critical experiences from their lives. This accumulation of "self-knowledge, self-regulation, and self-concept" were deemed essential to the growth of an authentic leader. Eagly (2005) contested that authenticity is derived from a relational, or *interpersonal*, process between leader and follower. Reciprocal connections are formed over time between these two groups, culminating in genuine relationships and identity-building for the whole. Both approaches assume that authentic leadership is largely a fixed trait, or minimally, an attribute that the leader can inherently tap into. Conversely, the *developmental* perspective (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Walumba et al., 2008) suggested that varying components of authenticity can be learned, and even nurtured and taught, over a lifetime. Given the emphasis by many scholars that authentic leadership is ultimately a developmental process further implies that many organizations, including

schools, can actively cultivate authentic leaders from within and resultantly impact their organization in increasingly positive ways.

Authentic leadership and organizations

The process and impact of implementing AL practices in organizations falls squarely within the literature of organizational leadership. Barnard (1958) divided authentic organizational leadership into two distinct categories: 1) the internal, relating to the interests and goals of shareholders and employees, and 2) the external, addressing interests of competitors, communities, government, and greater society. Often, he analyzed AL through executive leadership, emphasizing the roles of the top tier managers. His conclusions were that the internal and external demands of leadership ultimately challenge those who make the decisions as they must accommodate their personal, moral beliefs with their obligations as leader of an organization (Barnard, 1958). This potential conflict of interests helps further complicate the challenge of being an authentic and effective leader. It is also within this context that truly authentic leaders succeed: if one can escape conformity and measure their self-worth by their own standards and noy simply by the acceptance of others, they routinely find success as leaders (Kernis, 2003).

The impact of AL practices on an organization's output and the wellbeing of its members is a robust area of study. Within this framework, multiple scholars have addressed the ways in which authenticity has impacted an organization's ability to perform its tasks. Gardner et al. (2005) determined distinct connections between authentic leadership and work engagement. Scholars agreed that if workers can connect their organizational role with their own self-identity, there are higher levels of job

satisfaction (Christian et al., 2011; Lawler & Hall, 1970). To affirm this, Alok and Israel (2012) conducted a Google Docs survey study of 112 participants to determine if there was a relationship between authentic leadership practices and worker engagement. Using linear regression, these scholars concluded from the results that AL can be predictive of member engagement if those members interpret that their leaders are manifestations of the organization's mission. Furthermore, it is critical that these members also exhibit their own significant levels of authentic self-awareness (Alok & Israel, 2012).

Peus et. al (2011) determined how authentic leadership shaped worker output in a corporate setting. Utilizing the Authentic Leader Questionnaire developed by Walumba et. al (2008), these scholars asked participants to rate their supervisors' self-knowledge, self-consistency, and authentic leadership. They were then asked to rate their satisfaction with their supervisor, based on the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire created by Bass and Avolio (1995). Results indicated that AL practices infuse higher levels of commitment, greater satisfaction with management, and motivation to exert extra effort at work (Peus et. al, 2008). The authors concluded that data collected points to the advantages of AL but they also recognized the novelty of this field of study. There remain numerous definitions of authenticity and self-knowledge that hamper the data collection process. Additionally, AL practices and positive outcomes in members do not necessarily correlate with positive outcomes for the organization itself. A leader can genuinely inspire their workers but in the process lead the company towards failure. As such, the authors advocated for additional research that connects AL to both internal and external metrics of efficacy.

Wang et. al (2014) built on these conclusions in their assessment of AL and overall member performance. In this study, the researchers utilized previous scholarship to hypothesize that authentic leaders, by modeling transparency, openness, and truthfulness, can inspire other members of an organization to develop physical and emotional connection with their work, in addition to greater cognitive vigilance whole competing tasks (Wang et. al, 2014). This hypothesis builds on earlier scholarship that authentic leaders "can enhance followers' hope not only by establishing their willpower but also by including positive aspects of the pathways or directions to pursue which enhance followers' sense of self-efficacy" (Avolio et. al, 2004). The researchers utilized two separate questionnaires to evaluate how members of a large organization in Beijing, China assessed their leaders. The survey was based on the 16 item Authentic Leadership Questionnaire developed by Walumba et. al (2008). The survey also asked participants to assess their own psychological capacities (PsyCap), based on a questionnaire developed by Luthans et. al (2007). The results confirmed the study's hypotheses. Specifically, the authors concluded that AL remains an effective relationship-based model for management that also fosters positive PsyCap in its organization's members (Wang et. al, 2014).

Cottrill et. al (2014) determined that the benefits of AL practices also extend into the field of organizational equity and inclusion. Leveraging previous scholarship, the authors hypothesized that AL is positively correlated with inclusionary practices, including Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCB). OCB is described as individual actions, often altruistic and unrewarded, that contribute to an enhanced social and psychological environment (Organ, 1988; Organ, 1997). Participants completed a survey

that incorporated the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire in addition to metrics for measuring OCB. The results demonstrated that AL practices positively impact sentiments of inclusion and propagate OCB. The authors argued that authentic leaders model self-worth and encourage others to feel valued and trusted (Cottrill et. al, 2014). As a result, employees with greater self-esteem are likely to exceed their formal job expectations and work collaboratively to achieve increasingly constructive goals (Cottrill et. al, 2014).

On an organizational level, there is evidence suggesting that AL practices have positive effects on the efficacy of an organization, ranging from worker satisfaction to tangible outputs. Additionally, there are broader implications for why AL is important to the everyday functions of an organization. Freeman and Auster (2011) reframed this argument by introducing new language to the concept of AL: "We see being authentic as an ongoing process of conversation that not only starts with perceived values but also involves one's history, relationships with others, and aspirations" (p. 15). Rather than identify authenticity as a benchmark, these authors posited that the traits of an authentic leader are individualized and ongoing. Leaders, like organizations, are not static – they evolve and adapt to the demands of their environment. Therefore, rather than simply assessing an organization based on "its business card" and how closely its leader mimics its taglines, Freeman and Auster (2011) argue that one should instead start by asking where an organization's values are perceived to be. Importantly, these authors also stress that organizations "must become aware of their history and their historical routines" (p. 22) to better understand their paths forward. For this study, this article helps to

emphasize the transitory nature of organizational values and how leaders can best shepherd this process in the most genuine way.

Authentic leadership and schools

The application of authenticity to leadership extends beyond traditional organizational and corporate models and can also inform collective understanding of education. Scholarship addressing authentic leadership in educational institutions remains limited, given how new this field of study is. However, the literature that does exist (Feng, 2016) is instructive in establishing a collective understanding of how this leadership approach, which has demonstrated efficacy in the corporate sphere, could help improve American schools, both public and private.

Pavlovic (2015) aimed to better define AL in the context of educational institutions. Skeptical of Walumba's (2008) AL model, Pavlovic randomly sampled 227 primary and secondary school leaders, to assess the characteristics that they most commonly associated with authentic leadership. This study aimed to both characterize authentic leadership in schools and determine whether these school-specific AL traits were any different from those used in the field of organizational leadership. Pavlovic utilized the results to organize AL traits into four categories:

1) communication conformism, the ability of a school leader to listen to others and adapt their decisions to meet the needs of the community
2) self-consciousness, the school leader's awareness of their own actions and willingness to reflect on those actions
3) self-discovery, the leader's acknowledgement of their character, ability, and feelings that influence their choices

4) self-concept, or knowledge of one's self, the leader's awareness of their advantages and weaknesses, which often informs their self-discovery (Pavlovic, 2015)

This categorization of traits, while sharing some similarities with the Walumba (2008) model, does offer a new perspective on AL practices. Specifically, Pavlovic (2015) argued that this study, which included leaders, and was conducted in Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, provides a broader sample for analysis. Pavlovic concluded that while not perfect, the results indicated that there is still considerable work to be done in identifying a common set of standards for the AL model. Additionally, this study also demonstrated that time and place matter to the values of the organization and its leadership: each organizational culture has its own specific definition of authentic leadership (Pavlovic, 2015).

Similar studies have been conducted in recent years to determine and complicate the assumed impact of AL on schools (Bento & Rebeiro, 2013; Bialystok & Kukar, 2018; Karadag & Oztekin-Bayir, 2018). Bento and Ribeiro's (2013) study, utilizing the Walumba (2008) set of AL traits, aimed to identify how followers interpreted the authenticity of their leaders, in addition to whether there was a significant difference in perceptions of AL between leaders of public and private schools. Results from the study demonstrated that school leaders demonstrated an "above the moderate level" of AL (Bento & Ribeiro, 2013). Pertinent to the scope of this doctoral study, Ribeiro confirmed that "the leaders of the private schools had "demonstrated slightly higher values in the four analyzed domains" (p. 129). Unfortunately, Ribeiro does not discuss the possible

reasons for this difference in authenticity by school type any further in this study, showcasing the need for additional research in this area.

Karadag and Oztekin-Bayir's (2017) utilized the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (Walumba, 2008) and the Organizational Culture Scale (Karadağ)to explore the connection between AL and organizational culture in educational settings. In this causal design study, the researchers sampled 256 primary school teachers and results confirmed that the benefits of authentic leadership in corporate settings can also translate to schools (Karadag, 2009). Specifically, principals who demonstrated Walumba's (2008) characteristics of self-awareness, transparency, balanced processing, and internalized ethical viewpoints helped to increase teacher's positive perceptions of school culture. This led Karadag to conclude that overall, AL has a positive impact on school culture.

Authentic leadership and independent schools

Predictably, there is limited literature addressing AL in independent schools. Given the novelty of AL studies, research in private education, even on an international scale, has yet to fully address this specific form of leadership practice and its impact on this specific subset of schools. However, NAIS has published in recent years commentary on AL and its perceived importance at independent schools. Blankenship (NAIS, 2018) argued that independent schools aim to educate their students to one day be effective leaders on the local, national, and global levels. Inherent in that educational process, is teaching the ability to know yourself and the community around you to better understand its needs (NAIS, 2018). This sentiment was echoed by NAIS president Donna Orem in 2016, who identified four authentic characteristics for independent school

leaders: being self-aware and genuine, being mission driven with a focus on results, leading with both the heart and the mind, and focusing on the long term. These traits seemingly correspond with Walumba's (2008) categories of self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency. Orem emphasized that "School leaders, in short, not only need great skills, they also need an absolute commitment to both personal and institutional growth" (NAIS, 2016).

Conclusions

In recent years, political and economic stability, often further exacerbated by ingenuine leadership, has led to a scholarly interest in AL practices. Authenticity remains a valuable and enviable trait and scholarly literature suggests that leaders who demonstrate authenticity often lead successful organizations and schools. Members of an organization, or teachers at a school, will often emulate characteristics of authenticity when their leaders model them, and this process in turn will lead to improved morale, greater efficiency, and more robust organizational and school culture.

In the context of independent schools and for the purpose of this doctoral study, authenticity is central to understanding mission and identity. Specifically, school leadership has an obligation to authentically emulate the mission of their institution, and initiate programming and strategic planning that can help embody and embed those values in members of the school. In turn, members of the school, from faculty to students, can also replicate authentic virtues and build a positive school ethos, founded on authenticity and the school mission. Understanding the interplay of school identity, mission, and authentic leadership at independent schools can help all members of the community create a transformative and impactful environment.

Conceptual Framework

The relationship between theories such as context, portraiture, organizational identity, and institutionalization are both sequential and iterative and can help to explain how independent schools develop identity, mission, and authenticity over time. Schein (1984) similarly organized these ideas in his own visualization of organizational culture (see figure 1).

Figure 1

Schein, E.H. (1984) Coming to a New Cultural Awareness of Organizational Culture, Sloane Management Review.

Schein (1984) argued that organizational culture can be understood by its layers of external visibility. At its foundation, an organization's culture is comprised of tacit assumptions. This combination of unspoken and unseen knowledge, beliefs, and norms, while not immediately measurable, significantly influences organizational decisions (Schein, 1984). The second level of the figure represents the more formal and agreed-

upon embodiments of organizational culture. Stated values, even if they are not authentically reproduced by the organization's members, are most found in a mission statement, vision statement, or company philosophy. The final level of the pyramid, which he described as artifacts and labels, in addition to surface, demonstrates the most outward facing and visible components of an organization's culture. Examples include the strategic plan, fundraising campaigns, programming and initiatives, and additional public documents (Schein, 1984). Schein accentuated that the first two levels are regularly internal: they are sometimes implicit, sometimes espoused, and oftentimes utilized as means for organization and congruence. The last level of organizational culture is actionable, measurable, and open to public consumption. Schein's framework provides important structural and theoretical patterns that ultimately inform the conceptual framework for this study. Notably, it recognizes the seen and unseen forces that inform identity and action within an organization or school. Furthermore, Schein's concept presents a model that is linear and focuses on the ascending progression of organizational culture and identity towards a more focused, and often public, summit.

The relationship between theories such as context, portraiture, organizational identity and culture, and institutionalization are both sequential and iterative and can help to explain how independent schools develop identity, mission, and operations over time. Figure 2 summarizes this relationship.

Figure 2

Identity Formation & Reinforcement at Independent Schools

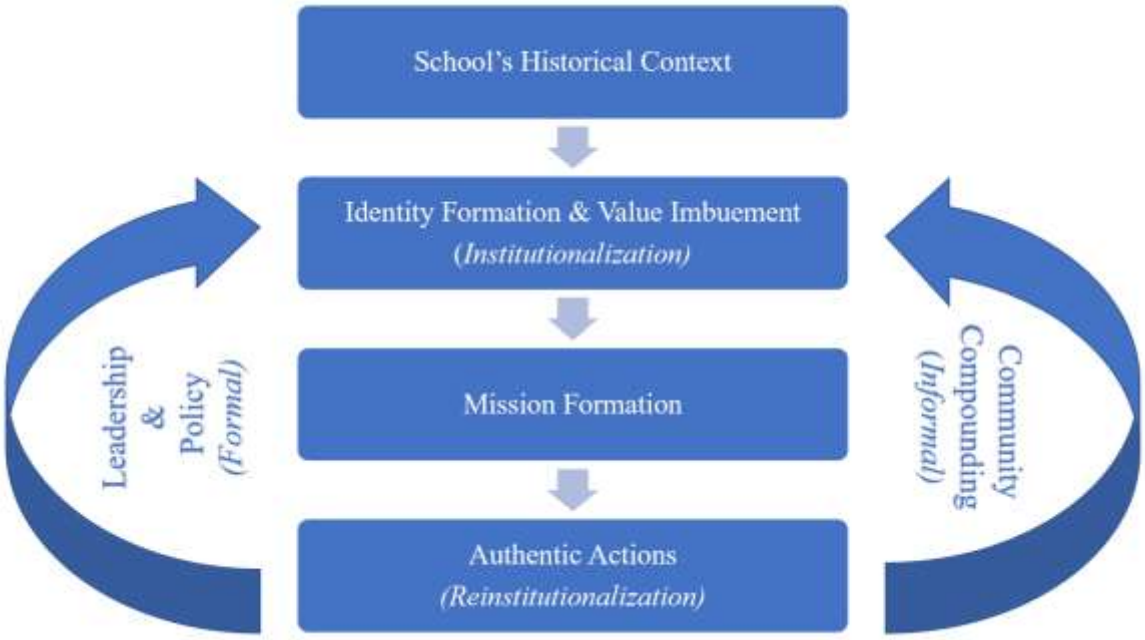


Figure 2 presents the iterative process by which independent school identity is formed, formalized, and operationalized. The historical experience of an individual school, and the ways in which the members of that school inform its identity, is a process that Selznick (1957) termed *institutionalization*. It is through *institutionalization* that an organization and its members adopt values and evolve into an institution. Next, the institution formalizes its identity and values in documents such as its mission statement. Lastly, the school reinforces the mission through authentic actions, a process that this author has labeled *reinstitutionalization*. Reinstitutionalization is visualized by the two arrows, which represent the distinct yet often equitable ways in which an institution can reinforce its mission, identity, and values. The nomenclature used in this conceptual framework was adopted from Donnelly's (2000) characterization of *formal* (positivist) and *informal* (anti-positivist) school ethoses. The left arrow demonstrates how authentic leadership practices and policies, or *formal* actions, by the head of school, board of trustees, and other administration can effectively marshal the mission of the school. The

right arrow accentuates the *informal* actions, often sourced from members within the school, such as students, faculty, and staff, that compound over time to reinforce the mission, identity, and values of the school. This dual approach accentuates the complex nature in which identity and mission are embedded and re-embedded over time, by multiple levels of school personnel and external community members associated with the school, ranging from the head of school, board of trustees, faculty, staff, students, parents, and alumni. As such, this figure represents the development of an independent school-specific approach to education, designed with the mission in mind, that further embeds components and aspects of the school's identity and creates an iterative process that defines an institution and its future actions.

Conclusions

Despite their significant and impactful position in American education, independent schools remain an infrequently studied topic in academia. Independent schools in the United States predate the public school system, and throughout their history often reflected the various social, political, and economic realities of their time. Today is no different: waves of economic downturn, global health crises, and renewed calls for racial introspection are challenging traditional approaches to the independent school model and present a challenge for school leaders to keep their institutions safe, affordable, and meaningful for their stakeholders.

This review of literature aimed to contextualize a study for how independent schools formulate and ultimately activate their mission statements. Inherent in the exploration of this process is the examination of how independent schools came into being in the United States and their historical experience as autonomous institutions of

learning. As discussed in the conceptual framework, these distinct historical paths led to the creation of unique leadership, governance, programming, and curriculum. Additionally, the autonomous approach to learning also led to the entrenchment of certain social hierarchies and "elite reproduction". Furthermore, this review of literature also explored the definition and utility of mission statements at the organizational and school level. Studies suggested that authentic mission statement do impact efficacy (Bain et al., 1996; Bart et al., 2001; Darby, 2010; Mullane, 2002), although literature surrounding independent school mission statements remains sparse (Boerema, 2006; Boerema, 2009). Lastly, this review of literature also summarized the role of authentic leadership in both corporations and in schools. For the purpose of this study, AL helps to further inform how school leaders can best represent the mission and identity of their institution and forward programming that will genuinely serve the needs of all stakeholders. This overview of the existing literature contextualized the conceptual framework, which provides a structure for the process of mission building at independent schools and the iterative process of actionizing that mission. With this literature and framework in mind, this study can now thoughtfully address how to best explore the intersection of history, identity, mission, leadership, and authenticity at U.S. independent schools during a time of unprecedented change and opportunity.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to outline and justify the methodologies and designs that will ultimately be implemented in this study. Specifically, this chapter addresses methodologies, the theoretical foundations for research, how data were collected and analyzed, and the strategies by which trustworthiness and validation was achieved. The ultimate purpose of the study is to better understand how institutional identity, school mission, and authentic leadership practices intersect to inform strategic decisions and collective community actions at independent schools.

U.S. independent schools, like their public counterparts, must adapt to the complex political, social, and economic challenges of their time. In recent years, economic crises, compounded by the global COVID-19 pandemic, and empowered calls for racial equality, have contested traditional assumptions about American society and its mechanisms of education. Independent schools rely heavily on annual tuition and fundraising to operate and as such, the members of these institutions are reassessing their own place in the American educational landscape. Thus, a focused study of independent school identity, mission, and leadership is essential in framing how these schools can authentically produce mission-based education that addresses this historical moment.

Overview of Methodology

Qualitative studies are an effective approach to understanding real-world phenomena and explaining the behaviors and perspectives of many different types of people and the groups they represent (Yin, 2016). In the field of education, qualitative research, through observation, interviews, and other types of analyses, can effectively contextualize various aspects of school culture. This approach to research and analysis

provides expansive opportunity as well as potential pitfalls: topics of inquiry do not always fall into neatly organized boundaries and require the researcher to commit significant time and organization prior to their actual research preparing for their study (Yin, 2016). Ultimately, this approach, when organized correctly and intentionally, can be an effective means of studying the world and extracting relevant meaning (Creswell, 2014).

Given their central emphasis on autonomy and aversion to standardization, independent schools do not receive considerable scholarly focus within the field of education. The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) infrequently releases national data, and these numbers only represent its member schools, not the larger population of private schools across the country. As such, most of the scholarship pertaining to independent schools is qualitative in nature: these institutions stress authentic relationships between students and faculty, encourage teachers to assist in coaching or supervising a dormitory in boarding school settings, and simply put, tend to focus less on mandated data collection than their public counterparts. So much of the independent school culture is centered on experience that scholars have largely focused on investigating these institutions via qualitative means. Therefore, a qualitative approach best addressed the phenomena explored in this study.

Research Questions

The ultimate purpose of the study was to better understand how institutional identity, school mission, and authentic leadership practices intersect to inform strategic decisions at independent schools. Central to every study is the development of research questions that narrow the scope of the study and prompt the researcher to explore the

stated phenomena (Creswell, 2014). For this study, the following research questions were developed:

1. How does a school's historical experience shape its mission statement?
2. How does a mission statement inform authentic actions?
    a. How does institutional leadership authentically operationalize a school's mission & identity, if at all?
    b. How do community members contribute to reinforcing school mission and identity, if at all?

Research Procedures

Epistemology embodies the lenses through which one can understand the nature of knowledge, and more specifically, the methods used to acquire knowledge of certain things (Yin, 2016). There are many lenses, and the researcher is informed by their specific belief of epistemological approach (Yin, 2016). For this study, a constructivist approach was used. Constructivism is the worldview that can often guide qualitative research. This view is underpinned by the belief that reality can be interpreted in multiple ways and as such, meaning can be drawn from various events and people (Creswell, 2014). Specifically, Creswell (2014) stated that "meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas" (p. 45). Rather than deconstruct interpretations, this epistemological approach builds upon them.

Theory also provides the structural beliefs on which an entire study is designed (Grant et al., 2015). This study utilized several underlying models that share a common acknowledgement of the intersection of identity and historical experience in

understanding observable phenomena. Specifically, Mishler (1979) argued that context is critical to accurately deriving meaning from human experience. Traditional positivist researchers designed their methods without context in mind, removing subjects from their natural settings. Mishler (1979) instead stressed the importance of various environmental factors to understanding how systems function: "human action can be understood only within its own context of socially grounded rules for defining, categorizing, and interpreting the meaning of our conduct" (p. 8). To understand how independent schools utilize their historical context in the construction of their mission and strategic planning, this study was embedded in that very school context.

Mishler's (1979) emphasis on understanding the broader world in which phenomena occur heavily influenced the works of Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983), whose seminal work *The Good High School: Portraits of Character and Culture* advocated for a deeply embedded contextual investigation of public and private schools. Her self-titled portraits of different educational institutions provided the framework for a reassessment of qualitative, investigative research. Lawrence Lightfoot argued that this approach to research employ context in five distinct ways:

1. It depicts a detailed description of the physical setting
2. It acknowledges the researcher's unique "perch" and perspective while conducting observations and interviews
3. It underscores the history, culture, and ideology of the place
4. It identifies the central metaphors and symbols that shape the narrative
5. It speaks to the actor's role in shaping and defining context (Lawrence-Lightfoot, n.d.)

In sum, the epistemological and theoretical foundations of this study, characterized by the extraction of meaning from people and events, with intentional emphasis on embedded, contextual understanding of the people and places where the phenomena occur, effectively informed the methods of this study.

Data Collection Methods

This exploration of independent schools was a multi-case study. Creswell (2013) stated that case studies investigate real-life systems over time, through the thorough collection of data from multiple sources. Multi-case studies allow the researcher to study multiple cases to compare the differences and similarities between them (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995). To provide an all-inclusive assessment of independent schools and the relationship between their history, their mission, and their leadership, the study explored three independent schools, with each one representing a different historical experience. That is, this study selected schools that offer a diverse array of school profiles: parochial and non-parochial, coeducation and single-sex, boarding and day, etc. This diversity of school profiles provided a widespread and expansive analysis of historical experiences and better informed and answered the stated research questions. As such, the unit of study was in fact the school itself as opposed to the people who comprise it.

At each school, I interviewed the head of school, who best understands the initiatives and strategies, both formal and informal, internal and external, that embody the mission of their institution. Furthermore, as head of school, this participant also had considerable institutional knowledge and effectively communicated how their school's history influences key decisions today. Secondly, I interviewed a long-tenured member

of the school community, who could best communicate the historical identity of that school. At many independent schools, there are formal positions such as school historian or school archivist that effectively filled this role. Additionally, this figure also provided historical records that demonstrated how these schools have changed over time and how those changes affected formal and informal expressions of school mission. Additionally, at each school I interviewed a newer member of school community, who could express how the school's mission and identity shaped their daily life at the school. By interviewing members of the school community with varying levels of tenure, I holistically assessed how school mission was authentically operationalized and acted upon.

These interviews were semi-structured, meaning they involved both targeted questions and open-ended questions that allowed the participant to offer opinions and interpretations of the phenomena (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2016). An interview protocol was established to provide consistency for all participants (Yin, 2016). Interviews with the heads of school and other community members were approximately one hour in length. I chose this format so that the emphasis of the study, the formation of institutional mission and its implementation, could be understood through the lenses of leadership and the broader school community.

After Interval Review Board approval, I recruited at schools that met the stated criteria via email or telephone and asked about their interest in the study. Subjects who stated interest in participating in the study were given the opportunity to ask questions about the nature of the study and were required to read and sign a consent form.

Additionally, I used documents relevant to school mission and strategic planning, when available, to triangulate any data collected from the participant interviews. Specifically, this study sought out public documents that detailed the evolution of the school mission at each site and included the school mission statement, the course catalog or academic catalog, and the most recent strategic plan. I used these documents to identify how school leadership has operationalized their mission and identity. Prior to each interview with the head of school, I identified emergent themes from the documents to shape questions that were specific to each institution and their leadership.

Limitations of Data Collection Methods

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 reshaped the configuration of schools across the world. In the wake of major school closings in the spring semester of 2020, independent schools faced considerable challenges in the 2020-2021 academic school year to safely reopen and deliver a rigorous, holistic, and mission-based education. The challenges that these schools faced to maintain normalcy also impacted research in this field significantly.

Specifically, schools greatly altered their previous routines. In the most ideal circumstances, classes in person experienced considerable alterations to pedagogy, schedule, and safety procedures. Some schools alternated between hosting students in person and instructing students through distance learning plans. Many campuses remained closed and conducted all their instruction online for the entirety of the academic year. Regardless the format, researchers had restricted access, or simply no access, to independent school campuses during this period as schools sought to limit their number of outside visitors. For the purposes of this study, complications from the COVID-19

pandemic impacted the nature of the data collection methods. Initially, this study intended to mirror qualitative data collection methods popularized by Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983), who emphasized portraitures, or prolonged and embedded observations of a school. While this style of lengthy, in-person observation could not be replicated, through a multi-case study I still explored the context of each school through the process of intentional and informed, albeit remote, interviews with members of each school community.

An additional limitation was access to documentary evidence. Broadly speaking, independent schools offer both internal and external facing documents related to school planning. For example, strategic planning documents that are available on school websites are generally limited in detail and serve primarily as communication and branding documents. Fully detailed strategic planning documents are often only accessible to school leadership teams and the board of trustees. As such, I was unable to access these internal documents in most cases. For this study, I was able to utilize public facing documents available on school websites in addition to limited internal documents.

Participant Selection

I created specific criteria to identify appropriate sites and participants. Creswell (2014) asserted that the purposeful selection of sites, participants, and documents is an intentional step by the researcher to ensure that chosen individuals and settings will best help them explore the research problem and understand the studied phenomena. Regarding site selection, three schools were chosen based on the following parameters:

1. The school must be an independent school and in operation for at least fifty years
2. The school must have the following employees

a. A head of school
b. A member of the school community with extensive institutional knowledge, such as a school archivist, school historian, long-tenured faculty member, or member of the board of trustees
c. A newer member of the school community, who ideally has been employed for less than five years

The criteria for site selection were critical. First, the school had to be considered an independent school, meaning the school utilizes an autonomous board of governance. This type of school typically pursues its own agenda without extensive oversight or regulation from local, state, or national government (Kane, 1992). This category included both parochial and non-parochial schools. Additionally, a study of a school's historical experience required that institution to have existed for a considerable amount of time. Minimally, fifty years ensured that the school had experienced generational change that could be exhibited in its infrastructure, curriculum, staff, and school ethos. Geographically, this study targeted schools located on the eastern seaboard of the United States. Ultimately, the ongoing complications of the COVID-19 pandemic never allowed for on-campus or in-person observations. There were no limitations regarding the specific profile of independent school. This choice was made because a case study of several diverse independent schools and their missions and identities would ultimately produce generalizability that would best address the problem of this study (Maxwell, 2013).

Regarding participants, there were the following criteria:

1. The head of school has been in their current role for at least five years

2. One member of the school community that has been employed or associated with the school for at least ten years
3. One newer member of the school community, who ideally has been in their role for less than five years

The standards for interview participants were predicated on the belief that these individuals should have considerable institutional knowledge, but potentially differing views of the school based on length of tenure. This standard allowed participants to competently answer questions about the history of the school, the mission of the school, and the intersection of these phenomena. Snowball sampling was used with the head of school to identify members of the school community who best fit these criteria. Participants are summarized below (see Table 1).

Table 1

Summary of study participants

School	Title	Tenure in role at school
The Colonial Academy		
Participant 1	Head of school	5< years
Participant 2	Dean of faculty	<5 years
Participant 3	Faculty	30< years
Metro Boys Academy		
Participant 1	Head of school	5< years
Participant 2	Faculty	15< years
Participant 3	Athletic director	<10 years
The Confluence School		
Participant 1	Head of school	15< years
Participant 2	School archivist	25< years
Participant 3	Faculty	<5 years

Data Analysis

Saldana (2016) argued that a large majority of researchers consider the process of coding, both during and after data collection, to be an effective form of analysis. Coding allows researchers to categorize their data, and through this process of dissection, identify themes and trends. Through open coding, the researcher can better understand the phenomena of the study (Saldana, 2016). In this study, in vivo and descriptive coding were utilized to define emergent themes and more accurately characterize the essence of the interviews and documents. This was an iterative process that required multiple reviews of transcripts and available documents to ensure that the codes were accurate, and representative of the participants and sites studied. In the initial review of the transcripts, approximately 80 descriptors were identified as relevant to the stated research goals of the study. After an additional two analyses, these descriptors were narrowed down to 44 codes. From these codes, five overarching themes were identified as both pertinent and summative in nature. Furthermore, these themes aligned with the conceptual framework of this study, providing enhanced continuity between the framework, the research questions, the interview questions, and the ultimate organization of the findings as well as a more cohesive narrative across schools. This approach to analysis and ultimate grouping of themes allowed for the emergence of higher-level theoretical constructs (Saldana, 2016).

Document analysis was limited in scope. O'Leary (2014) identified the "witting" technique, that allows the researcher to treat the document like a study participant, and "ask" the document questions to extract information relevant to the central research questions. In addition to targeted questions, documents can be analyzed thematically, recognizing patterns, emergent themes, and eventual categories (Bowen, 2009).

Due to limited access, public documents were utilized to create overarching narratives for each school and provide extensive context for the eventual participant interviews.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness and reliability, several precautions were utilized. I transcribed data using password protected, professional software. Audio files and transcripts were kept on secure cloud storage throughout the research process. Transcriptions were modified using intelligent verbatim style, meaning recorded speech was cleaned so to remove distractions and best represent what was said, instead of how it was said. Additionally, member-checking allowed participants to review and confirm the validity of the transcript. Given the nature of this study, I triangulated data between interview transcripts, document analysis, and voice-recorded memos to ensure trustworthiness. Additionally, a subjectivity statement provided readers of my inherent biases.

Subjectivity Statement

As a product of public secondary education, I was not exposed to the world of independent schools until I accepted my first job as a teacher at a boarding school in New England in 2013. As a result, my relationship with private education was first shaped as a teacher with little to no knowledge of this alternate universe of schooling. Growing up the words “private school” simply meant the Catholic school several towns over and carried with it none of the connotations of affluence, privilege, tradition, or autonomy that I came to later discover as an educator within that system. Resultantly, I found myself observing the machinations of these types of schools with fresh eyes, and by the product of my undergraduate and graduate educations, with a decidedly scholarly focus.

Additionally, my passion for the study of history has significantly influenced the way in which I view many of these private institutions and education at large. Since my earliest days in high school, I have found myself drawn to studying the past and the ways in which various historical phenomena have shaped our world and our establishments of learning. This set of beliefs and ultimate focus of study have left a distinct and impactful mark on the way I view the educational institutions in which I teach and with which I regularly interact and study: over time, history and tradition matter and directly and indirectly inform how these institutions identify mission, formulate curriculum, and reinforce identity.

It is with this historical focus that both my perspective as a researcher and the aims of my study have been shaped. I often frame my occupation as both a history teacher and simultaneously a student of history as having one foot in the present and foot in the past. The same description aptly defines my study. To best understand private secondary institutions, one must understand the complexity of each school's past while acknowledging the entirely proximate demands and needs of a school's present. As such, this study is both titled and constructed in a way that accentuates the distinct and interdependent relationship between the historical and the contemporary.

As I began to delve into the study of independent schools, I was drawn to larger ideas of tradition and identity. Specifically, I was influenced by historian Eric Hobsbawm's famous work The Invention of Tradition (1983) that explored the origins, both organic and artificial, of collective habits and values, many of which can be directly linked to organizations and institutions such as schools. Additionally, upon further research, I found that organizational theory was a rich field of scholarship that directly

addressed many of the overarching phenomena I was attempting to deconstruct. In particular, Philip Selznick's *Leadership in Administration: A Sociological Perspective* (1957) introduced the theory of institutionalization, a process he argued in which an organization, as a result of historical, social, and political forces, forms its identity and values, which are ultimately reinforced by its members. These two schools of thought, one historical and one sociological, formed the foundation on which I assessed independent schools.

Additionally, my role as history teacher and department chair within the independent school system also brought potential biases. While I did not include my own school in this study, I did recognize through feedback from mentors and peers, all of whom operate in the public school system, that there were significant and unavoidable gaps in knowledge that presented themselves in the editing process. Simply put, I recognized the difficulty of authentically presenting narrative descriptions of private institutions while simultaneously avoiding the bias of being a member within that system. To address this, I asked additional public school colleagues to review my work to identify moments where I could not see my own bias.

Therefore, it is with these inherent beliefs and biases in mind that I approached my research of independent schools and their own historical formations of identity.

Human Participants and Ethics Precautions

When conducted with intentionality and ethics, a study develops trustworthiness. Specifically, trustworthiness is developed when the findings and summaries of collected data accurately represent the perspectives of the research, participants, and readers of an account (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Given the nature of this study, I built trustworthiness through the triangulation of different types of data. All participants were given

pseudonyms and sites were given pseudonyms and intentionally generic geographic descriptors to guarantee the anonymity of both the school and its members. Participants were informed of the general purpose of the study prior to agreeing to be interviewed and that the published study would be publicly available upon completion. At the start of each interview, I provided participants with informed consent. Interviews and public documents were cross-referenced. Additionally, I utilized thick, rich descriptions to replicate a correct representation of the schools, the interviews, and the available documents. Furthermore, all participants member-checked their interview transcripts for accuracy and modification. Lastly, I utilized an active audio audit trail after each step of the data collection process to guarantee the authenticity of the procedure.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter summarizes the results of the analyses outlined in chapter three. Specifically, this chapter reviews the purpose of this qualitative study and its associated research questions, explains how the data were processed and coded, and how exemplars were selected for inclusion in the findings. Each site is described in detail to appropriately contextualize each setting and participant data is highlighted and summarized in coordination with the study's established research questions.

Overview

In recent years, the educational model in the United States, both in public and private settings, experienced cataclysmic disruption because of economic upheaval and the multitude of challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. For much of the 2020-2021 academic year, independent schools closed their doors and teachers were forced to reimagine mission-driven pedagogy in a virtual setting, while administrators simultaneously managed the tumultuous financial implications of lost revenue, closed buildings, and private school families debating and often prioritizing their collective health and fiscal well-being over the survival of the schools their children attended. While the phrase "existential crisis" is overused, within the context of private education, this determination may aptly describe the situation in which many independent schools found themselves. The Cato Institute (2021) stated that as of July 1, 2021, 142 private schools had permanently closed in the last 18 months because of pandemic related difficulties, resulting in a projected transfer of over 22,000 students to public schools, with an estimated cost of approximately 360 million dollars. And these numbers, while

staggering, fail to reflect the multitude of schools that are still in operation but have had to permanently and drastically modify their educational models simply to stay afloat.

In addition to the challenges presented by the global pandemic, the 2020-2021 academic year also coincided with renewed conversations and unrest surrounding racial inequities and police violence, against the backdrop of a polarized political election cycle that culminated in an armed insurrection at the nation's capital on January 6th, 2021. These divisive political, cultural, and racial phenomena amplified unprecedented strains on schools that historically had been havens of racial and social elitism. As one participant in the study noted in reference to the 2020-2021 academic year, "[we] had three, once or twice in a career crises happen all at the same time."

The purpose of this study was to explore U.S. independent schools, their mission statements, and how community members, both at the administrative and faculty level, can implement their school mission in formal and informal ways. Understanding a school's mission statement was predicated on a better comprehension of that institution's collective past, as perceived by members of the community with varying levels of tenure. Furthermore, authenticity, and more specifically authentic leadership, was defined and explored to better understand how heads of school effectively and genuinely implemented their school mission while leading their communities through periods of crisis.

Themes and Organization of Findings

This chapter presents the many themes and findings that emerged from the participant interview data. Specifically, I identified five major themes that mirror many of the major components of this study's conceptual framework: school history and identity formation (*institutionalization)*, school mission, authentic actions

(*reinstitutionalization)*, leadership, and recent challenges and opportunities of COVID-19 and social justice. This chapter first analyzes major themes within each case study, utilizing narration from each participant, and concludes with cross case analysis.

In the spirit of Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983), I provided detailed, thick descriptions at the beginning of each section to provide portraiture renderings of each institution. This approach, particularly when describing a setting that is new to the reader, creates a flowing narrative that provides elements of realism, chronological depth, and geographical space (Creswell, 2016; Miller, Creswell, & Olander, 1998).

The Colonial Academy

Like many of its private school counterparts, the Colonial Academy is a product of historical time and physical space. Situated alongside a network of national waterways, with direct access to major metropolitan centers of the east coast, the Colonial Academy, a coeducational, secondary boarding school, was founded in the years prior to the U.S. Civil War, a seminal period in U.S. history that proves inescapable from the fate of the school itself. Colonial is a parochial school, whose Christian tradition still plays a pivotal role in the daily habits and routines of its faculty and students: mandatory, daily chapel services offer a collective moment of community cohesion, including opportunities for contemplation centered around ethical concepts as well as lighter updates from student government and club officers. Inherent to its boarding program is the objective of maintaining an around the clock community, where the experiences of the classroom, the dormitory, the athletics, and the expansive campus all contribute intentionally to a holistic, independent education. As such, the Colonial Academy offers an exceptional look into the intersection of U.S. history, race relations, school mission,

and the many challenges and opportunities presented by COVID-19 and renewed conversations around racial reckoning.

School History and Identity Formation (Institutionalization)

All three participants, who also serve as administrators at the Colonial School, mentioned the early history of the school and its significant impact on the current identity of the institution. The head noted that the physical property on which the school stands still permeates its identity,

> There's some history to the property, which is both important from the standpoint of pride and our connection to the founders, but also that it carries a legacy of challenge with it, being a school in the antebellum period when enslaved persons, worked the farm before it became a school. But then I think even during those years…there were enslaved persons who were essentially rented from local landowners to do different kinds of labor…

This acknowledgement of the school's temporal and geographical position in American history was echoed by members of the faculty, who also recognized the challenges of confronting these topics on both an individual and collective level. One faculty and administrator[1] noted,

> We have a certain Southern history and Confederate past. And so, we're starting to reckon with that in a really interesting, good way…It created who we are….And that has changed over time too. We've retained our faith base, but we've also expanded in really diverse and important ways.

The Colonial School's early history, first as a preparatory school for its founding religious order and later as a destination for members of America's elite, has left equally important and sensitive legacies for its current community members to inherit and reflect upon. Of note, the Colonial School was impacted directly by the events of the American

[1] It is not uncommon at independent schools for dual roles to be held, where one serves as both teacher and administrator.

Civil War, at times occupied by the Union army, serving in various capacities and most notably as a field hospital. As stated by a member of the faculty,

> And even now when you walk in, and you look at all the plaques, we have people killed in various wars. There's one for former students who were killed fighting for the Confederate States of America. There isn't one for those who fought for the Union. And I don't know that there were any. I haven't gone deep enough into that to know. I know that our US history teachers have looked really carefully at this. So a lot of this history is coming out right now. I'm sure there were but nowhere do you find names of people who fought for the Union during that. So the [history] piece is deeply embedded and there were vestiges of that even recently.

This same faculty member also noted that the nature of Colonial Academy's early history, which was interwoven with Confederate history by nature of the predominantly Southern student body at the time, has weighed heavily on their own attitudes towards revisiting controversial historical phenomena,

> You can get a sense of how deeply embedded that Southern tradition is in the fiber of [Colonial] and I say this as somebody who went to [university name redacted]. And we're dealing with this very same thing right now. And I'll be honest, these are things I'm wrestling with. There's a movement right now to drop [Confederate officer's] name from the school. And that was something I dismissed two years ago. And in June completely flipped and said, "Yeah, it's time for a whole host of reasons. It's time to do this." I'm probably in the minority among my contemporaries, but the younger you get, the more that that flips, so I've been dealing with these issues on two different fronts. So I spent a lot of time thinking about what that means, and how do we articulate these things? And how do you tell histories authentically while at the same time, acknowledging flawed mythology.

The theme of historical reckoning was repeated by another faculty member, who mentioned,

> We are directly next door to…our original parent institution. They founded us back in the day. And they have done a lot of reconciliation. So we are starting to work with them on learning our shared history and our shared past, and how the [church] was really complicit in a lot of that as

> well. So I would say it's kind of at the middle stages. For a while I think [Colonial] has not wanted to unravel that history, but we're starting to see the real benefits of just being open and honest about it all.

These internal dialogues amongst the faculty constitute the center of Colonial Academy's contemporary school identity – an identity in which both the aspiring and problematic elements of the school's history continue to influence the ways in which the school functions and defines its purpose today. As the head of school stated,

> I think the school for many, since its founding, because of its connections to the seminary too, the spiritual life of the school here was always very important. And its focus on the development of character and leadership was critical. I think that rigorous academics have always been really important, but I think if you asked people over time, "What's the most important thing that [Colonial] does?", they would say it would be to instill in each of the students an incredibly strong sense of honor and integrity, and being ready to go out and live an honorable life and understand what that means in terms of the responsibilities to make a difference in the lives of others and all the things that are at the core of ethical leadership. I think there are some schools that very much have an achievement culture where your value is based on your test scores, and your GPA and while that's important here, I think we have a culture of character more so than a culture of just achievement, which is important.

This sentiment is echoed by an administrator at Colonial, who noted, "I would say we're defined by tradition, which is also being challenged right now, in a good way." All three participants noted the importance of two major events in the 20th century that greatly altered the trajectory of the school: the integration of black students in the years following the Civil Rights movement and the subsequent decision by Colonial Academy to be coeducational. The head of school described these moments as "interesting chapters of change at the school over time" that demonstrated "how the community has grown and how the community has been enriched with a more diverse group of individuals." However, these changes were gradual and often met with resistance. As one faculty commented,

> In spring of 1968, when Martin Luther King was assassinated, it was announced in a school meeting, and some kids stood up and applauded. And this was right around the time when the school had decided to integrate…And there was a group of students and we've brought some of these people back, who wrote this letter to say, "If we're going to do this, we can't have this culture the way it is." I'm paraphrasing, but essentially, this was a very public letter. This was a letter published in the school newspaper by some students, with the help of a faculty member. A courageous and important act at the time. So that's a moment, like a lot of independent schools, predominantly white institutions.

This specific, divisive moment at Colonial Academy was not mentioned by the other participants in the study. However, all participants did acknowledge that the integration of Colonial Academy was a watershed moment for the school community and led to significant progress in the school's path towards diversification of the student body. These comments echo scholarship that described the tumultuous setting of independent education in the United States during the era of the Civil Rights movement. The faculty member continued,

> There was a pretty small number of students of color, particularly black students. And there's a critical mass you have to reach before those students really feel like they have voice. And I think that moment happened right around when I arrived. There were some moments of racism, where our black students felt like they had voice to really speak out against it. And I can remember several of those moments in my first few years. I've seen the evolution of it. When we went coed, that was a moment of profound change in the school. I have a better sense of that because I experienced that. It took a few years for us to go from an all-male school that had female students, to a coed school in terms of culturally. It wasn't until recently that we became 50/50.
>
> I think you can be a school with a few students of color, but not really have a diverse community and culture. And I think we're still evolving there. I think we're in a much better place now. Again, I feel like I'm in a place where I can look at changes that are happening right now, whether it is for our students of color or for our perspectives on the LGBTQ community, where I can examine us on the relative scale versus the absolute scale. On the absolute scale, we're not where we want to be. But on the relative scale, I can look at us and say, "You can't imagine the

> changes that have occurred." Those are actual, substantive changes through which I've seen the evolution, but I can also look at that and say, "But we're not there yet."

School Mission

Members of the Colonial Academy community were asked about the school mission statement and how it influenced formal and informal actions on a day to day basis. All participants stressed the importance of generally having a mission statement and how it served, in the words of one teacher, "as a North Star, kind of compass, to have everyone moving in the same direction and make things happen in a really good way for our kids." Another participant agreed, stating, "As I think about it, you know, what matters in independent schools? Again, I think they all matter, but being mission driven, knowing where you want to go, and then being essentially like, 'Well, how do we know when we get there?' That matters." As part of the interview protocol, participants were read the Colonial Academy mission statement and asked to comment on verbiage that resonated with them and impacted how they conduct their jobs. It is worth noting here that the extent to which each participant was knowledgeable of the exact verbiage of the mission statement varied but all participants at Colonial knew portions of the mission statement. All participants described how the document served as a guiding force in reaffirming values and prioritizing strategic planning at the school. The process of revising and clarifying the statement started with the head of school, who noted,

> In the mission statement was this notion that two critical components of what we were trying to accomplish in the mission was to develop in all the students, both intellectual courage and moral courage…And a lot of schools talk about the importance of developing strength of character. But I think what was nice about adding the word courage to the mix was that it denotes some level of action, some level of stepping out of your comfort zone, to use those gifts to make a positive difference in the lives of others.

All three Colonial participants identified the word "courage" as being an important component of the school's mission statement. However, the head of school focused specifically on recent efforts by the administration to better understand how to effectively operationalize those words beyond the mission statement document.

> What intrigued me when I arrived was the fact that the school had never stepped back and actually defined what it meant by those two terms. So one of the first things that we did when I first arrived was to spend time as a school, having conversations about that very thing, and what were the character pieces? What were the academic skills? What were the life skills, what were the personal qualities that we would associate with intellectual courage and moral courage? And we identified certain qualities that seemed to fit very directly with intellectual courage, and certain qualities that seemed to directly fit with moral courage, and then a number of qualities that, to some extent, fit with both.
>
> But then the notion was, how do we think about everything that we do here? Academic work in the academic classroom, the things we do in athletics and in the arts, the things we do in the spiritual life of the school, moments in the residential program, moments in service learning, everything we do? How does that help us move our students along a continuum more quickly than they would at any other school in those qualities? And how do we help every single person here feel like they're pulling on the same oar, that this is what we're doing?

As the head of Colonial Academy described, the mission of the school, with its emphasis on intellectual and moral courage, pervades all aspects of school life for both students and staff. It influences how members of the community, from the head of school to new members of the faculty, comport themselves. This sentiment, that the mission is a formal and informal driver of school ethos, was repeated by the other participants at Colonial. One faculty member described this concept of lived mission as "a hidden curriculum, some of which is really positive… [and] becomes routine." All three participants similarly expressed the positive impact of the Colonial Academy mission statement on its community. The head of school noted,

> It's a hard challenge, if we feel like we can get that right to some extent, and show others how to do it, that would be a great benefit to add to the conversation in education about how to go about doing things the right way. So that's sort of at the heart of the mission piece.

More formally, the head of school utilized the document to organize the strategic direction of the school. They stated that,

> Whenever you develop a new strategic plan, a logical place is to start with your mission and to see if there are any aspects of it that potentially might need tweaking. So we talked about that and we realized that a lot of the qualities that were being listed in our mission statement were things that we were pulling out and putting into our portrait of a graduate. And then we also felt that one thing we hadn't been as direct and intentional about is articulating what we thought were the best ways to bring our mission to life would be, and we hadn't ever really developed that kind of a statement.

One administrator noted the mission helping to guide faculty responsibilities and is used to align professional development. An administrator noted faculty spend time reflecting on the qualities they desire for graduates and a faculty agreed, noting, "I really love that document." The participant noted that

> We are like all schools, continually evolving what it looks like. And I do think that if you want to know what schools care about, look at how they spend their time. We spend time. We carve out time in the schedule….So I do think we care about it. And I think that we spend resources, both financial and the most precious resource being time, on it. And so I think that this document is informing how we spend our time.

Authentic Actions (Reinstitutionalization)

The two faculty interviewed alluded to the formal and informal ways that mission is lived on out on the Colonial Academy campus. They agreed that while academics are critical to the school's purpose, many of the most important lessons tied to the mission happen outside of the classroom as part of residential life, the athletics program, and the advisory system. These informal moments represent

the bottom-up approach to infusing values into a school community. A longtime teacher observed,

> Well, obviously, the intellectual and moral courage and the ethical leadership and service are highlighted and bolded. And that's by design. Those are the things to me that matter and maybe I've alluded to this already: I care deeply about what happens in the classroom, in terms of my kids' experience. But that's not the most important thing that happens here. The important things that happen and the lessons I want kids to remember are about how they do things and doing them well and doing them honestly and doing them intentionally and doing them thoughtfully and to the best of their ability and that's the stuff I try and spend time on….that stuff to me really, really does matter.

A similar sentiment was echoed by an administrator who also taught and advised in one of the dormitories. They noted that these additional roles on campus allow faculty to engage, listen, and guide students during their time at Colonial. One faculty noted that "I always tell people if you want to be a boarding teacher, here's the stuff that boarding school teachers do: you get up at 9:30 on a Saturday morning and you go watch your advisee run 3.1 miles cuz that's what boarding school teachers do….They see their role as in loco parentis. And so for me, it's about relationships, and I think we do those student-faculty relationships pretty well." While the teaching faculty detailed various informal ways in which they are able to both live out the mission and impart it to their students, the head of school at Colonial Academy spoke to the more formal processes in place. Significant resources have been committed to the establishment of the Johnathan Bee Center for Ethical Action[2], named after an alumnus, which organizes the various resources at Colonial's disposal to invite speakers, develop curriculum, and engage with the community off-campus around issues of civic and moral importance. The head of

[2] A pseudonym was provided to maintain confidentiality.

school described the creation of this formal space as central to the advancement of Colonial Academy's greater missional objectives,

> We knew that to get our teachers to be as effective with all of these pieces and parts of this initiative as they needed to be, they were going to need a lot of help and support. It's kind of like when you try to help your teachers be more effective with technology, if you don't have some folks there to hold their hand, to give them suggestions, to make sure they have the support they need, you're not going to make the progress you want to make. So similarly, the Johnathan Bee Center is really designed to be that support team. Those sort of the super creative, innovative, curricular, programmatic, designer-thinkers who can make sure our teachers are feeling like they're in the best position that they can be in to make progress in these areas.

Faculty agreed that the creation of the Johnathan Bee Center aligned well with their own visions of how to best institutionally support and forward Colonial's mission. One teacher noted,

> We have this amazing Johnathan Bee programming that tries to really be the umbrella for all the formal stuff that happens outside of the classroom. All these speakers we're bringing in and these afternoons talking about honor or integrity or being a good member of the community, tries to be the umbrella for all that. That falls under Johnathan Bee program, and we've even tried to delineate by year what each of those things looks like.

One administrator spoke to the Center's focus on community engagement and civic obligation,

> We also have the Johnathan Bee Center, which is a new venture that has come out of the strategic plan. And all of us as teachers are part of bringing that center to life. But there is a particular team that is charged with running that place and its center. And that is a group that both helps teachers do experiential learning in [the area], or bring [the city] into the classroom through zoom meetings… but also provides really interesting speakers and opportunities for reflection and discussion. And we did that quite a bit in the fall around the election. So you know, building up to the election, thinking about how we were going to have difficult conversations and provide space for all different views. All of us faculty members, were

> involved in doing that through our advisories and in conjunction with the Johnathan Bee program.

Leadership

Colonial Academy's leadership structure mirrors many of its private school counterparts, with a head of school functioning in various capacities, whether it is strategic planning, development, hiring, or oversight of curriculum and school life. The head of school at Colonial Academy was asked to reflect on what qualities matter most in their role, with a specific focus on how authenticity impacts their style of leadership. The head of school stated,

> I think anytime that you are trying to, to lead a group of people to accomplish a certain goal, if that group of people don't feel the genuine and authentic passion and commitment of the leader to those initiatives, and as being especially meaningful for the right reasons, it's hard. When you're seeking a leadership role at a school, I think it really helps if you can find a school where the key elements of the mission seem to resonate with your own personal philosophy as opposed to trying to come into a school thinking you're going to change it and fix it. I think those tend to be the places where leaders flame out and have real difficulty.
>
> And I think all of us are pretty quick to be cynical, and to identify, where we don't think we're seeing authentic examples. So for me, I think leadership, whether you're the head of the school, or you're trying to be a leader in the classroom, or you're trying to be a leader in whatever area of school life... if you're not modeling those portrait of graduate qualities that we're saying are critical to develop in the students, then anything you do is going to fall flat. There has to be a sense that you are genuinely reflecting the mission elements, and how you conduct yourself as a human being. And that can be hard for any of us, and you'll have to talk to more people here as to whether they think that I actually do that well or not.

Faculty at Colonial Academy were asked to provide examples of when they believed the head of school displayed characteristics of authentic leadership. One noted,

> Two years ago, we had a teacher who was retiring after 50 years in school. And our head had known him when [they were] a child, working at a previous school where his father worked. So it was one of those connections over the years. But our head's father had died four years ago.

> And so there was some emotion there, and it was a goodbye to this teacher, but you could tell there was more to it. After a year of getting to know this new head, where [they] hadn't displayed a lot of emotion in front of the faculty, [they] teared up and choked up when saying goodbye to this teacher. And you could see how important the role of teachers is in [their] life. And to me that was just this incredibly genuine, authentic moment of leadership and a symbolic moment of respect for teachers, which was really powerful.

Another faculty identified different traits that characterize authenticity, instead focusing on the head of school's willingness to make decisions that were their mission based and outside the influence of various external forces. During an academic year that presented significant challenges for a boarding school community, the need for genuine leadership was noted by its community. This faculty stated,

> I truly like I can't imagine what it's been like. [They've] had three different things where no matter where [they] landed, [they were] going to have significant numbers of people unhappy. Whether it's how we handled political discourse, and how we landed on things like what do we do about MAGA hats, or to what degree do we embrace Black Lives Matter? Or, how strict do we go on COVID? All those things, no matter where [they] land, a significant number of people are going to be unhappy. And it's hard. But I think [they are] an absolutely dedicated school person. And like [they have] put [their] heart and soul into all of it. I know [they've] lost sleep in the right way over it. [They've] thought carefully about all of it. So I would say…they stayed on mission.

COVID and Social Justice

The 2020-2021 academic year demanded public and private schools adapt to unprecedented challenges on multiple fronts. Boarding schools in particular, where, in the words of a faculty member, "our residential community make[s] us who we are", were forced to find safe and practical ways to bring students on campus during a pandemic. These difficulties were compounded by a year in which the social fabric of the country was tested by political division and renewed calls for racial equality. At a school like Colonial Academy, where its history further complicated its obligations to

pursue social justice, there were additional challenges for both leadership and faculty to come to terms with the institution's past. The head of school at Colonial Academy saw these challenges as opportunities to highlight the benefits of private education and right historical wrongs.

> From a standpoint of the of COVID-19 challenges, there has been a pretty strong opportunity for independent schools to be able to help people understand the benefits of our size and scale and nimbleness and flexibility to adapt to changing circumstance. For the most part, independent schools have been able to accomplish more with in-person learning than a lot of the public systems would and understandably so…the interest in independent schools, from an admission standpoint, from transfers in this year for next year have been way up. So I actually think there's a resurgence of interest in independent schools because of COVID-19.
>
> I think the really difficult moments came from this summer when the protests began, and there were a lot of uses of social media to share really distressing and unfortunate stories about those moments when our schools haven't been the places that they've needed to be. And not just decades ago, but last year, and the year before that….Just heartbreaking stories. My sense is, there is an appreciation for the notion of our schools having an ongoing focus and commitment on the development of character, which at the end of the day is what needs to be the foundational piece of moving to a different place in building true community. You know, if we're not able to help our kids understand how to do things the right way, how to treat people in an honorable manner, how to build true community where everyone is appreciated, we're not going to be the places we need to be.

A faculty member at Colonial Academy agreed with the head of school, reframing the multitude of obstacles unique to Colonial's identity as openings for improvement across various areas of school life. They directly spoke to the school's efforts to explore its history and create a more equitable environment today,

> So about six years ago, we started a school history project where one of our seniors decided to take on a senior internship program. And she did a bunch of research into the history of this one particular man, an African American man who is pictured in a sea of white boys from the 1910s. So her question was, who is this person? You know, what did he do here?

> And she found out that he was a person who worked at the school for 40 or 50 years, he lived in the neighborhood right across the street, which had, it turns out, been a community of descendants of freed slaves, who had moved from the south to [here] when it was an occupied city, and they were sheltered…right across from our school. And ultimately that became a neighborhood with churches and a school and houses, and it was a black neighborhood. And a lot of the descendants of those original people who settled that area began to work at Colonial right across the street in various capacities. And from there, it's been a cavalcade of really interesting scholarship.
>
> Three years ago, we had the 50th anniversary of integration. We had a really powerful weekend commemorating that. And what's amazing about us, I think, maybe there are other schools like this, but we have the granddaughter of Jesse Jackson as one of our students and the grandson of Strom Thurmond as one of our students currently. And it's just this crazy mixture of interesting kids. Southern connections, Northern connections, there's a lot happening under the surface. And so we're trying to get to the bottom of that.

A long tenured faculty member noted that this process of coming to terms with the past was not only timely and appropriate but also forward-looking and in the best interest of students who currently attend the school. Much like their colleagues, they recognized the pain and division associated with Colonial's history but also identified it as an incredible moment for growth. They stated,

> We've had to rip off the band-aid on some stuff. And silver lining for me, is it's good. I've had to rip off some band aids, too. But I do think that, fundamentally, you subscribe to the idea that schools are for the students who are there right now, first and foremost. And I also acknowledge, hopefully, places like Colonial, and places like Washington and Lee and, all the schools you and I know so well, are places that also represent lifelong relationships to the institution like the physical plan, but also to the ideals and the people and all that. Fundamentally, schools are for the people and the students who are there right now. And if that's the case, then you have to make your decisions based on what's best for the people who are there right now. And some of what's happened this year has forced us to do some things that have been really challenging, but I think ultimately are going to lead to a better experience and better messaging for the students who are here right now. And no, I would not wish the last 14

> months on anybody, ever. But I think a lot of schools have had to examine closely a lot of things about where they come from, and where they're going, and what's best for the students who are there right now.

Conclusion

As noted by all three participants, Colonial Academy's unique history placed its leadership and staff in a difficult but important position to reconcile its relationship with its community of color. Not every school is like Colonial Academy – the campus is situated on property whose previous owners utilized enslaved labor. This story, alongside an institutional heritage linked to the South and former Confederacy, has only recently been directly explored and broached in a public forum. In fact, faculty and leadership at Colonial Academy have embraced events such as the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 to further push these issues to the forefront of Colonial Academy's priorities, which directly align with the school's missional values of intellectual and moral courage. While the example of Colonial Academy represents one of intense social and racial reckoning, it is not an outlier in the world independent education. These themes, alongside that authentic leadership and the informal and formal implementation of mission, will be analyzed and compared in further sections of this chapter.

Metro Boys Academy

Founded in the late 19th century, the Metro Boys Academy, or MBA, is a microcosm of the burgeoning urban landscape of the United States during that period. Located within a major metropolis on the East Coast, the Metro Boys Academy is an urban school for boys, having been associated with several powerful industrialists of that era and representative of the emergent educational trends of the late Gilded Age. Metro Boys Academy is a single-sex, K-12 private day school, with students of color representing over 40% of its population. The school is non-denominational; its identity is

deeply rooted in its commitment to the development of boys into responsible and gentlemanly young men. Furthermore, its physical location plays deeply into the character of the institution: the school is comprised of several brownstone buildings in the heart of the city, nestled in an affluent, historically white neighborhood. As such, much of Metro Boys Academy's history has been one permeated by white affluence despite the greater, heterogenous population of the city it serves. This characteristic, alongside modern reinterpretations of gender identity and masculinity traits have challenged the traditional values and approaches that MBA has espoused over the years. In sum, the MBA community, and in particular its leadership, has had to genuinely reassess how to be an effective and inclusive boys' school in the 21st century.

School History and Identity Formation (Institutionalization)

Metro Boys Academy was one of the first non-denominational, all-boys schools to be situated in a major urban center in the late-19th century United States. Fueled by the industrial revolution, westward expansion, and the economic boom of the years following the Civil War, private investment into education soared at the turn of the twentieth century, leading to the emergence of many independent schools up and down the East Coast. In the cities, where jobs were plentiful and major financial institutions were centralized, private schools of all sizes met the demands of a growing class of American elites. In the words of a longtime faculty member, the school's origins could be summarized as "an education for wealthy boys…it was like an old boys club." Another faculty member, who is an alumnus of MBA, and also serves as the athletic director, described the school as "[the] kind of place where on Fridays, every kid would get picked up and go to their [vacation] house with their parents." These statements are congruent

with those made by the current head of school, who characterized MBA's historical identity as one that is greatly influenced by the affluent neighborhood in which it operates. Its location "portends an awful lot and for a time the school kind of leaned into that. The idea that you come here and got an [elite] education. I've been here [a few] years, I still don't really know what that means. But it struck me more about geography than about pedagogy or about mission…And so there was something, I don't want to say insular, because that sounds really derogatory…a kind of a neighborhood vibe that it wanted to create, and with this neighborhood, that comes with a lot of connotations." However, MBA's historical identity has been strongly forged by more than its physical location. Like many small, independent schools, the direction, and as a byproduct, the values and ethos, of Metro Boy's Academy have been significantly influenced by its heads of school. Uniquely, MBA has only had six heads of school since its founding over one hundred years ago. Looking back on its leadership, the current of school commented,

> I could speak a little bit to the longevity of the heads of school…You know, for a school that's been around 130 years, it's kind of a thing. One of my predecessors was here for only five years. So that means there are like four other dudes who like for 120 years, they covered it. So my predecessor was here for 28 years. His predecessor was there for 38 years. I think what that means is that the character of the school was so defined by two men over the course of more than a half century. And I think that's something that has been very real about the culture. Both my predecessors were, I think it's fair to say, were very formal. Both of them came from this neighborhood…the one who started this 60 years, he was an alum, as well.

An alumnus and administrator of MBA agreed that that culture of the school has been heavily defined by its long-tenured heads. Additionally, the entire leadership framework at an institution like Metro Boy's Academy can be dictated by the head of school. This participant noted that the composition of the board of trustees at MBA was

also a reflection of the head of school's leadership. Alongside the transition from one head of school to the next, there is often a substantial redistribution of members of the board. This alumnus commented that, "When our head of school who had been there for almost 30 some odd years…retired, they turn[ed] the board over with younger parents, and a [more] diverse group of parents." According to this participant, the reorganization of the board of trustees under the new head of school was an intentional decision to move away from older practices of "the richer you were, the louder your voice, the higher your seat on the board." When asked to reflect on moments that represented turning points in the school's history, two participants noted that the hiring of the most recent head of school marked a new chapter for MBA. One longtime faculty member stated that "Prior to [them], it was like an old boys club….I do think that [their] arrival and the recrafting of the mission statement sort of gave us a renewed purpose." The athletic director agreed, commenting that with the arrival of the new head of school, "There a lot of voices now within MBA that weren't heard back in the day…It's not like that anymore which is a great thing."

School Mission

Although Metro Boy's Academy has been in operation for well over a century, the school only drafted its first mission statement in 1990. The head of school noted that this first mission statement was "95 words long and more of a kind of history of the school" rather than a document aimed that espousing institutional values. As an all-boys school, the Metro Boy's Academy mission statement today contains intentional language about the importance of educating students to be courageous, intellectual, and contributing members to their larger community. The interview protocol allowed for

participants to speak broadly to the importance of mission statements at schools, as well as comment on the verbiage and application of the MBA mission statement in their daily practices. One faculty member noted that, "it's extremely important for organizations to have mission statements, and I can see the value for individuals having purpose statements and mission statements…[they] point people in directions, [they] lay out value systems for the consumers, for families who want to join our organization, and then…we can use mission statements also to defend decisions that we make that sometimes are not popular."

In the context of MBA, all participants noted that the most recent version of the mission statement, crafted in the last five years under new leadership, helped to solidify the overall purpose and programming at the school: "[Now], we're a boys' school by design. We are not one by default, but we're doing this because we think that there's value in being a single sex school for boys." This phrase was reiterated by the head of school, who spoke to the importance and centrality of gender, identity, and masculinity in the school's mission. In particular, they noted that "the word gentleman has such currency here still and we talk a lot about trying to reclaim that so it doesn't speak in 19th century landed gentry notion but literally 'a gentle man'…So try to just think in the sense of what it means to be masculine." The incorporation of the word "gentleman" in the mission statement was noted by an MBA parent as well, who commented that,

> The word gentleman... I think it's still in our mission statement. It was before. There was a huge conversation about taking it out. It was in our previous mission statement. I think the first iteration of the newly revised mission statement did not have gentlemen in it, because a lot of people found it really charged. And people lost it. And so gentlemen came back….I suspect that for a long time, MBA used the word gentlemen and

> it was really deliberate….like, we're gonna stake out some ground here by calling ourselves gentlemen.

Both the head of school and MBA parent spoke to the need of Metro Boy's Academy to be declarative in the words of their mission statement that the school is purposefully designed to educate boys. Furthermore, a faculty member and the head of school also commented that recent efforts to revise the mission statement were representative of broader conversations about more inclusive definitions of what it means to be gentlemanly and how to best externally communicate that as an institution. The head of school summarized,

> I hope we continue…trying to reclaim a new grounds for masculinity. So much of the traditional language is winsome. I'm all for being strong and independent and courageous. I like these kind of Homeric virtues, they're great. But they can be leveraged, or they can be paired…. to be courageous is to be compassionate, right? So try to just think in the sense of what it means to be masculine. While we shouldn't reject things like strength, independence, and stoicism categorically, our mission should include a real effort to value and draw out the obverse sides of these qualities, and to esteem them as essential to being fully human. There shouldn't be an antimony between courage and compassion, between strength and vulnerability, between thinking and relating—rather, these are synthesized and championed within every healthy individual boy and every healthy community of boys.

These comments demonstrate the transformation occuring under new headship at Metro Boy's Academy, an institution described by a faculty member as once being an "old boys club", which according to an alumnus, was "just the way things were back then." Furthermore, non-adminsitrative participants indicated that much of this transformational change, aimed at addressing historical, institutional obstacales to equity, is due to the change in headship. This reimagining of single-sex education, as envisioned in the mission and lived out in the formal and informal actions of leadership and community, characterize much of the efforts taking place at MBA in recent years.

Authentic Actions (Reinstitutionalization)

All participants provided examples of how they work to forward the Metro Boy's Academy mission in their formal capacities as administrators and members of the faculty. Additionally, participants discussed the informal ways that the MBA mission is infused into their daily practices. The head of school spoke to the policies that have been put in place since their arrival to better institutionalize behavioral norms and values that are espoused in the school mission statement:

> My predecessor was fond of saying, "It's a school of norms, not of rules." And that sounded fantastic when I came in. And then when I found it was up to me to sort of adjudicate any violation of a norm by anyone…And so we put together a joint student-faculty committee, and we wrote up a Code of Conduct. And so there are eight principles that inform this Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct is posted in every school room. And the Code of Conduct provides sort of grist for conversational meal in places like advisory or assembly. [Before,], we didn't have a system. And so we have courses in things like in the middle school called Radical Empathy. We have a course called Panthers Connect, which is for sixth graders, which because we've done research, shows that around sixth and seventh grade, intimate friendships start to fall apart, and boys start to buy into a really narrow definition of masculinity where they won't be vulnerable with one another.

These observations directly align with later comments made by the MBA head of school about their role as it relates to the mission statement. The head of school stated that "I'm not the only keeper of mission. In fact…I think a lot of my job is to make sure that there is ongoing conversation and either coordinating, empowering, or leading ongoing conversation about what it means to deliver a mission." This notation demonstrates a leadership philosophy that the head of school, alongside their many other responsibilities, is also charged with formalizing the unwritten aspects of the school's ethos. The establishment of a student code of conduct, that was brainstormed by and created for the students and faculty, is one example of how the head of school was able to

leverage the community to create a formal *and* authentic embodiment of the school's culture and expectations. Furthermore, curricular adaptations, including the creation of coursework focused on empathy, friendship, and masculinity, also demonstrate how formal changes to the school's structural offerings can further the institution's mission. One faculty participant also noted the impact of these new approaches, stating,

> We're at a point in history where people are having really complicated and difficult conversations around identity. First of all, we've had this organization Courageous Conversations, an organization has come in. And we're engaging the board, the teachers, we're engaging students in these conversations and thinking about how, as a teacher, how am I teaching? Or do all of those things make sense in the context of these conversations around identity? [We] need to have deliberate conversations about what it is to be empathic and what it is to walk in someone else's shoes, and what it is to be radically empathic, meaning how do I extend myself when I observe someone is living through something? In fact…the head of the middle school and I created a course called Radical Empathy for fifth graders. I also think that we have an opportunity to be thinking back to this life of the mind and reinvigorate our commitment to not just being performative to get into college, but to really get excited about ideas and thinking and any of those things.

Outside the classroom, other formal mechanisms of mission can be seen advisory and athletics. The MBA athletic director stated that in his role, he contributes to a holistic education of the student. Furthermore, he is supported institutionally, regardless of the success of the athletic program. By deemphasizing results and instead promoting a healthy sports culture, Metro Boys Academy is ultimately serving its students and furthering the mission of the school. The athletic director, also an alumnus, noted, "I've been able to hang my hat at the end of the day, knowing that I'm supported by the school, as long as I'm always doing things the right way and for the right reasons. I'm not ever gonna be in a position where I'm in trouble because we're not winning so it's comforting knowing that I have that support from the school and from the administration."

These areas of school life are best summarized by the head of school as "programmatic ways in which we're trying to give expression to our values and our mission. Sometimes they happen in an intellectual and academic disciplines. Oftentimes, they happen in kind of non-cognitive areas, whether it's formal classes, or simply community gatherings."

As a day school, the Metro Boy's Academy does not have the extended hours of campus and residential life that its boarding school peers offer. However, the participants at MBA highlighted the many opportunities and occasion that exist during the regular school day that represent the informal embodiments of school mission. Two participants acknowledged that the small size of the student body and the proximity of the physical buildings allowed for constant relationship building between students and teachers. One participant stated that "the beauty of a small school like MBA is that people really, really know each other….then you're in the same classroom five times a day, you see them eight times a day in the hallway, and so I do think that the boys really do care for each other and that there is a brotherhood….I think that the kids do genuinely feel that when they have left or when they get towards the end of their career there. And they understand that they had access to unique relationships that are afforded by the size of our institution." Another participant agreed and noted "Metro Boy's Academy is such a small school. It's one brownstone, where there are five year olds and there are eighteen year olds all going up and down the steps together. And there's magical stuff that happens in there. And you treat one another like family." Both faculty member participants credited their ability to model good behavior and imbue mission values on their students to the leadership team at the school, who "empowered" them to act in the best interest of

their students. An administrator at MBA explained how the athletics department was also a space for students to build relationships with adults. They noted,

> [The coach's office] is a safe place for them to be able to come and I'm not there to judge them or get them in trouble. It's really just a place for them to be able to be safe and find some sort of comfort and guidance. It's not written. It's not formal. But it's known throughout the school that the coach's office is sort of the place that kids go when they're down or when they're not.

The head of school echoed the sentiments offered by other participants, yet again highlighting the heavy emphasis that Metro Boy's Academy places on human connections. They stated, "[We're] a school that really prided itself on being a relational school, because of its size someone in my position could know every boy by name, would see every boy every day. When I arrived before the COVID times, the daily handshake was the first thing I was told, that this is a ritual from which you will not part. And I'm grateful for that. It is fantastic. And so I think MBA has tried to position itself as kind of intimate, almost bespoke educational experience." While seemingly insignificant to the outside observer, according to members of the MBA community, the informal routine of offering a handshake to a faculty member or the head of school embodies a critical component of the ethos at Metro Boy's Academy and further infuses characteristics of empathy, brotherhood, and nobleness.

Leadership

At the time of the interview, the head of school at Metro Boy's Academy was in his fifth year in that role. As such, participant responses, specifically from the faculty and other administrators, gravitated towards the differences in leadership styles of the current head of school and their predecessor. Additionally, participants were asked to comment on specific characteristic traits of authentic leadership as defined by the NAIS

and identify examples of when those traits have been exhibited by the current head of school. The head of MBA spoke at great length about shared leadership practices and the role of an independent school head, specifically as it pertains to school mission. They noted,

> I think it's my job to foreground…with our Board of Trustees an awful lot - to say, here's what we're called to, here's what we say we do, here's what we say we're attentive to. How is this defending our mission? How is this compatible or congruent with our mission? I do not do a whole lot of asserting program or policy. I very seldom say, this is something we need to do, because this is what the mission demands. Very occasionally, I will do that. Mostly, I'm trying to create conditions whereby leadership is distributed so that folks will have the space and feel secure in thinking in those terms.

Other participants agreed that the head of school at Metro Boy's Academy believed in and operated by a delegated approach to leadership. Whereas the former head "created a power structure where it was…spokes radiating out of a hub with him being the hub," the current head "gets the most out of everyone for the right reasons." One faculty member described the former head as "Louis XIV…he called all of the shots and you didn't ask any questions." Conversely, they now felt that the current head of school had created a "partnership [and] collaboration" in which "people work for one another."

All participants commented on the importance of authenticity as a leadership trait in a head of school. The head of school provided multiple examples of how authenticity creates opportunities to connect more wholesomely with members of the greater MBS community. They noted,

> Because of the size of our school, I can have an outsized influence as a kind of cultural officer or cultural model. There are certain things that I've learned, the behaviors I can normalize or encourage simply by participating in them in a kind of public way, a handful of times. My first year here, going up to watch a middle school PE class, and asking the

> teacher, "Hey, can I play in this dodgeball game?" Culturally, my predecessor wouldn't have done that. But it felt natural and normal to me. Kids can sniff out someone who's not in it. But people who are just like, authentically there for the ideas and the play of ideas...just eat that up. And so it's good not to play pretend at things. But I think I find in my role, that there are choices I have to make, I think there are limits to authenticity, that can be allowed, at least in short periods of time, I think it's something where you can kind of gradually expand the spectrum of what people come to expect from you.

Again, members of the Metro Boy's Academy echoed statements made by the head of school, and commented that public displays of genuineness and humanness by their head had profound impacts on their motivation to excel in their roles. Furthermore, participants stated that by acting authentically and with humility, the head of school was embodying components of the MBA mission statement and resultantly, further embedding those values within the community. One faculty member observed,

> Despite probably being the smartest person in the room, they never walk into the room and act like they're the smartest person in the room. They will apologize if they make a mistake. This is totally in line with what we're trying to do to build courageous young men of integrity and whatever the rest of the mission statement says. I mean, they're incapable of not leading with their heart and with their mind. And they're a human being. They're really good at what they do. They're a very, very effective leader.

Another participant, who is an alumnus and administrator at MBA also noted how authentic leadership from the head of school motivates them to be the best in their own role, regardless of the results. They stated,

> So I had been the athletic director for, I want to say, eight years before [the new head] came. And again, this isn't to poke fun at the headmaster before [them], but they had been to one athletic contest in the eight years I was the AD. And [the new head] is at one almost every day. They know every boy's name, they know every parent name…and it's not a show. They're just so genuine….There are two kinds of bosses. There's that boss where you want to do well because you're scared that if you don't, you're

> going to be in trouble. And that gets results, for sure. But then there's [the new head] who I want to do well because I want to make them happy and proud. I work harder for that. I always want to do more. I don't want to do just enough, and [the new head] genuinely appreciates every effort we make and acknowledges it. And that's the kind of leader that gets the most results.

When asked to provide an example of when they believe they displayed aspects of authentic leadership, the head of school provided one anecdote from early in their time at Metro Boy's Academy that highlighted their willingness to act on their personal, ethical standards rather than lead based on expectations from others. This story was also highlighted by a faculty member who described the head of school's actions as "pastoral" and "human." The head of school described,

> November of my first year in headship, one of our teachers came to me and said, "Look, I found a swastika drawing on one of the bathroom stalls." And I brought in some of our leadership to see what we would have done about this in the past, [and they said] "That sometimes happens. And it wasn't something that we were encouraged to chase down." But it was something where kind of like, viscerally, I know at [my last school] we wouldn't have allowed…We would have made an effort, whether we succeeded or not. But just gathering - at MBA we don't have a space large enough to gather the entire student body. I said we need to jam everybody into the gymnasium. And so we have 400 boys standing in the gymnasium with 100 adults. To achieve my job, I wanted to say, this cannot be who we want to be. If you don't know the history of a swastika, you can come talk to me right now. If you think this is okay, you need to come see me now, because there is not going to be a place for you here. And I'm sure some people thought it was grandstanding. But it also felt to me, all of us can be about more, all of us can share in this. When I look at things where I just feel like doing that has allowed me to have a whole different set of conversations since, that struck me as pretty important.

This example demonstrates the oversized influence that an individual like a head of school can have at a small institution like Metro Boy's Academy. As stated by the head of school in an earlier comment, there are moments when the head can be a "cultural officer" that moves the school's ethos in distinct directions that mirror the

leader's own values. In this particular instance, the head of school was told that traditionally these types of incidents were not often prioritized by the previous leadership team – there was not an expectation that the entire school population should be assembled to address what happened. However, authentic leadership hinges on the leader choosing to *act authentically* and make decisions based on what they believe to be genuine rather than popular.

COVID and Social Justice

Like many of its public and private school counterparts, the Metro Boy's Academy as forced to drastically modify all aspects of its educational model in response to the COVID-19 pandemic during the 2020-2021 academic year. Furthermore, due to its geographic location in a large urban metropolis on the East Coast, MBA experienced "the eye of the storm" during the early stages of the pandemic, forcing it to shut down swiftly and completely in early Spring 2020. This early shift from in-person learning to remote learning forced the leadership at MBA to design a model that was sustainable throughout the duration of the pandemic that still emphasized the missional values of the institution. One significant, institutional initiative was asking teachers over the summer to spend a week changing to new classroom and grading technological platforms. While perceived as a necessary adjustment for an upcoming year of remote teaching, one participant identified this as "a huge ask…we did an extra week of training at the end of the worst school year on record. But they knew they had to do it. And I think it paid off in the long term." The head of school recognized these structural changes as "decided[ly]" a good thing for the long term health of the institution.

Despite these attempts, all participants recognized that the 2020-2021 academic year lacked the relational components that defined a traditional Metro Boy's Academy experience. As stated by the head of school, "Screens can do a lot of things but screens can't give hugs…I'd rather close the school than become Global Online Academy." The athletic director at MBA echoed these sentiments, stating that "it's been a little bit harder to be a relationship based school, because there's only so much you can do of that over Zoom." Specifically within the context of the Metro Boy's Academy mission, the head of school noted,

> What I'm taking away from this is that the thing that MBA should do if MBA wants to exist, is to return to the things that it did really, really well…I think, returning to a place of connection, that's what our mission was based upon. And I think there is going to be a crying need for that. When people actually return to, in person schooling fully, because we're all going to be different in my judgment, because we will have lived through a trauma, to some degree or another. But all of us are going to come back having lived through something that we didn't train for, that we didn't ask for, and we didn't really know how to negotiate. And so having a place where you can go and feel known and loved and cared for, and then extended and then stretched, and then challenged, I think that's going to be really important.

All participants acknowledged that despite the extreme challenges of the 2020-2021 academic year, there were silver linings that bode well for the future of Metro Boy's Academy. In particular, all participants noted the renewed need to address social and racial inequities in ways that are congruent with the school's existing initiatives and also uphold the MBA school mission. They all noted that this imperative to systemize equity, while already existent prior to the 2020-2021 academic year, was further exposed and emphasized by the numerous events during the summer of 2021, and specifically highlighted the George Floyd murder and subsequent protests as catalysts for change.

One faculty member noted the "thoughtful" creation of a diversity director role and the hiring of an outside group called Courageous Conversations to normalize discussions around equity both at the administrative and faculty level. An alumnus commented that "the school has been really good about being proactive…but there was never a focus on alums of color. [Now] there's an alumni panel called the Boy's Academy Mentors, and they're all alums of color who have come through MBA…We're making sure that the school…connects to everybody…Not just making sure we have the numbers, making sure we're checking boxes, but doing it the right way so that there's those real connections to the school for everybody." These recent actions by MBA, which include internal, organic creation of DEI roles, in addition to partnership with external organizations that professionalize equity practices at independent schools, represent an institutional shift that is aligned with MBA's core value of dignity that aims to "support the power of a diverse, inclusive and welcoming community."

Conclusion

Every independent school has its distinct identity, often shaped by the geographical and temporal characteristics of the institution. In the case of Metro Boy's Academy, this paradigm remains accurate. Founded in the late nineteenth century in a major city of the East Coast, a product of immense industrial wealth and patronage, MBA represents how private education met the demands of an increasingly influential and urban, social elite in the United States. Defined by its single-sex approach to education, MBA has historically served the upper echelon of society, solidifying a reputation as an institution where the affluent are groomed for entrance into lofty social circles. However, in recent decades, immense demographic, social, and economic change, paired with more immediate public health crises, political and racial discourse, and new leadership have

forced Metro Boy's Academy to review existing policies and implement new approaches to deliver an equitable and contemporary approach to boy's education in the 21st century. These phenomena are recognized by the MBA head of school as challenges and opportunities constantly informed by both the past and present. They noted,

> The term existential has been thrown around way, way, way too much over the past year. To me, an existential crisis is to wonder about your meaning. It's not whether your fancy independent school will have another year…But as I look at our idiom here [at MBA], we've actually said, we need to bring our mission to more boys…we need to create more space for boys to come here, because otherwise, we actually, paradoxically, feel like we're gonna bleed out over the course of 20 to 30 years. And…it's good to let that history or the story of an institution really, really shape where you want to go.

The Confluence School

Nestled in the foothills of New England, the Confluence School harkens to an earlier era of education, with students stuffing their trunks and then being dropped off by their parents at prep school for the academic year. Presiding over two major riverways, the Confluence School has a distinct relationship with its quaint location, offering students opportunities to walk the local wooded trails or kayak with their class as the leaves change color in the fall. As much as the institution has modernized, its community, through its habits and traditions, also still clings to relics of the past, whether it is the annual trip to the rival school for a full day of athletic competitions in the fall, an acapella concert in the school chapel after a formal evening dinner, or the "seniors only" footpath that dissects the original dormitory quad. For most visitors, the Confluence School radiates a collegiate energy, with separate buildings housing different disciplines, bells indicating the close of evening study hall in the library, or the original academic building with its splendid architecture emerging from the trees as one arrives on campus.

Founded in the early 20th century, the Confluence School, despite its many unique aspects, also serves as a prototype for the traditional private boarding school in the United States and the unique challenges they face. It is located in the rural Northeast and distanced enough from the major cities to offer a charming escape to a simpler, more isolated haven for elite education. Its residential community stresses a holistic approach to nurturing youth through a core curriculum, faculty advisory system, and robust athletic program. Its campus, spanning hundreds of acres, boasts state of the art facilities for theater, music, science, and more. Its clientele has been historically privileged, with many graduates fully immersed in the upper echelons of the American and international elite. Yet, when one looks past the porticos lining the dormitories and the regalia of commencement exercises seemingly resemblant of a bygone era, one finds an institution such as the Confluence School grappling with the inexorable and seemingly relentless challenges of the 21st century. Its relative and supposed seclusion from public education and the wider world has disappeared over time, forcing the school alongside its independent counterparts to ask difficult questions about institutional purpose in an age of division, revision, and redemption.

School History and Identity Formation (Institutionalization)

The number of New England boarding schools rose dramatically in the fifty years following the American Civil War to answer a growing demand by the emerging elite class to educate their children away from the perceived urban decay in cities such as New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. As a result, most private schools in the United States, once largely understood as synonymous with parochial schools, became increasingly associated with the emergent affluence of a promising, industrialized nation. Despite its

categorization as a private boarding school, the Confluence School's origins differentiated it from many of its sister institutions. As described by the head of school, Confluence opened its doors "tuition free, [for] boys and girls, and open to students from across the world…they certainly did enroll local children from all walks of life. Non-denominational, non-political…[and] a commitment to being accessible." This vision for a democratic institution of learning ran counter to many other private preparatory programs at the time but was compatible with the vision of the school's founders, who wrote in letters to one another of their intent to create a school where other people's children could thrive. As noted by the Confluence School archivist, both the founders of the school and its first head of school were heavily influenced by the philosophies of Charles Elliot, the longest tenured president of Harvard University in Boston, Massachusetts. Elliot argued that education must be both physical and moral and allow for a student to maximize their inherent gifts. At Confluence, this vision translated to a boarding school where diverse students from many different backgrounds could live and work together with the goal to ultimately enhance the political and economic spirit of the country. In the words of a faculty member and archivist, "And so [head of school] Greenfield[3] created first a school that had an agriculture division, a college prep, and a business division. And all the boys would be in one of those three. And their projects would kind of overlap, they would need each other…they actually included this notion in [the] covered walkways…to make visible this idea of the kind of living and learning all together in the same space…rain or shine." The current head of school commented that Greenfield was instrumental in establishing the early identity of the Confluence School,

[3] A pseudonym was provided to maintain confidentiality

and specifically championed the notion that the institution was "apolitical, areligious, and accessible to everybody." Furthermore, Greenfield was head of school for over fifty years, which undoubtedly meant his influence permeated generations of faculty, students, and staff.

Notably, two of the participants noted how the Confluence School also experienced significant change in its early years, specifically in regard to the organization of the boys and girls programming. Within fifteen years of its founding, the board of trustees at the Confluence School decided to close their girl's division, citing a lack of resources and interest. A subsequent lawsuit, citing the founding documents of the school, resulted in the creation of two separate schools, located only a few miles apart from each other. For the next several decades, these two schools coexisted until a decision was made in the 1960s to unite the boys and girls programs once again on the same campus. As a residential boarding program, this reunification signified a full reimagining of what the school intended to be. As stated by the school archivist,

> When girls became boarders…that moved us towards full, full embracing of this idea of a school for boys and girls. Title IX also had a huge effect with athletics…[but] in that shift a really, really strong intellectual group of women came on to this very traditionally male campus and said "No, you're gonna have to listen to us." And so that then crafted a conversation about leadership, about gender.

While the reunification of the campuses was noted by the archivist as a seminal moment in the identity of the Confluence School, another faculty member commented that the years when there were two separate schools also represents an unfortunate episode in the school's history when the boy's program was prioritized. They stated, "You have a whole cohort of women who feel that their legacy and their identity have kind of been forgotten. And I've been in communication with some of those women

through the programming that I've done. And they're looking for ways in which their legacy and that part of the school and that identity can live on."

The head of school, when asked to identify a turning point in the school's history, focused on how Confluence struggled to remain open in the 1960s and 1970s. In particular, the head of school noted that as a result of "a series of unfortunate events" and mismanagement by leadership, both the quantity and quality of boarding applications plunged during this period of time. Some of the school's dormitories were empty during this period and "there was a gulf between day students and boarding students as far as their intellectual accomplishments." A change in leadership during this period of crisis, with the installment of a new head of school that would go on to serve for twenty years, helped to reverse this negative trend. By the turn of the 21st century, the Confluence School had regained its status as a New England *boarding* school.

Ultimately, all participants, including the head of school, spoke to the unique character of the Confluence School and how its democratically-minded origins have permeated the school's identity until this day. The head of school emphasized that the school was "not founded as a school for the elite," which was supported by another participant who emphasized multiple times that the historical identity of Confluence was predicated on the belief that the leadership was "willing to break from the traditional prep school ways." As a result, by the 1980s, the Confluence School was increasingly representative of the school that stands today: a non-denominational, coeducational, residential boarding school. In the words of one long-tenured faculty member, "In terms of the ethos of the school, when I first got here, I remember thinking that we were really trying to make good people, who really thought for themselves, and were not like cookie

cutters…" Participants data such as this emphasizes how members of the Confluence School community believe that their goal is to educate students who do not fit the typical private school mold. In fact, all participants highlighted how Confluence School's origins impressed upon its community the need to buck stereotypes of privilege and instead adapt more democratic and equitable approaches to boarding school education.

School Mission

The Confluence School mission statement has been updated multiple times over the course of the school's history, and most recently was revised as part of a semi-regular accreditation process from the Association of Independent Schools in New England (AISNE). As part of the interview protocol, all participants were asked to speak broadly to the importance of mission statements at schools, as well as comment on the verbiage and application of the Confluence mission statement in their daily practices. One newer faculty member noted that mission statements, while important, vary greatly in importance based on the member of the school community. They noted,

> I think the mission is more important to faculty and administration and parents than it is to students. When you're looking for a job? The first thing you want to know is what's the mission. And how do you live that mission, whether that's the mission of the school or the DEI mission, people ask that, especially in 2021. I think it's definitely like a school leadership thing. In part for strategic planning, and, you know, rooting your decisions in the mission, I think is important. But I don't know how much of it matters to students.

Interestingly, another participant commented that there may be confusion amongst community members at Confluence surrounding the mission statement as some faculty, and particularly students, reference the school motto more often than the actual mission statement. One faculty similarly questioned the ultimate purpose of mission statements, questioning whether or not they are effective because of their pervasive nature. However,

this same faculty member also acknowledged that students at Confluence would likely point to verbiage about inclusivity and citizenship within the mission statement as particularly important to their experience at the school. Speaking broadly to the importance of mission statements at independent schools, the head of school argued that there needs to be a differentiating factor between public and private institutions, stating "if we are going to exist separately from the public school system, which should be the bedrock of our democracy, we better have a damn good reason for it and we better go above and beyond what public schools are capable of doing. This shouldn't simply be a training ground for the elite. It should be, that we can provide something in addition that society needs, and I think that that addition is taking the children of the elite and really exposing them to a wider understanding of their responsibilities." Furthermore, the head of school identified their role as being a "champion of the mission," who helps to remind people of the purpose of the school. According to the head of school, "When [I] talk to any person at our school about what their job is, it has to relate to mission."

All participants identified one specific component of the Confluence mission statement that has historical roots in documents authored by the founders of the school. As stated by the school archivist, the "sentence about the best self and the common good…connects to the founders…that's the reason to get up in the morning, right? To be that person, as well as to encourage kids to find their own way in doing that. That's not a prescription. That's an opportunity." The head of school agreed, adding that "I think if you ask most people at the school what our mission is, they would talk about best self and common good…it does speak to the values that we have as a school…[it is] not just about

turning out accomplished young men and women, it really is about public citizenship and public responsibility of private institutions."

All participants noted that the passage about improving "mind, body, and spirit" was one that resonated deeply with them and was a natural component of a residential, boarding school. One participant voiced concerns about the language expressed in the mission and questioned if such explicit references to the school's founders was necessary or even appropriate. They stated,

> I don't like the inclusion of..."as its founders intended." Because I would question how its founders actually intended the school to be. I don't know if 2021 Confluence School is what the founders would have envisioned the school to be in [the early 20th century]. I'm thinking of diversity, equity, and inclusion and justice…I wonder if it would be better to change the language there of "since then, this has been improved"...or something like that….The schools like Confluence were not built for our students of color, or our students from lower socioeconomic statuses. And so how do we change language to make sure that that message does get across…And so I would push back on "as its founders intended" while understanding the importance…to recognize the truth behind that history.

This commentary highlights an interesting chasm between the different responses by members of the Confluence School community. The one faculty participant who voiced criticisms of verbiage within the mission statement was a newer member of the Confluence School community. Conversely, the head of school and a longer-tenured faculty member participant both expressed satisfaction with the school mission statement and made greater linkages to the aspirational nature of the document. This trend is observed in other areas of the Confluence School data as well.

Authentic Actions (Reinstitutionalization)

Participants at the Confluence School noted various formal and informal mechanisms for advancing the school's mission. One faculty identified the school work program – a required, weekly chore or housekeeping task for students and faculty to help

maintain the campus – as critical to the embodiment of an engaged and self-sufficient community. They commented that "it's really important for students to start at the bottom, working alongside community members that might need help…around campus…that is totally the common good." However, the same participant had also reservations about the program, stating that it may be outdated and yet again represent a missional program that students do not embrace or view as critical to their experience. They stated that "They're living out the mission, but it seems like we're chasing down kids to wake up at seven in the morning and pick up trash. And that feels actually like the opposite of our mission." The head of school stated that the student work program was an excellent example of a commitment to the common good by promoting a "shared responsibility" for the upkeep of school.

Furthermore, the head of school highlighted larger, institutional initiatives that represented a strong commitment to aspirational values of engaged citizenship and civil discourse. They highlighted the creation of the Brighton Center for Civic Engagement and the Common Good[4] as an embodiment of "Greenfield's commitment to civil discourse." In addition to being a centralized space for dialogue surrounding issues of civic importance, the Brighton Center also invites outside speakers to campus, collaborates with academic departments on how to best infuse ethics and morality into the classroom, and designs and implements its own curriculum. According to the head of school, acts such as realigning curriculum or breaking ground on a building dedicated to certain values, which are predicated on approval by the board, are "a reflection of our priorities [because] the budget is a moral document."

[4] A pseudonym was provided to maintain confidentiality

Faculty participants provided greater insight into how the Confluence School mission is lived out in informal ways. The school archivist identified ways that in their role as teacher and historian they espouse the mission of the school. These included sharing documents and material culture to better inform members of the community about their place in the school's history. They stated,

> Teaching history is really easy to talk about engaged citizenship, we are lucky that way…So I see my job as really having an opportunity to get some of that out, for us to be intentional and self-conscious about enacting what we may be doing or thinking in the history of the school like, this is us, right? So there's some storytelling opportunities. I'm a huge believer in making, as I said before, the founders be three dimensional people. And that if they could do something extraordinary, then we all can too. And maybe there's a piece of that in the mission. The Best Self and the Common Good.

Another faculty participant detailed how their role as a junior varsity coach was critical to developing the "mind, body, and spirit" component of the school mission statement but did not "do much of the best self and common good. They also acknowledged that "engaged citizenship" was likely occurring at the varsity level of athletics through more organized community service efforts by upperclassmen. Both faculty participants mentioned the dormitory as a critical space where the mission is lived out informally. A student prefect and residential assistant program was identified as giving "students the opportunity to live that best self and common good…they're passionate about it…if it's student led and student driven…it's gonna have more impact on themselves and on others, whether they know it's rooted in the mission or not." This emphasis on student-driven actions as being an authentic embodiment of school mission was echoed by another faculty member, who celebrated the classroom experience, where students "express opinions, speak freely, take risks, respect who they're speaking to…and

[balance] this privilege of being heard with the responsibility of both listening and understanding what it's like to be heard." These characteristics were noted as central to forwarding the idea of best self and common good.

Leadership

The head of school at Confluence has been in the role for over ten years, overseeing drastic changes to the school's curriculum, programming, and physical plant. During their tenure, multiple new buildings have been added to the campus, including residential dormitories, an improved health center, expanded athletic facilities, and a new student center. These changes to the campus coincided with the centennial celebration of the school, capping off an unprecedented fundraising campaign that financed these endeavors and bolstered the endowment of the institution for years to come. The head of school was asked to reflect on how authentic leadership traits have impacted the way in which they have conducted their job at the Confluence School. They noted,

> When I came here, I quickly noticed that actually as a leader, as the head, you couldn't roll your eyes and you couldn't be cynical about what it is that we do. And so I think that you have to learn to be authentic about your commitment to what it is that we're doing here. You have to be authentic. And it's good for faculty to be cynical, they should be. But I don't think that that's the role of a school head. I think you have to be able to stand up and say things that you believe in, but that in a different context, might be seen as being sappy or whatever. You need to say it because somebody's got to say it. And the person who's got to say it is the head of the school.

Other participants also stated that authentic leadership at an independent school requires the head of school to act on their beliefs, despite the steady stream of input from the many constituents that comprise the greater school community. By doing so and displaying "genuineness and the heart and the mind," most observers, including "the old fogeys and people in different of their age and their careers" will support the decision. In

the words of a senior faculty member, “Boarding school faculty really pick up on [authenticity], you can sniff it out if it’s not there.” This commentary was congruent with other participant observations, who stated that the head of school needs to be embedded within the community, “alongside faculty and alongside students,” to be accepted by those that work underneath them.

Participants were asked to provide examples of when they believed their head of school displayed characteristics of authentic leadership, as provided to them in the interview protocol. A younger faculty member highlighted the head of school’s willingness to carve time out of their schedule to make others feel seen and heard. The participant commented that “I do feel like they’re leading with their heart and mind and that they’re making sure that I, in that power dynamic, feel like they have time for me, and they want to hear me…It’s her living [the mission] and her actions there have spoken louder than words.” Another participant noted that the head of school has displayed traits of authentic leadership during recent crises related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the head of school has been compassionate in their communication with the faculty and has stressed “where we need to scale back [and] how we need to take care of our students.” One participant offered a conflicting experience, noting that the administration “had to act very quickly” in response to the pandemic and “there were a lot of decisions being made that weren’t in the best interest of the faculty. It felt like we were not about the common good.”

COVID and Social Justice

As a residential boarding school, the Confluence School had to act decisively in March 2020 to guarantee the safety of its many students, faculty, and staff that were

living on campus. After teaching and learning went completely virtual in March 2020, the leadership team at Confluence had to decide how to best educate their many students, who originate from more than 46 countries and 21 U.S. states, for the upcoming 2020-2021 academic year. As described by the head of school, "I've been in education for 40 years, and I think it's the most difficult situation I have ever seen." The school adopted a gradual approach to reopening, that started with allowing day students to come to campus with the eventual opening of dormitories later in the year. The school created a mini-semester between the Thanksgiving holiday and Winter Break that allowed for distance learning. However, these adaptations still detracted from the prescriptive residential program that defines the Confluence School. The head of school noted,

> [COVID] has eroded assets of community. It's very, very difficult not being able to see people in person…And even if you take the time for the sort of social niceties, it's not the same as being able to go and have a lunch with somebody or the serendipitous meeting in the bookstore or in the library.

Alongside this diminution of community, which participants identified as pivotal to the boarding school experience, the changes to school life also highlighted who is ultimately cut out for the demands of this type of work. One faculty member stated that the events of the 2020-2021 academic year, while challenging, have also provided clarity for many who work at these types of institutions. They noted that "If you're a faculty member at a boarding school, specifically, tit takes a really special person to do that. And if people can figure that out now and move on to other things like grad school, or a total career shift, I think that's a really good thing." Another longer-tenured faculty member also commented that the challenges of COVID have put into perspective what traits are necessary to thrive in this line of work. They stated,

> There's a bigger world that needs you. You don't do this stuff for yourself. And you have to let people in. You have to. And so I think that sometimes, and maybe it's people my age who have stayed, they feel a fit with the school….I see a lot of them really aspiring to the Common Good, to being inclusive in ways that I think that some faculty could take a note…Are we willing to give up our privilege in order for some other part of the school to? And that inclusivity, also really requires people to kind of park themselves at the door and see something bigger?

In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Confluence School, like its many peer schools, also acknowledged their place as an institution of privilege at a time of significant racial reckoning. In the aftermath of the George Floyd murder in May 2020, the Confluence School was forced to reconcile its status as an institution that, while historically inclusive, still had much work to in the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The school archivist placed the 2020-2021 academic year in historical context by recognizing that recent events had "forced the school to address issues about systemic racism and to take a stand where I think we were kind of always like, 'Oh, we're inclusive.' The founders weren't thinking about a multiracial school, but they were thinking about differences and welcoming people from different backgrounds. And so we now have invented or recast that for 2020/2021." These efforts have included hiring initiatives, student and faculty seminars, and alumni panels. Simply put, the head of school stated that in light of larger national conversations surrounding race, the school will "never go back to the way it was." Looking forward, the leadership team at the Confluence School will need to assess what structural changes need to be made to better infuse equitable practices into their school program that simultaneously and authentically mirror the missional values of the school.

Conclusion

Celebrating its centennial year, the Confluence School invited a former head of school to speak to its graduating class. In the address, the former head of school recognized the many attendees, even acknowledging the "hovering, admiring ghosts of the founders" whose ideals still permeate the classrooms, practice fields, and dormitories. The former head concluded by challenging those in attendance to utilize their education from Confluence to join fellow alumni in tackling the challenges of the modern world. This great undertaking is the obligation and opportunity of those who attend the school. According to the former head, "It has been for 101 years, and will be for the next 101."

Independent boarding schools such as the Confluence School represent a fascinating paradigm in 21st century private education. At the heart of these institutions is a nostalgic dedication to tradition – all three participants repeatedly recognized the living legacy of the school founders and the greater purpose they imprinted on future generations of students, faculty, and staff. Concurrently, these institutions, steeped in history and ritual, must also modernize, whether it be the physical facilities, classroom pedagogy, or institutional practices surrounding diversity and privilege. The Confluence School has experienced watershed moments throughout its century of existence, often in reaction to external forces beyond the control of the school. One significant guiding force in decision-making has been the school's dedication to its founding principles, which in the words of the school archivist, serves as "a letter to the future." The many challenges of the 2020-2021 academic year at Confluence have further highlighted the necessity across independent education for adaptive, empathetic, and ultimately purpose-driven leadership and action.

Summary

This study aimed to better understand the complex relationship between historical identity, school mission, and the mechanisms by which mission are actualized at U.S. independent schools. The conceptual framework developed for this study sought to highlight the sequential nature by which unique identity is formed at private institutions and ultimately lived out in formal and informal ways. All of the steps in this process, from the formation of organizational identity (*institutionalization*) to the creation and adaptation of formal mission to the authentic implementation of that mission (*reinstitutionalization*) were evident in the data collected and analyzed in this study. Additionally, the application and endurance of a school's mission by leadership at a time of significant political and social upheaval was further highlighted in the data. All data conclusively emphasized the centrality of school history, identity, and mission in the daily operations of a U.S. independent school.

The purpose of this chapter was to authentically present participant data, leveraging interviews and school documents to reach generalizable conclusions about independent schools. To do this, I distilled the five major themes that emerged from participant data into four significant findings: the geography and institutional history of private schools are decisive in their trajectory and ultimate identity; during their tenure, a head of school is often the primary determinant of an independent school's ethos and identity; the school mission, as dictated in the mission statement, serves as a pivotal guiding force in the daily operations of the school; in 2021, the greatest challenges and opportunities at independent schools remain centered on the historical and contemporary shortcomings of each institution regarding race, privilege, and elitism. This distillation displays the significant interplay between the participant themes and the need to simplify

the many recommendations that emerged from this study. For example, the theme of school mission informed both the "head of school and authentic leadership" finding as well as the "mission as compass" finding – in both cases, the creation, revision, and implementation of mission by both community and leadership was evident in both findings. Another example is that data presented in the themes of school history and identity formation, school mission, authentic actions, leadership, and COVID and social justice *all* permeated the major finding of "challenges and opportunities of race, privilege, and elitism."

To begin, the identities of all three private schools are direct products of historical and geographical determinants. Whether it be urban or rural, the physical location of the school and its access to local resources played a considerable role in how the school has developed over time. The mission and identity of the Metro Boy's Academy is heavily influenced by its urban environment and relationship with the neighborhood in which it presides. Furthermore, participants noted that schools do not operate in historical vacuums – events on a local, regional, and national scale have periodically altered the identities of these institutions in ways that are often acknowledged in the school mission statement and various aspects of school life. The Colonial Academy has an inescapable connection to the American Civil War that has shaped its path as a school ever since.

Secondly, the unique position of head of school directly correlates with the outsized influence the role can have on the identity and ethos of the school. Participants from all three schools identified moments of great historical change at each institution often within the context of the head of school. At the Confluence School, the "Greenfield Years" were often referenced as critically important to the early formation of school

identity. Similar trends were found at Metro Boy's Academy and the Colonial Academy. In most cases, for better or worse, as goes the head of school, so goes the school. This paradigm, predicated on the often expansive responsibilities of the role, is seemingly further accentuated at independent schools.

Thirdly, mission stands at the center of independent schools. All participants stated that the mission is essential to understanding the ways they conduct their roles. At each school, the mission helps guide policymaking within the administration, informs decision making daily, and influences how many members of the community approach their job. The importance of mission at an independent school cannot be overstated. However, the degree to which the mission is ultimately received and emulated by students varies widely from school to school.

Lastly, all participants at all three schools acknowledged the historical reckoning that independent schools face in the 21st century. Some institutions had started the process of reflecting upon and acting on injustices that had occurred at their school while other institutions have only recently initiated these efforts in response to the May 2020 George Floyd murder and the subsequent mass protests against racism in the summer of 2020. At all three schools, confronting racial, social, and economic inequities has become a central component of their strategic plan moving forward and in some cases has become a tenet of their revised mission statement.

Despite the unprecedented challenges of the 2020-2021 academic year, all three schools were able to deliver a mission-based, holistic, albeit modified education to their students. Financial uncertainties, political upheaval, racial reckoning, and public health crises were all addressed with mission in mind, with varied levels of success. While the

2020-2021 academic year presented unique challenges, many of these obstacles will remain for years to come in the world of independent education. As such, there is need to translate these findings into concrete implications and recommendations for those that serve in private education.

Chapter 5: Interpretations, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This chapter discusses how the major findings of this study inform future research and practice in private education. Existing literature in this field is scarce and compounded by long held and often inaccurate assumptions about the state of independent schools. This chapter will first summarize and discuss the major findings of the study, placing them within the context of the scholarly literature, and connect how existing research and the collected qualitative data have implications for both future studies and future practices in independent schools. The research questions and conceptual framework will also be evaluated considering the study's findings. Secondly, this chapter will provide recommendations for members of independent school communities, at both the administrative and faculty level, and educational researchers interested in expanding this narrow field of study.

The initial problems outlined in this study were predicated on conclusions produced from a review of the existing literature in this field. Specifically, the contextual premise of this study was twofold: 1) there is a clear need for scholarship of any type in the field of independent schools – the scholarly literature as it currently exists is insufficient in providing the qualitative and quantitative data necessary to assist independent school leaders and community members in improving the many facets of their institutions and relies on organizations whose mission focuses on perpetuating the benefits of independent school education (i.e., NAIS); and 2) the events and phenomena of the 2020-2021 academic year, from unprecedented public health crises to extreme political and social upheaval, have further exposed the many challenges and opportunities that these schools, who rely directly on tuition and fundraising to function, must face and

simultaneously embrace in the near term to survive. This pair of problems informed the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the subsequent research protocol of the study.

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this research study was to better understand the historical identity of U.S. independent schools and how mission statements at these institutions are embraced and operationalized by members of the school community. To achieve this, the following research questions were developed:

1. How does a school's historical experience shape its mission statement?
2. How does a mission statement inform authentic actions, considering the history of a school and the current context?
    a. How does institutional leadership authentically operationalize a school's mission & identity, if at all?
    b. How do community members contribute to reinforcing school mission and identity, if at all?

Utilizing semi-structured interviews and related documentary data, I observed phenomena related to all aspects of the established research questions, in addition to outcomes in the broader field of private education. I organized these phenomena into five themes: school history and identity formation (*institutionalization)*, school mission, authentic actions (*reinstitutionalization)*, leadership, and recent challenges and opportunities of COVID-19 and social justice. These themes were further distilled into four major findings. These four findings, are all discussed further in this section alongside the existing scholarly literature:

1) the geography and institutional history of private schools are decisive in their trajectory and ultimate identity;
2) during their tenure, a head of school is often the primary determinant of an independent school's ethos and identity;
3) the school mission, as dictated in the mission statement, serves as a pivotal guiding force in the daily operations of the school;
4) in 2021, the greatest challenges and opportunities at independent schools remain centered on the historical and contemporary shortcomings of each institution regarding race, privilege, and elitism.

History and geography as identificatory determinants

Schools, like many organizations and institutions, are products of their respective time and space. Glenn (1988) and Saveth (1988) both outlined in detail how the late 19th and early 20th century, a period of immense economic growth in the United States, created the conditions and demand necessary for the upper class to begin seeking education outside of the national public school system. It was during this period that many of the elite private schools in the United States began to emerge, typically in rural areas and predominantly single-sex and church-related (Saveth, 1988). In particular, and unique to the United States, was an emphasis on educational autonomy (Carpenter and Kafer, 2012), which would allow for independent schools, of both parochial and areligious affiliations, to develop identities outside the influence of state and federal oversight. This process of identity formation because of autonomy and historical circumstance, while not exclusive to independent schools, is certainly central to their definitive characteristics. Selznick (1957) argued that without adaptations "to the existing centers of power", or more colloquially, the ebb and flow of historical events,

organizations retain a "certain bareness" (p. 4). More simply, instead of developing an ethos, organizations fail to adapt and instead remain rational and normative in both philosophy and practice. *Time* allows for an organization to ultimately develop its character and become an institution (*institutionalization*) with a distinct set of habits, norms, rituals, and identities.

The case for history as an identificatory determinant in organizations, specifically within the context of independent schools, was confirmed by the participant interviews in this research study. Guided by the interview protocol, all participants spoke at length about the historical identity of the school and its relevance in modern times. Expectedly, each institution was shaped in unique ways by its own historical circumstance. For example, the Colonial Academy's institutional identity has been inexorably influenced by its connection with antebellum United States history. One participant stated that Colonial's traditions, espoused by the predominantly Southern aristocratic student body, "created who we are." The Confluence School, founded in the early 20th century, was heavily shaped by national conversations started by Godkin, Dewey, and Elliot, who envisioned the independent school as a training ground for the future leaders of government and public life. Without this historical context, the Confluence School's ethos from its origins would not have been so centrally focused on concepts such as "the common good." The Metro Boys Academy, a product of the industrial boom of the late 19th century, envisioned itself as an institution that formed young male leaders, albeit in a format that for many years lent itself to the reproduction of social elitism at the exclusion of most others.

In fact, Gaztambide-Fernández (2009) argued that a defining characteristic of elite independent schools is their distinct history, which was often directly linked to a school's endowment and social connections. Inherent to the time period, these idealizations of a more democratically minded future generation of public servants targeted young men, which explains why most independent, single-sex schools of the late 19th and early 20th century were predominantly all-boys. At most independent schools, the expansion of this educational model to one that was coeducational would largely be delayed until the 1960s and beyond. Given the semi-structured nature of the interview protocol, participants were given the freedom to navigate their school's complex historical narrative, and all participants demonstrated a nuanced knowledge of their institution's history, regardless of the length of their tenure. Additionally, their reflections on their school's past were never entirely positive, and in many cases, deliberately focused on the critical and historically condemnable aspects. Perhaps, this gravitation by participants towards critical perspective represents a contemporary inclination towards more objective reassessment of an organization's values and practices over time. Furthermore, as much as a school's historical record may inform identity, ultimately the present reality and the challenges of today will more immediately impact the implementation of school mission and the process of *reinstitutionalization*.

Geography is equally important as an identificatory determinant at independent schools. Space operates on a macroscopic and microscopic level at private schools and is further accentuated at boarding schools. First, the geographic location of most boarding schools, and many private day schools, is distinctly non-urban. This choice of (at the time) rural campuses was to remove students of the social elite from the "contaminating

aspects of city life, including the dangerous habits and ideas of working-class children" (Levine, 1980). These elitist attitudes are further imbued by the spatial characteristics of the campus itself.

Boarding schools rely on their sprawling campuses to offer the most state-of-the-art comfort and aesthetically compelling physical plant available (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1980; Persell & Cookson, 1985; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009). At most elite boarding schools, where there are expansive athletic fields, natural phenomena such as rivers and woods, and historic buildings attesting to the institution's longevity, space and expenditure is simply not an obstacle to learning as it may be at an urban, public school. As a result, the impact of physical space, from its abundance to its aesthetic, sets the "tone" of elite education (Persell & Cookson, 1985). These observations were also confirmed by participants in the research study. At the Confluence School, faculty noted that the intentional, classical architecture of the original academic and residential buildings, set against the backdrop of New England woods and rivers, accentuated the democratically minded, "living and learning" philosophy of the institution. The Colonial Academy, noted for its residential boarding program that is also situated in proximity to a major urban area, accentuates the blended model of "asylum and safety of an elite private school with the dynamic cosmopolitanism of city life…an intercourse with the wider world" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1980, p. 21). As one participant noted, "Most boarding schools aren't full boarding schools, or even mostly boarding are pretty rural. And we are not at all. We're really central to two different vibrant cities." Conversely, the geography of Metro Boys Academy, which is situated centrally in a major city on the East Coast, has played a significant role in its development as an institution. Specifically, its location

within an affluent neighborhood of that city, as noted by all participants, directly contributed to its long-held reputation as an institution that served the social elite as an "old boys club."

All participants in the research study, from heads of school to faculty, spoke to the origins of their schools and noted the role of historical experience and geography in the development of the school's identity. While this observation may on the surface seem obvious, it does portend the centrality of these traits in how the school operates in the current day. The schools in this study are the way they are today, and resultantly formulate their mission in distinct ways, *because* of their historical and geographical origin. Despite the lack of scholarship in this field, participants confirmed that the unique historical and spatial position of independent schools do indeed impact how they operate as institutions of learning today.

The head of school and authentic leadership

Independent school scholarship repeatedly emphasizes the centrality of the head of school to the daily operations and spirit of the institution (DeKuyper, 2013; Juhel, 2016; Bassett, 2012). This classification is due to the many roles that a head oversees, from the educational program and management of faculty and staff to financial stewardship and collaboration with the board of trustees. This position is also the most outward facing, public role at the school. The style of leadership in heads of school has transformed in recent decades, shifting from that of a pastoral schoolmaster to a technicalist CEO, representing the increasingly bureaucratic nature of private education (Bassett, 2012; Juhel, 2016). Regardless of leadership style, a head of school is often the primary determinant of an independent school's ethos and identity during their tenure at

the institution. McPhee (1966) described independent school heads as "magnanimous despots who—no matter whether they had actually founded the places or not—created enduring schools through their own individual energies, maintained them under absolute rule, and left them forever imprinted with their own personalities" (p. 7). This observation echoes later sentiments shared by Jorgensen (2006) who argued that the independent school and its head become indistinguishable from one another.

This research study explored and confirmed the supposition that the head of school was often the central determinant in a school's identity and ethos. When asked to characterize the history and identity of their school, most participants detailed the founding head of school or other important heads of school that led the institution through important moments in its history. At the Colonial Academy, the current head of school described a former head of school as "the one who established…the foundational elements" and "created the traditions that are still very important." This statement was congruent with those made by the head of school at Confluence School, who stated that the founding head "set a stamp on the school" and without the guidance of a later head of school, "we would not be the school we are today." One faculty member noted that the same head of school had "so much energy about and confidence in his own ideas, [which] was a way to distinguish their time" at Confluence School.

An additional purpose of this research study was to determine how independent school leaders and community members perceive and identify authentic leadership traits in their head of school. Utilizing a list of traits assembled by Orem (2016), president of NAIS, I asked participants to choose one of four traits (being self-aware and genuine, being mission driven with a focus on results, leading with both the heart and the mind,

and focusing on the long term) that they believed was most valuable as an independent school leader as well as provide an example, if available, of when the head of school displayed that trait. This protocol was developed in coordination with Walumba's (2008) categories of authentic leadership. Analyzing leadership through a lens of authenticity is critical as school leadership must emulate a school's mission *authentically* to best embody the espoused values of the school. This in turn will encourage faculty and staff to emulate similar characteristics to the betterment of the institution.

Interestingly, there were no major trends in participant responses when asked to identify a particular trait from the list provided. Most participants agreed that all characteristics were noteworthy and then expanded on one specific trait. Two heads of school noted the need for aspiring independent school leaders to identify a school where their values align with that of the school to better ensure the mission "resonates with your own personal philosophy." One head of school simply stated, "Who's signing on for inauthentic leadership?" As it relates to mission, one head of school also stated, "you have to learn to be authentic about your commitment to what it is that we're doing here." In total, heads of school saw the necessity of maintaining an authentic approach to their leadership, to forward the mission of the school and combat potential cynicism amongst community members. Other participants shared examples of authentic actions, ranging from greater transparency during the COVID-19 pandemic to simply breaking tradition with former heads of school to maintain true to oneself. Simply put, independent school community members value authenticity as a trait, both amongst the faculty and even more importantly, amongst the leadership team. Displaying authentic traits empowers members of the school as well as drives the mission forward in genuine ways.

These findings broadly support research in the field. Specifically, faculty respond positively to leadership that exhibits characteristics of honesty and authenticity (Gray et al., 2015; Moye et al., 2005; Louis, 2007; Eilers and Camacho, 2007) and are more likely to buy in to strategic plans and other mission-related enterprises if a school leader demonstrates a genuine commitment to institutional values (Cabral, Verdasca, & Alves, 2021).

Mission as compass

Given the scarcity of scholarship on independent school mission statements, one purpose of this study was to better understand how mission is actualized in private school settings. Two studies by Boerema (2006, 2009) helped to differentiate language within Canadian independent schools and did not address the complex system of private institutions that exist in the United States. According to Boerema (2006), missions statements serve as outward facing documents that serve to share "ideas and hopes of what they want their school to be…[and] do not indicate the degree to which the statements represent reality" (p. 199). Broader scholarship on the importance of mission statements conclusively states that mission statements are necessary at the organizational and school level. Mission statements collectivize a sense of purpose amongst organization members (Bain et al., 1996; Bart et al., 2001; Darby, 2010; Mullane, 2002) and under the right leadership, promote aspirational values amongst members of the school community, including students (Davis, Ruhe, Lee, and Rajadhyaksha, 2007). Schein's (1984) organizational culture model (see page 70) can be utilized to visualize the layers in which mission is actualized on an independent school campus. Faculty, staff, and other community members tacitly forward the mission through unspoken

beliefs and underlying assumptions. The second tier of the pyramid, labeled stated goals, represents the organization's mission statement. The final level of the pyramid is the most outward facing, and publicly available representations of mission, which can include strategic plans, fundraising and marketing campaigns, and additional public documents.

Participants were unanimous in their appreciation for the mission of their school. Most participants were able to recite portions, or the entirety, of their school mission statement. Furthermore, participants were keen to recognize how they implement the mission in their daily practice and the benefits an authentic school mission can have on the larger school community. One participant at the Metro Boys Academy stated that it was "extremely important for organizations to have mission statements [as] we can use mission statements also to defend decisions that we make." The head of school at Confluence School stated that "if we are going to exist separately from the public school system, which should be the bedrock of our democracy, we better have a damn good reason for it." Participants from all three institutions noted the various formal and informal mechanisms that help to promote mission, from relationships built in the dormitories and on the athletic field to major capital campaigns and the construction of specific academic centers. Heads of school were more likely to speak to the formal aspects of mission being operationalized at the school while faculty were quick to speak about how mission is lived in the classroom and in their auxiliary roles as coaches and dorm parents. With these different interpretations in mind, it was apparent that both institutional leadership and community members find unique ways to both operationalize and reinforce school mission in ways congruent to their roles. Leaders identify broader

strategies to enact missional values while faculty and staff are the workhorses that imbue the mission into the daily operations of the schools. School achievement as it aligns with school mission cannot be done in isolation – both formal and informal mechanisms are necessary.

Given the unique nature of independent schools, in which each school has a distinct declaration of its values, it came as no surprise that faculty and school leaders were drawn to the mission of their school. One faculty member noted that "When you're looking for a job? The first thing you want to know is what's the mission." That said, one participant did identify that mission, while important to most adult members of the school community, may not be as well received by the student body. Students may be aware of the school mission but ultimately their embrace and practice of school values is determined by a variety of factors beyond the scope of this study.

Collectively, participant data were decisive in affirming the utility and need for strong missional values at independent schools. Heads of school and community members also described the importance of the school mission statement in their daily practices. While this sentiment has been widely explored in broader organizational scholarship (Bain et al., 1996; Bart et al., 2001; Darby, 2010; Mullane, 2002), this research study begins to explore a topic that is nearly non-existent in the field of independent education.

Challenges and opportunities of race, privilege, and elitism

As this research study was being developed, the COVID-19 pandemic forced public and private schools across the United States to shift from in-person learning to varying durations of remote and hybrid learning for the 2020-2021 academic year.

Concurrently, the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 and subsequent protests, in addition to the 2020 presidential election and the subsequent failed insurrection at the U.S. Capitol in January 2021, contributed to a seemingly cataclysmic year for educators. As a result, the research design for this study was adapted to identify how independent schools were able to adapt to this "new normal" of political, societal, economic, and biological upheaval. The interview protocol included questions about how each case study school addressed these national issues and whether the school's mission helped in guiding the institution and its leadership through crisis.

Expectedly, participants detailed the various changes to policy and practice that occurred at their school because of the COVID-19 pandemic. These changes included training for remote learning, updated health screening and sanitary practices, overhauling digital infrastructure, converting non-academic services such as fundraising and alumni outreach to online platforms, and altering the daily and annual schedule. One head of school described the 2020-2021 academic year as "the most difficult situation I have ever seen." All participants noted the decline in human interaction and relationship building as one of the most significant impacts that the pandemic wrought on school networks. Faculty and students missed out on "the serendipitous meeting…in the library" that often defines the holistic, on-campus experience of many residential boarding programs. Regarding community, one head of school stated that part of the 2021-2022 academic year would require "very consciously building that fabric back for the faculty and the students."

All participants addressed the variety of social and political unrest that impacted their schools. In particular, racial inequities and social justice were topics that most

faculty and heads of school chose to expand upon. Of course, each institution has its own unique set of historical circumstances and complex challenges when it comes to addressing current and existing inequities. The Colonial Academy's distinct ties to Southern culture and antebellum slavery have created enormous challenges and opportunities for the school to overcome its historical shortcomings and introduce sweeping new policy and practices, including student-led research into the school's past. Metro Boys Academy continues to grapple with its traditional reputation as a school for the urban elite. The Confluence School, in the in the wake of the George Floyd murder has been forced to "address issues about systemic racism and to take a stand." Given that independent schools, and particularly elite boarding schools, have historically been havens for the political and social elite in the United States (Saveth, 1988), the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement and renewed calls for social justice from current and former students have placed private schools under the microscope for their prolonged inaction on these issues. For a longtime faculty at Colonal Academy, the 2020-2021 academic year was the time to "rip off the band-aid."

Independent schools do not exist in a political, social, or cultural vacuum. The events of the day have significant impact on the operations of private schools. However, participants in this study, many of whom have been in education for decades, remarked on the nature of the 2020-2021 academic year and how the many diverse and complex events presented unprecedented strain on the health of their institutions. When this study was first problematized in 2018, the notion of independent schools facing an existential crisis seemed appropriate, even three years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, national protests, and political violence. Clearly, as evidenced by scholarship and participants

alike, the issues at the forefront of education in 2021, many of which are seemingly novel, are not disappearing anytime soon.

Implications and Recommendations

The data collected for this research study demonstrate the significance and complexity of history, mission, and identity at independent schools and the ways in which community and leadership can authentically operationalize those traits and values. At a moment of great disruption in education, independent schools must adhere to the visions and ideals that define their institutions. Glenn (1998) argued that independent schools are in fact most vulnerable to emergent internal and external phenomena, and those that lose "[the] nerve and conviction about their educational mission" (p. 441) are likely to fail. In the near term, the ripple effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which upended education in the 2020-2021 academic year, appear to be long lasting. The economic impacts of the pandemic, while acute in the short term, may permeate independent school families for years, much like the decade-long impact of the 2008 financial crisis. This fallout will impact leadership decisions at some independent schools for many years. Additionally, the lost time on campus and in the classroom will also influence the pedagogical and developmental nature of education for the foreseeable future. Generations of students and teachers have experienced, in the words of one head of school, "something that we didn't train for, that we didn't ask for, and we didn't really know how to negotiate."

The purpose of this section is to outline implications and explore recommendations based on the existing scholarly literature, the research conducted for this study, and the perspective of the researcher. Several recommendations can be drawn from the research data to assist members of the independent school world in how to best

understand, formulate, and deliver mission-based education. Constituents include those who work at independent schools, notably faculty, as well as school leaders such as heads of school and other administrators. Additionally, while educational policy varies in private education, this research can also be instructive to regional and national associations such as the NAIS in communicating broader guidance to its member schools. Lastly, given the significant gaps that currently exist in independent school literature, additional educational research is needed in the various subsections of this study.

Practice and Policy

Practitioners and policymakers in independent schools are varied, ranging from the faculty and staff who maintain the school to the heads of school and boards of trustees that formulate strategy and implement programming. Operating outside of individual schools are organizations that serve as guiding forces in the field of private education in addition to providing accreditation and other consulting services. These organizations, such as NAIS, offer regulatory policy recommendations most akin to their local, state, and federal counterparts in public education. This study has broad implications for institutional policies and practices at independent schools.

First, it is important to reassess the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that formed the epistemological and structural foundation of this research study. From the start, this study has been unapologetically historical in scope. As stated in the subjectivity statement (p. 85), my interests in the study and teaching of history significantly influenced the format of this study. As such, the theoretical framework for this study drew heavily from Mishler (1979), who argued that context is ultimately critical to accurately deriving meaning from human phenomena. Rather than remove

context, this study was immersed in it, dissecting unique historical circumstances at each school to better understand its people and paradigms today. The results of this study uphold the theoretical framework. When studying independent schools, it is critical, and even necessary, to contextualize each institution. No two independent schools are the same, given their historical and geographical circumstances. Therefore, any holistic assessment of these types of institutions should consider their broader historical experience as a component of the study. It is for this reason that introductory remarks for each school provided overarching narrative descriptions of each school's campus, ranging from its buildings to its daily rituals. Every minor detail contributes to the school's historical and contemporary portrait.

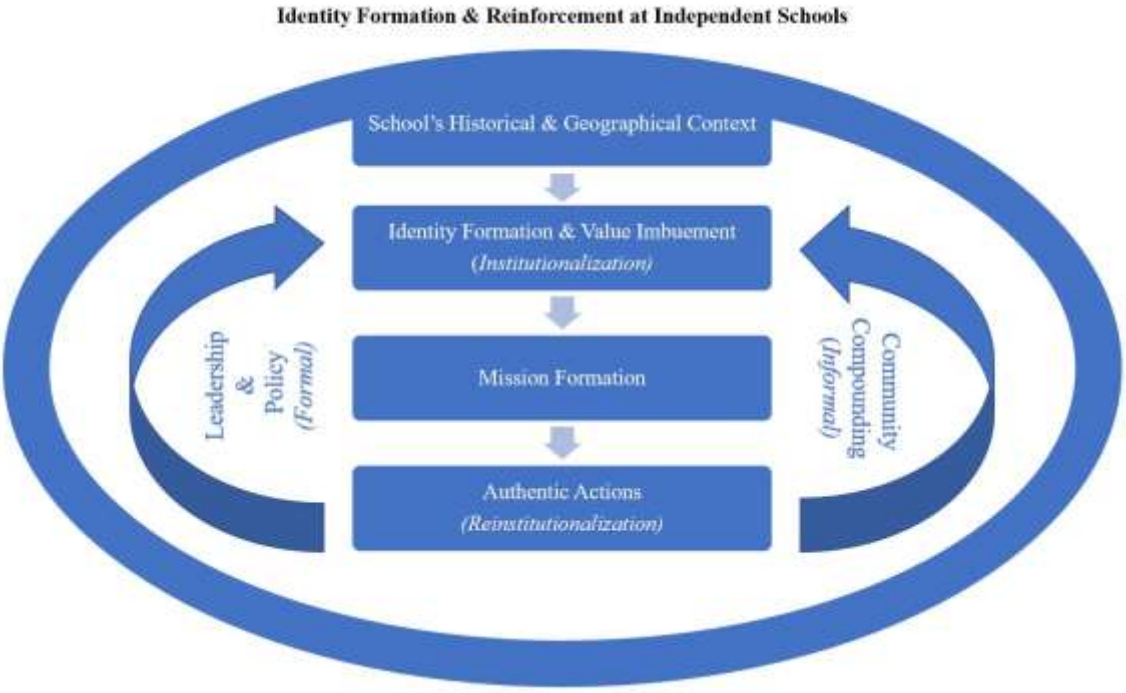
As such, future studies should also recognize the increasingly collaborative nature of independent school policies at the national level; despite their proud autonomy, many independent schools subscribe to national organizations such as NAIS, that utilize their platform to highlight shared histories, shared philosophies, and shared practices that transcend individual institutions and formulate a national shared identity for independent schools.

Regarding the observational nature of the study, Schein's (1984) organizational culture model (see figure 1) offered insight into the discernability of these phenomena, arguing that culture exists in multiple stages or layers of visibility, ranging from unspoken beliefs and tacit assumptions to more externally facing and formalized assertions of identities and values. This model was effective during the coding process in helping categorize and understand the various ways that mission and larger school culture is lived out on a day to day basis at private schools.

This grounding helped establish a conceptual framework (see figure 2) that demonstrated the following process: historical experience informs how schools develop their identity and mission, which is ultimately actualized in formal and informal ways by leadership and the community at large. This is an iterative process that occurs intentionally and unintentionally, seen and unseen, throughout the course of a school's existence. The conceptual framework also informed the interview protocol as questions were organized around the steps in the process. Participant data confirmed that the conceptual framework accurately represented the sequential nature of mission formation and implementation.

However, the data also highlighted a need to reassess the conceptual framework regarding the position of the school's historical context. In the original figure, the iterative process loops back to identity formation and value imbuement, which does not accurately portray the pervasive nature of the school's historical experience, which although often relegated to much earlier periods of an institution's past, should also include more contemporary and relevant periods of the school's context. Simply put, a school's historical and geographical context is ongoing, encompassing, and even contemporary and as a result directly contributes to the formation of school mission *after* the first mission statement was formed, as reflected in the revised conceptual framework (see figure 4).

Figure 4



As visualized in the revised framework, the school's historical and geographical context, both of which were identified as major findings in the participant data, are now accurately portrayed as being a more pervasive force in the process of identity formation and reinforcement at independent schools. For example, Metro Boys Academy's first mission statement was created in 1990 and drew upon its first hundred years of historical context. However, in the time since MBA formulated its first mission statement, the school has adopted several new mission statements, to depict the vision and values of the school more accurately, the most recent modification being in 2018. As such, this conceptual framework would now accurately portray how the school's historical and geographical context, as noted by an alumnus, has evolved in the thirty years since the school's mission statement was first published, continues to impact how identity and values are shaped. Furthermore, authentic actions, which represent contemporary

community engagement that can entrench or reorient values, are compounding in nature – meaning newly established rituals and traditions entrench themselves over time - and contribute to the iterative process of identity formation. Authentic actions, by leadership and community, represent the contemporary lived experience of the school, and are ultimately still part of the broader historical and geographical context of the institution. These are now accurately reflected in the updated conceptual framework.

One central objective of this study was to explore how independent schools can reassert their unique autonomous conditions, to not only overcome the external challenges of 21st century education but in fact thrive *because* of these obstacles. One head of school noted that the institutional flexibility of private schools allowed for them to forward their educational mission with greater fluidity than their public counterparts during the most perilous moments of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, with such broad independence, these institutions can design programming and curriculum to best address issues of racial and social equity on their campuses that is uniquely catered to their school community. Within this framework, the concept of school improvement can be adapted to fit an independent school context with independent school measurements: the lack of standardized achievements scores at private schools can be instead reoriented to represent a more holistic and multi-categorical assessment of student success. Looking ahead, independent schools should capitalize on their alternative and institution-specific definitions of student achievement, and leave the singularly focused quantitative achievement scores to the public school space.

Faculty. Expectedly, participant data revealed that school identity and mission are most often embodied and delivered daily through the actions of a school's teaching

faculty. Faculty at independent schools prioritize a school's mission, even as they are identifying the ideal school for employment. As stated by one faculty member, "When you're looking for a job? The first thing you want to know is what's the mission." Faculty participants in this study, regardless of their length of tenure, identified school mission as being central to their daily practice. Boarding school faculty accentuated how mission also guides their practices in roles beyond the classroom, such as in athletics and in the dormitories. These informal embodiments of mission are understood, embraced, and implemented by faculty at private schools.

Furthermore, faculty expect school leadership to similarly prioritize mission in their actions. Participants noted repeatedly that authentic leadership stems from a leader's ability to be true to oneself and be true to the ethos and identity of the school. Authentic displays of compassion by heads of school constituted effective leadership in the eyes of faculty who recognized such traits as "symbolic moment[s] of respect [from] teachers." Conversely, in moments of confusion, such as the summer of 2020 when schools were making critical decisions regarding COVID-19 and the reopening of schools, faculty also recognized when leadership was not transparent and instead acted in "the self-interest of the school as a business" rather than prioritizing the community.

Lastly, the social and political climate of the 2020-2021 academic year reoriented many faculty's perspectives on their role and the school's role in addressing systemic injustices. Long time faculty at independent schools expressed their shifts in attitudes towards the responsibility of private education in combating racism at their schools. In the words of one faculty, these issues were "something I dismissed two years ago. And in June [2020] completely flipped." Another faculty stressed that "with everything that's

been going on, in the divisive nature and state of our country, I feel like [mission]'s been a really good thing to lean on." For many participants, the chaotic nature of the 2020-2021 academic year contributed to a realignment in values at both a personal and institutional level.

The implications of these findings for independent school faculty coalesce around the importance of genuine and firmly held institutional beliefs. Faculty prioritize school mission and seek out schools where the mission also alludes to or directly addresses elements of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Furthermore, faculty expect school leadership to display components of authentic leadership in their practices and respond positively to it when it is well executed.

Faculty also serve on the front lines of an institution and act as the most direct embodiment and application of a school's mission daily. Without faculty, the informal branch of mission application and community compounding does not exist and as a result, the mission is ultimately meaningless. As such, the informal application of mission does not occur without the independence granted to individual faculty members. Independent schools have succeeded when appropriately balancing administrative oversight with intentional autonomous space. One faculty member at MBA noted that training during the summer of 2020 to address remote teaching for the following year was exhaustive but ultimately necessary to allow teachers to then navigate their digital classrooms independently in the fall. Therefore, the most effective, mission-based schools should continue to grant flexibility and independence to faculty so that they can embrace missional values and implement them in ways that are unique to their teaching practice. That delicate balance helps create, as one faculty stated, "the special sauce" that

makes independent schools uniquely effective in the currently calamitous landscape of education. However, delivering on that unique combination of autonomy and mission does not occur without intentional commitments by school leadership to build trust amongst their community. This only happens with transparency and collaboration between those in decision-making roles and those who live out this mission most prominently in their roles in the community.

Much like previous conversations on student achievement scores, faculty evaluation and accountability remain topics of interest for independent schools moving forward as well. The expanded autonomy granted to faculty and other community members is undoubtedly a unique strength of private education. However, many schools lack the regulatory tools to best assess and affirm their faculty. Specifically, schools should regularly reassess their faculty evaluation procedures and identify methods to measure faculty embodiment of mission. By creating benchmarks for how community members can best live out the school mission, school can better guarantee that the guiding missional values are present at all levels of school life.

School Leadership. As previously mentioned, school leadership is expected to outwardly project elements of school mission to constituents within the independent school community. Participants and heads of school noted that the most effective and authentic leaders are those that can ignore external influences, be themselves and gain the trust of others, and enact positive change in ways that are congruent with the school's mission statement. Furthermore, one major finding suggests that the head of school has an increasingly outsized role in defining the identity of the institution during their tenure as school leader. The head of school is the most public figure at a school and in their

many capacities, sets the strategic priorities for the school during and well after their time in leadership. Recognition of that significant historical impact can guide heads of school towards making decisions that are grounded in the school's mission and contextualized within the broader framework of the school's history.

This emergent paradigm also allows for a broader conversation about the actual versus perceived autonomy of independent school leaders. On one hand, independent schools and their leaders benefit from structural autonomy – these institutions exist on the predication that they do not adhere to the same local, state, and federal regulations of their public school counterparts. While independent school leaders may escape certain levels of external accountability, they do inherently face internal constraints in the form of institutional tradition and norms. Simply stated, upon entrance to their new place of employment, a head of school still must operate within an existing framework of history, values, practices. Even if hired as an agent of change, the head of school must adhere to internal customs that preceded their arrival. As such, future studies of independent school leaders should wrestle with the concept of headship autonomy. Perhaps with accrued tenure, heads will be able to chart the course of the school and its mission more dynamically; however, regardless of tenure, no head of school can completely ignore the school culture that predated them. For these reasons, future studies should also dig deeper into the relationship between autonomy, authenticity, and headship tenure. As the data showed, heads of school pursued schools that aligned with their own values, allowing for more seamless headship transitions and perceivably, more successful tenures as head of school. Given the likelihood of significant headship turnover in the coming

years, researchers should focus on these issues so that schools can be better informed when hiring new leaders.

Participant data also highlighted the complex dynamics of independent school governance, specifically addressing the relationship between the head of school and the board of trustees. The role of head of school has evolved significantly over the last fifty years, becoming increasingly bureaucratic and prioritizing executive leadership over pastoral headship. Inherent in those responsibilities is collaboration between the head of school and the board of trustees. As evidenced by Juhel (2016) and confirmed by data in this study, heads of school need to delicately balance their autonomy as school leader with their expectations as stated by external school governance structures.

These dynamics also have implications for the process by which mission is reviewed and modified. School mission statements are often created and revised without intentional timelines. While some schools schedule a review of their mission statement to coincide with reaccreditation cycles, many schools simply do not have a plan for when it is appropriate to reconsider verbiage and values in their mission statement. Moving forward, school leadership should prioritize a regular and comprehensive review of the school's mission statement and related school philosophy documents, even if the purpose is simply to affirm the existing statement.

Associations. Today, regional and national independent school associations constitute the closest semblance of oversight for private educational institutions, with the largest and most influential being NAIS, or the National Association of Independent Schools. Upon its foundation, the goal of NAIS was to create a centralized space for discussions surrounding independent schools and their role in the educative landscape of

the United States (Esty, 1992). Inherent in this discussion was the belief that independent schools, despite their celebrated autonomy, were inexorably linked to the fate of their public counterparts, and that public policy helps to shape practices in private institutions as well. As stated by Cary Potter, the first president of NAIS, in 1969: "The independent school, like other kinds of nonpublic schools, may be nonpublic in control, but its fundamentally public role with public responsibility, which it has always had, but not always recognized, is becoming clearer every day" (Esty, 1992).

At the heart of this study has been the discussion of the future of independent schools and their ability to maneuver the many crises of the 21st century. Participants, while aware of NAIS and other regional associations, rarely mentioned how these organizations impact their daily work. This lack of recognition of outside organizations speaks to the need for greater input and guidance from national and regional associations. Given the multitude of crises facing private education today, independent schools should prioritize collaboration with NAIS so that there is a more collective, cohesive approach to grappling with COVID-19, polarized political discourse, financial instability, and most importantly, social justice initiatives. While independent schools value autonomy and minimal regulation, NAIS and its counterparts serve as invaluable resources and mediums for communication between often disconnected schools.

Additionally, local, regional, and national organizations such as NAIS can better serve as programmatic and financial advocates of research in the field of independent schools. As this study has noted, independent school scholarship remains miserably insufficient in addressing what have been empirically recognized as the most important issues facing private schools today. While independent schools can individually finance

graduate degrees for faculty and staff in various fields, organizations such as NAIS have the purse and persuasion to make independent school scholarship a strategic priority for its many member schools. With greater urgency given to aspiring independent school leaders, or simply, independent school scholars, private schools can more proactively address the challenges of the 21st century with decisions grounded in empirical research.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Social Justice. Review of school mission and identity is particularly important given the circumstances of the 2020-2021 academic year. The various social, political, and economic upheaval caused and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic accelerates the need for all private institutions to meaningfully reexamine their mission statements and espoused school identity. This process, which starts with the head of school, should involve multiple community stakeholders, and prioritize critical introspection as it pertains to the school's established historical identity and its relationship to race and social justice. Only by asking difficult questions about an institution's history can many independent schools redemptively address the issues that have plagued them for decades.

Expanded institutional conversations about racial and social equity also complicate this study's interpretation and categorization of informal and formal embodiment of mission and values. Specifically, this study sought to identify the relationship between institutional history and the overarching components of culture and ethos at three separate independent schools. That said, the narratives that emerged from participant data more accurately represent the majority of stakeholders at these schools, and the experiences of those who align more closely with the predominant culture of the school. Simply stated, how do the formal school mission and the informal embodiments

of that mission resonate with non-majority community members? For example, how do non-white students at Colonial Academy, students receiving financial aid at Metro Boys Academy, or teachers of color at the Confluence School contribute to, or more importantly, provide a counternarrative of, the culture of the majority at these institutions? Moving forward, private schools who embrace the dynamically shifting social, cultural, and racial landscape of the United States must explore, recognize, and ultimately more authentically integrate voices, attitudes, and beliefs of community members that were and continue to be historically marginalized or excluded from formal and informal elements of their school's identity.

These challenges and opportunities regarding social justice present the greatest competitive advantage and areas for growth at independent schools. Unlike public schools, that are often unfortunately constrained by the geographic proximity of their student body, many private schools can capitalize on recruiting a more diverse student and faculty population. Given their expanded financial resources, that are often directly linked to financial aid and expanding student access, private schools can be at the forefront of creating schools that best represent the demographic makeup of the United States.

Independent schools should approach their diversity and social justice work with formal and informal objectives in mind. Formally, all independent schools should create a full-time position for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Data suggests there is still a lot of work to do. As of 2019, 54% of NAIS member schools reported that their diversity leader also served in other roles at the school, namely as a teaching faculty member (NAIS, 2019). A large majority (71%) reported that their role was "imprecisely defined"

and a majority (54%) indicated that their school did not have a diversity strategic plan (NAIS, 2019). These numbers suggest that more formal work in this area is paramount. Independent schools, as mission-driven institutions, are also value-based institutions, and therefore have an ethical and moral imperative to better their practices around diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice. Informally, diversity work is critical to healthy and equitable daily operations of a school. All community members should be given the resources and training to best understand how to expand social justice in ways that directly align with their missional values.

Research

The findings of this study, while compelling, also demonstrate the need for further exploration in a variety of areas in independent schools. The problems facing independent schools, while exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, will continue well after its diminution. As such, research that continues to explore independent schools and provide recommendations for school leaders and community members will prove to be vital in the future.

Due to logistical restraints, this qualitative research study utilized video interviews, alongside limited public documents, to compile data. This study also focused on two participant categories: heads of school and faculty/staff. Future research in independent schools can certainly be expanded in a variety of areas to broaden the application and utility of scholarship. First, when available, qualitative studies should be conducted on independent school campuses so that the researcher, in the style popularized by Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983), can engage in prolonged and embedded observations of the school. This will allow for holistic assessments of the research

phenomena that simply cannot be collected over Zoom. This again includes a more detailed investigation into the relationship between various community members and those in leadership. Additionally, similar studies should also seek out commentary from auxiliary members of independent school communities that can offer even broader assessments of history, identity, mission, and leadership. These participant groups include parents, alumni, and members of the board of trustees. In addition to participant interview data, future studies should also explore documentary data, and specifically internally facing documents that are typically inaccessible to community outsiders. Due to issues surrounding transparency, independent schools limit the visibility of detailed strategic planning and school philosophy documents, often offering a simplified version for public consumption. Analyzing these documents in orchestration with participant interview data would allow for even more complex interpretations of school mission and how it is operationalized in accordance with the strategic plan.

Furthermore, one voice missing from this study is arguably the most important when assessing the centrality and efficacy of school mission: the student. Even within the limits of this study, one faculty commented that the broad and aspirational nature of their school's mission, when applied to their community work program, did not resonate with students. In fact, this same faculty member indicated that when discussing mission, their students often struggled to see the forest for the trees. Future studies should focus on the student experience at independent schools and capitalize on the voices of both current students and alumni to determine if the school mission statement reverberated during their time at the institution or if it gained or lost importance in the time after

graduation. Regardless, incorporating more student data into a field already lacking broader data will only benefit studies of independent schools.

One constant challenge for researchers in independent school scholarship is the lack of quantitative data. Independent schools do not conduct external standardized assessments like their public counterparts, and few rarely conduct internal measurements of student academic proficiency. While private schools have improved in tracking certain internal metrics, there is still a clear and intentional dearth of collective data. Organizations such as NAIS provide member school data but ultimately, there is a desperate need for macro-level data collection of independent schools in the United States. Understanding private schools at a national level will help in ultimately recommending policy that will better align certain practices.

Lastly, as it pertains to an institution's history and identity, individual schools must prioritize the collection, preservation, and study of their past. This study has demonstrated the importance of institutional history in shaping current missional values. Therefore, each school would benefit from critically researching their story, and providing faculty and students the opportunity to be active in this process. Promoting this practice would not only instill school pride and critical inquiry amongst community members but it would also encourage scholarly research at the school level, which is an important and necessary start.

Conclusion

In 2018, the impetus for this research study was to explore the intersection of history, identity, and mission at independent schools at a time when these types of institutions faced a supposed existential crossroads. This paradigm was predicated on the assumption that many independent schools, boasting decades or even centuries of

institutional history, needed to reassess and reassert their values to remain relevant in a rapidly shifting 21st century educational landscape. Fortuitously, during the research, events of historical magnitude, with implications that remain yet in motion and yet unknown, pushed back, extending the scope of this study even further into areas previously ignored, overlooked, or unforeseen. If anything, the guiding epistemological beliefs of this study continue to reverberate at its end. When addressing the great crises of our time, context does matter. The independent schools of today and tomorrow will need to understand and reckon with decisions that were made yesterday and even one hundred years ago. To survive, successful schools and successful leaders will recognize that the past can indeed inform the present. If authentically managed, tradition can mix with innovation without sacrificing values or mission to ultimately address the greatest challenges of our time. It will be in this negotiated space, where a mixture of past and present practices can best inform future success.

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