Leadership Development in Independent Schools:
A Needs Assessment and Recommendations for the Connecticut Association of Independent Schools

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Capstone Project

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Executive Summary

I worked with the Connecticut Association of Independent Schools (CAIS) to determine the leadership development needs of CAIS member schools and make informed recommendations for programming to help member schools address those needs. CAIS is a voluntary membership association of approximately 90 nonprofit K-12 independent schools in the state of Connecticut. A tenet of CAIS' mission is to help schools access collective wisdom and resources to inform their continued pursuit of excellence, which it accomplishes primarily through professional learning workshops and annual conferences. Given an increasingly volatile landscape for independent schools over the last decade, CAIS recognizes the need to assist member schools with the retention and development of prospective leaders (NAIS Research, 2021).

In this project, I sought to understand the alignment between the current leadership development practices and the future leadership needs of CAIS member schools. I also sought to understand what aspiring CAIS school leaders need in order to develop their practice of leadership. I developed three research questions to drive this inquiry:

(1) To what extent do leaders at CAIS member schools perceive that current leadership development activities are sufficient to support the future leadership needs of their schools?

(2) *2a.* What do CAIS member school leaders point to as the opportunities to learn that are instrumental to developing as an independent school leader?
2b. What conditions enabled these leadership development opportunities to become affordances for learning?

(3) To what extent do leaders perceive that there are sufficient affordances for learning available for independent school employees to develop as leaders?

I conducted a survey of CAIS member school heads and interviewed seven current CAIS school administrators. I analyzed the data using the conceptual framework of opportunities to learn as affordances for learning (Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008).

I found that CAIS schools have seen high turnover in the headship position in the past ten years and will likely continue to see more in the next five years. Current leaders do not think that their schools' efforts are sufficient for identifying and preparing successors to senior leadership positions. The school leaders I interviewed identified on-the-job learning experiences as the most important opportunities for developing their participation in, and practice of, leadership. Because these opportunities to learn often came through sponsorship, after an employee's potential or expertise was recognized by a senior leader with authority, the school leaders were concerned about the equity and inclusivity of this approach. School leaders also explained that opportunities to expand their perspective on school operations, as well as a practice of self-reflection, were important to their development as leaders.

From these findings, I recommend that CAIS:

(1) Plan their next Annual Conference on Governance for school board members, heads of school, and other senior leaders on the theme of succession planning and talent development. CAIS would need to identify a keynote speaker and plan a day of workshops with experts in independent school succession planning and talent development. I also recommend that CAIS prepare a deliverable for participants to be included with the conference registration fee, which would include specific recommendations by school type as well as samples of written succession plans.

(2) Develop an annual self-study process in which schools can participate that is modeled on the existing CAIS decennial accreditation self-study process. In a self-study, schools assess their own alignment with standards on all school operations, ranging from governance to programs to health & safety, and are given feedback by a visiting committee of employees from other CAIS member schools. Self-studies involve all school employees and provide opportunities for employees to participate in leadership practices by chairing standards committees or serving on visiting committees. Therefore, an annual rather than decennial self-study process will allow more school employees the opportunity to widen their understanding of school operations and develop their leadership practice. The annual self-study would not be a requirement for continued accreditation, but rather an evidence-based practice recommended but not required for schools.

(3) Develop a 'train-the-trainer'-style immersive summer workshop, with ongoing cohort-based meetings throughout one academic year, to prepare school leaders to foster equity-focused mentoring cultures in their schools. Equity-focused mentoring programs are built on the tenets that: (1) mentoring relationships are partnerships in which differences are viewed as assets; (2) mentoring relationships are mutually beneficial; and (3) mentoring is not restricted to just one relationship, but rather involves multiple levels or networks of partnerships (Endo, 2020). This kind of mentoring culture relies on a foundation of individual self-reflection, so the immersive workshop would enable school leaders to reflect on identity and unconscious bias as well as develop culturally competent coaching skills (Endo, 2020). The goal would be for school leaders trained at the CAIS summer workshop to also practice facilitation skills to be able to bring similar workshop experiences back to their school communities.

The primary limitation for CAIS to make use of these recommendations is a resource limitation of time, money, and human power, as each recommendation requires some amount of further inquiry, research, and design to implement.

Introduction

The Connecticut Association of Independent Schools (CAIS) delivers on its mission by offering relevant professional development programming for member schools. CAIS offers workshops, workshop series, and annual conferences in order to connect and share best practices with member school teachers, administrators, and students in each area of independent school life. One of those areas is school leadership. Given an increasingly volatile landscape for independent schools over the last decade, the CAIS leadership recognizes the need to assist member schools with the retention and development of prospective leaders (NAIS Research, 2021). The purpose of this study is to investigate the leadership development needs of CAIS member schools and make informed recommendations to CAIS for professional development programming. This study will focus on aligning member schools' needs with evidence-based practice in leadership development to inform the recommendations for a mission-aligned CAIS program.

As in all research, it is helpful for the reader to understand how my positions and experiences might contribute to my interpretations of the data (Darwin Holmes, 2020). I am a white, cisgender, female, heterosexual scholar with professional experience in independent school academic leadership. For the ten years prior to conducting this study, I have worked at a CAIS member school in positions of increasing leadership responsibility, from teacher to assistant head of school for academic affairs. I have not previously worked with CAIS except as a participant in CAIS professional development programming. The topic that is the focus of this research was born out of conversations in the fall of 2020 with CAIS leadership about areas of mutual interest. While the CAIS leadership expressed concerns about leader preparation and retention to support school sustainability across the CAIS membership, I bring the lens of having experienced many of the existing mechanisms by which independent school leaders in Connecticut are developed. In my role as a researcher and my role as a professional, questions of school sustainability and leadership development are never far from my mind.

In this project, I will use information from CAIS and the National Association for Independent Schools (NAIS) to provide background on the context and climate for this area of inquiry. I will conduct a literature review drawing on nonprofit sector research and independent school leadership research in order to explore issues pertaining to the leadership development pipeline. Through the literature review, I will identify gaps that may be present between leadership development needs and current practices in independent schools. I will use the literature review to synthesize a conceptual framework that informs the subsequent research questions, data collection, and analysis. I will collect data by conducting a survey of CAIS member school heads and interviews with current CAIS school leaders at different levels. I will analyze the data through the lens of the conceptual framework in order to produce a summary of findings. I will use the findings from this study to make informed recommendations to CAIS for professional development programming to support independent school leadership development.

Organizational Context

In the United States, independent schools are a subset of private schools. Private schools may be operated by for-profit companies, churches, dioceses, or other non-governmental organizations. Independent schools are nonprofit private schools that are independent in philosophy and each driven by a unique mission (National Association of Independent Schools, 2020). Independent schools are governed by boards of trustees and are sustained financially through tuition payments and charitable contributions. They are subject to state-level accreditation policies and are accredited by state-approved bodies (National Association of Independent Schools, 2020). Most independent schools participate in nonprofit membership associations at the local, state, and national levels. Through these associations, member schools contribute to the broader conversation about independent education in the United States, access collective wisdom and resources to inform individual school growth, and engage in collective action. Sometimes these associations also act as accrediting bodies at the state level.

CAIS is a voluntary association of approximately 90 nonprofit independent schools in the state of Connecticut. The association serves as an accrediting body for K-8 schools and brings professional development events to teachers, administrators, trustees, and students of all member schools. CAIS was founded in 1950 and is governed by a Board of Directors elected by and from the membership. CAIS operates with a small staff of five full-time employees and over 100 volunteers from member schools. The mission of CAIS is to "serve both independent education and the children and families of Connecticut" by fostering freedom of choice in education, providing leadership and support to member schools in their continued growth, fostering professional collaboration both between schools and with external organizations and the public sphere, and providing services and professional development opportunities that are aligned with evidence-based practice for each aspect of independent school life (Connecticut Association of Independent Schools, 2020).

In the fall of 2020, I interviewed the executive director and the director of professional learning at CAIS to better understand the work of the association. It is their aim to support Connecticut independent schools such that when a school identifies an area of need, they can turn to CAIS for research and design ideas instead of having to contract a consulting firm. They view professional learning programming as the primary means for accomplishing this aim. It is through programming that schools can access the expertise gathered by CAIS and see the Association as a relevant and reliable resource to support their growth. Program offerings are developed by the small full-time staff along with five commissions comprised of volunteers from member schools. The staff and commissions work together to decide on, plan, and implement one-off workshops as well as six annual conferences.

The CAIS leaders I interviewed recognize that the current landscape of independent school education has increased the need for more prepared leaders and leader retention efforts. The CAIS executive director believes that effective organizational leadership is a learned skill rather than an

inherent character trait. Therefore, CAIS is seeking design recommendations for a program to address member schools' leadership development needs for early career professionals and/or mid-level administrators.

Area of Inquiry

The focus of this project is to better understand how CAIS independent schools identify and develop prospective leaders and whether those efforts are sufficient to support school growth. Recent literature from the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) has identified an increasingly challenging landscape for independent schools and increasing demands on school leaders that are contributing to high leadership turnover (NAIS Research, 2021). NAIS has identified two compounding threats that leave the future uncertain for independent school leaders: (1) the shifting and shrinking independent school market since the 2007-2009 recession; and (2) the economic and existential threat brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

After the 2007-2009 recession, the demand for independent schools decreased and schools faced an enrollment crisis and an increased need for financial aid. To compensate, schools began to increase their acceptance rates and rely more heavily on international students, particularly Chinese nationals, for net tuition revenue (Corbett & Torres, 2020). By 2017, Chinese students represented 50% of the international student population studying at independent schools in the United States. The outlook for continued enrollment of both international and domestic students is troubling, given the political and economic climate in 2020. The growth rate in international enrollments has been decelerating since 2012, as visa restrictions, perceived xenophobia by international families, and increased competition from other countries has made it less desirable to attend school in the United States. Domestic enrollments are threatened by both demographic and economic shifts, as millennial families are both smaller and less financially secure than previous generations (Corbett & Torres, 2020).

Most independent schools in Connecticut, especially smaller K-8 schools, are tuition-dependent, meaning that more than 60% of the school's revenue comes from tuition rather than gifts or endowment income (Shewey, 2019). The schools lack the large endowments that help some nonprofit schools weather enrollment crises. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the troubling trends of the last decade, increasing the financial pressure on schools as international families pull their students out of US independent schools and domestic families face a recession anew (Corbett & Torres, 2020; Torres, 2021). Independent school leaders are attempting to weather the crisis with redoubled retention and enrollment efforts. They are doing this while simultaneously facing existential financial considerations, including the tightening of budgets, pay freezes, constant threat of litigation, and the need to develop new tuition and financial aid strategies to be prepared for an uncertain future (Juhel, 2016).

These compounding threats have been challenging for independent school leaders, shortening headship tenure. Even before the COVID-19 crisis, the average tenure of a sitting independent school head nationwide had declined every year since 2010-2011, when it was nine years, to 2019-2020, when it was seven years (Balzano & Rowe, 2020). The CAIS director of professional learning fears a further exodus of leadership in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, at a time when

independent schools need stable leadership to carry out new strategies for school sustainability. In this climate, the CAIS leadership recognizes the need to assist member schools with the retention and development of prospective leaders in order to support continued school growth. Therefore, CAIS seeks to better understand the current state of leadership development and leader retention at member schools so as to design an effective program that will fill any identified needs and support the future stability of leadership in Connecticut independent schools.

Literature Review

There is a growing body of literature on independent school leadership, but limited research on the specific questions of leadership development practices, succession planning, or prospective leader retention in independent schools (Cole, 2010). Existing peer-reviewed literature explores related topics including the relationship between the board of trustees and head of school, leadership skills of school heads, representation in the headship position, and headship transitions (Schuermann and McGovern, 2016). Recent doctoral research in independent school leadership explores the leadership practices of school heads and the intersection of race and gender with headship (Barnett, 2019; Bertin, 2016; Clouser, 2018; Gaudi, 2015; Feibelman, 2013; Gueye, 2016; Odell, 2020; Ostos 2010; Shrimpton, 2009; Smith, 2019).

This body of literature on headship allowed me to conceptualize independent schools as a particular type of nonprofit organization, with leadership pressures and practices like those in other nonprofit sector organizations. Independent schools follow the nonprofit model of having no "generally accepted, formal preparation route" for leadership and no "generally recognized credential requirements" as might exist for aspiring public school leaders (Aitken, 1991, p. 23; Ring, 2015). Therefore, in seeking out literature on leadership development practices, I broadened my search to include the nonprofit sector. In this literature review, I seek to understand four areas of inquiry in the nonprofit sector broadly and the independent school sector specifically, where that research exists. These four areas include

- Executive turnover (*to what extent are independent schools likely to face a leadership exodus and why?*);
- Succession planning and leadership development (*what are independent schools doing to prepare for leadership turnover?*);
- The leadership development deficit (*to what extent are aspiring leaders identified and provided with leadership development opportunities within their organizations?*);
- Existing leadership development programs for independent school leaders (*what opportunities currently exist for prospective independent school leaders to develop their leadership practice?*).

Executive turnover

Numerous studies point to the need for executive succession planning in the nonprofit sector, with high levels of top executive turnover expected as baby boomers continue to retire (Carman et al., 2010; Cornelius et al., 2011; Tierney, 2006). Recent data suggests that job losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated this concern by leading to a bump in boomer retirement, which had been growing annually by about 2 million additional retirements each year since 2011 but grew by 3.2 million in 2020 (Fry, 2020). In addition, given a changing nonprofit landscape, nonprofits face specific challenges in keeping their senior leaders, defined here as the executive director and those reporting directly to him or her. The nonprofit workforce is undergoing professionalization brought on by pressures to operate in more instrumental, businesslike ways given scarce financial resources

and accountability demands (Stewart & Kuenzi, 2018). Facing increasing efficiency pressures and performance evaluations, nonprofit leaders may leave their positions for work in governance, consulting, government, or business (Froelich et al., 2011; Stewart & Kuenzi, 2018; Tierney, 2006). In the 2011 *Daring to Lead* report produced by CompassPoint and the Meyer Foundation just after the last recession, Cornelius et al. report that 67% of executive directors anticipated leaving their organizations within five years. Although more recent research into delayed retirements has mitigated the notion of a leadership exodus for nonprofits, the need for succession planning is nonetheless on the horizon (Deaton et al. 2013, Stahl, 2013).

A smaller body of research has explored these issues in the private and independent school context. The changing landscape of private schools and the increasing demands placed on school heads, particularly since the 2007-2009 recession, have been documented in recent doctoral dissertations (Baldwin, 2012; Cole, 2010; Roddy, 2010). The new landscape for independent schools is marked by "a lingering economic climate of uncertainty; a shrinking pool of applicants…; rising costs without much elasticity left in pricing, leading to questions about the affordability of independent schools and the sustainability of their financial model; and increased competition from other types of schools" (Juhel, 2016, p. 588-589). The role of the head of school may have transformed along with these pressures, from that of a traditional, charismatic, instructional leader toward a more transformational, CEO-like, manager of a complex organization (Griffin, 1999; Price, 2005). Some recent research suggests that, despite the rising complexity of the demands placed on heads, the leadership skills required of them – namely, to build relationships, communicate effectively, and manage the board and leadership team – have remained largely consistent (Juhel, 2016). Nonetheless, Juhel (2016) notes that more qualitative data is needed from more diverse school contexts in order to understand the impact of the "new normal" on independent school leadership (p. 603).

NAIS trend analyses, as well as trade articles written about independent school headship, further illuminate the present challenges related to headship retention. NAIS statistics show that there is a high turnover rate among heads of independent schools, with many staying in their positions for only five or fewer years (Holmes, 2016; NAIS Research, 2021). The percent of heads leaving their positions abruptly is increasing while the average tenure for an NAIS member school head was 8.5 years in 2017-2018 and decreased to seven years in 2019-2020 (Balzano & Rowe, 2020; Daggett, 2018). Abrupt departure and short tenures may be due to lack of preparation for the breadth of responsibility that comes with headship, poor board relationships, or a poor fit between head and school (Holmes, 2016; NAIS Research, 2020). Heads of schools have recently cited their most prevalent concerns to be enrollment management, marketing, and branding, and have noted an increase in customer-service orientation expected of heads (Daggett, 2018). In addition to work stressors, heads report a social-emotional toll associated with a 24/7 job that is only rising in complexity, leaving little work-life balance (Holmes, 2016; NAIS Research, 2020; NAIS Research, 2021). The increase in abrupt departures and decrease in average tenure of school heads speaks to a growing need for succession planning in independent schools, a matter I take up in the next section.

Succession planning and leadership development

The literature on succession planning in nonprofits indicates that organizations typically expend minimal effort preparing for executive leadership turnover, with many boards reporting never discussing succession planning (Carman et al, 2010; McKee & Froelich, 2016). Nonprofit executives who intend to retire or leave the organization do so quietly, without identifying or training potential successors. They do so to avoid creating disruption and instability in their organizations and struggle to appoint a successor who would both want the job and be considered promotable by the board (Carman et al., 2010). McKee and Froelich (2016) identify similar barriers to succession planning, including the organization's desire to maintain the stability of current initiatives and the perception of being unable to replace the skill sets of existing leaders. Internal candidates bring both institutional knowledge and continuity and represent cost-savings relative to external searches; however, emergency succession plans generally center on searching outside the organization (Froelich et al., 2011). Still, nonprofit organizations express a strong preference for internal candidates in leadership transitions, even when "such candidates are largely deemed nonexistent, partially due to lack of leadership development activities within the organization" (Froelich et al., 2011, p. 15). Nonprofit organizations may therefore need to invest in leadership development in order to improve their succession planning efforts (Cornelius et al., 2011; Deaton et al., 2013).

At independent schools, a key role of the board of trustees and head is leadership succession planning, to ensure leadership continuity to keep a school true to its mission and progressing toward its strategic goals (Orem, 2016). Some evidence shows that what should be a board-driven initiative tends to fall to the head of school, who may be ineffective at succession planning for their own replacement because they are simultaneously trying to meet the board's expectations for their own performance (Pacholik-Samson, 2020). Moreover, independent schools may not be doing enough to plan for leadership succession from within. Former NAIS president John Chubb wrote in 2015 that, in the current landscape, independent schools will require "special kinds of leaders" (para. 4) who can ask hard questions and drive innovation. Chubb worried that if schools continue to rely on external recruitment from other independent schools, they may find leaders unable to introduce change into a community and culture that is unfamiliar to them (Chubb, 2015). Chubb (2015) writes, therefore, that schools "can and should do more to develop school succession plans," including more boldly identifying "prospective leaders among our young teachers and other beginning school personnel" (para. 11). Prospective leader development can provide a "bench of talent" that can serve the school for years to come while also contributing to strategic alignment throughout the school, "not just at the top" (Orem, 2016, para. 6). Additionally, investing in the development of mid-level leaders could contribute to talent retention. Literature in the nonprofit sector offers more evidence in this area.

Some research indicates that nonprofits are not investing sufficiently in developing the human capital at the bottom and middle of their organizations (Carman et al., 2010; Stahl, 2013). Young

professionals at nonprofits are interested in staying in the nonprofit sector and are eager for more advanced training but feel only limited support from their organizations (Carman et al., 2010; Stahl, 2013). In addition to feeling undervalued and frustrated by their inability to have more of an impact, younger professionals at nonprofits struggle with the fiscal reality of lower nonprofit wages and benefits and do not see room for advancement in their organizations (Carman et al., 2010; Froelich et al., 2011). There is a risk of younger potential leaders at nonprofit organizations leaving to find advancement in other organizations or sectors (Deaton et al., 2013; Froelich et al., 2011). Younger workers of Gen X and Millennials are less committed to their employers and the "speed at which talent moves" is increasing (Stahl, 2013, p. 37). Nonprofits increasingly must compete with entrepreneurship, government, and business to attract and retain young professionals with a commitment to the social sector. Stahl (2013) points to "chronically weak" recruitment and retention efforts in the nonprofit sector, despite human talent being the "most important asset driving performance, impact, innovation and sustainability in the social sector" (p. 47). A lack of training and education opportunities for employees at nonprofit organizations is a missed retention opportunity, especially at organizations where professional development substitutes as a performance enhancement and recognition tool in the absence of higher salaries (Stahl, 2013).

The leadership development deficit

Some nonprofit leadership literature points to a leadership development deficit and lack of a clear leadership pipeline for younger professionals (Johnson, 2009; Stahl, 2013; Stewart & Kuenzi, 2018). In a study of nonprofit executive career paths, Stewart & Kuenzi (2018) find that most current nonprofit executives moved across several organizations in their career in order to gain promotion, suggesting that organizations are indeed missing opportunities to retain and develop future leaders. As nonprofits plan for executive succession, the increasing educational attainment and skill acquisition of women and younger workers could counterbalance a retiring or departing workforce, but "formal education in nonprofit management and leadership" might be needed to replace years of experience (Johnson, 2009, p. 293). In addition, organizations have an interest in the ongoing training and development of their managers, so that their capabilities remain aligned with the organizational mission and strategic initiatives (Becker & Bish, 2017). Ongoing leadership development is therefore critical not only to retain talent, but also to advance the organization.

Nonprofits tend to develop prospective leaders informally through on-the-job training practices like mentoring, temporary assignments, stretch assignments, and job rotation (Cunningham and Hillier, 2013). Leaders may feel that this kind of development is effective because of the belief that "ongoing practice through day-to-day leadership activities is where the crux of development really resides" (Day et al., 2014, p 80). However, it is unclear if this belief aligns with the needs and wants of aspiring nonprofit leaders. Some nonprofit managers have expressed that they would like more formal learning, including brief introductions to leadership concepts and targeted training in areas relevant to their jobs (Becker & Bish, 2017). They also report wanting more "learning from others," including mentoring and coaching (Becker & Bish, 2017). This literature suggests that a combination

of formal classroom learning and informal experiential learning can support nonprofit leader development, but recognizes that research in context is needed to design appropriate approaches for specific types of nonprofit work (Becker & Bish, 2017; Malcolm et al., 2003).

Nonprofit organizations have limited resources, small workforces, and flat hierarchies, making leadership development programs challenging to implement (Johnson, 2009; Santora & Bozer, 2015; Santora et al., 2010). Stewart and Kuenzi (2018) identify the growing availability of nonprofit management higher education credentials, which could fill some of this need, but note that expensive degree attainment may be in tension with the nonprofit sector's values of diversity, equity, and inclusion. This suggests that there may be an opportunity for affordable leadership development programs or activities to fill an experience gap for future nonprofit leaders, including independent school leaders. Having identified the issue of frequent headship turnover in independent schools, one of Daggett's suggestions is to "step up our work in preparing the next generation of school leaders" (Daggett, 2018, p. 5). Many heads are still appointed without a clear sense of what is expected of them and attribute most of their learning to 'on the job' training (Juhel, 2016). There is little existing research on mid-level leadership development at independent schools; it might be expected that most of this is accomplished through 'on the job' training as well. An investment in intentional leadership development programs and activities could foster both enhanced recruitment and retention as well as performance and outcomes for independent schools (Deaton et al., 2013; Stahl, 2013).

Leadership development programs for independent school leaders

With no "generally recognized credential requirements," aspiring independent school leaders have historically developed their leadership practice experientially (Aitken, 1991, p. 23). Traditionally, independent school heads would bring teaching and academic administrative experience and learn the business management side of school leadership on the job (Aitken, 1991; Frankel & Schechtman, 2010; Ring, 2015). In the mid-1990's, for those that sought additional training, the Klingenstein programs at Teachers College, Columbia University and the NAIS Institute for New Heads were two of very few options for independent-school-specific programs (Frankel & Schechtman, 2010). Over the last decade, however, leadership development opportunities for independent school professionals have been increasing in number, through universities, associations, and search firms (Daggett, 2018; Frankel & Schechtman, 2010). Existing programs can be categorized by the type of operating institution: (1) national, state, and regional membership organizations; (2) university-based programs; and (3) other nonprofit and for-profit organizations (Cole, 2010).

> **National, state, and regional membership associations.** NAIS offers three leadership development programs: the Fellowship for Aspiring Heads, which is a year-long cohort-based program; the School Leadership Institute, which is a three-day program for leaders of any level; and the Institute for New Heads, which is a three-day program for heads in their first or second

year. Some state and regional associations offer leadership programs as well. The New York State Association of Independent Schools (NYSAIS) offers the Emerging Leaders Institute, a two-year cohort-based program for which aspiring leaders at NYSAIS member schools apply with the support of their current heads. The Northwest Association of Independent Schools (NWAIS) offers an Emerging Leaders Institute that is a one-year cohort-based program for NWAIS members, as well as the two-year Pathways to Leadership program for female-identifying senior leaders who aspire to headship. Many other national, state, and regional independent school associations offer annual conferences, retreats, and meetings that are designed to support collaborative professional development and school growth for their members (Cole, 2010).

University-based programs. For both the private and public sectors, the responsibility for educational leadership development falls primarily with institutions of higher education (Young & Brewer, 2008). A few universities offer degree programs specifically designed for independent school administration. These include Master's degree programs at George Mason University, the Klingenstein Center for Independent School Leadership at Columbia University, Mercer University, Mount Holyoke, the University of Hawai'i, the University of Pennsylvania, and Vanderbilt University. Some graduate schools offer certificate programs in leadership for independent schools, including Johns Hopkins University, Merrimack College, and Kennesaw State University. Others offer fellowship programs, like the Heads of School program at the Klingenstein Center. Graduate programs in school leadership garner criticism for a host of reasons: participants self-select rather than being identified and recruited, the programs lack connection between discrete courses and between the classroom and practice, change is slow to come to these programs, and universities that rely on these programs for revenue raise enrollment at the expense of quality (Young & Brewer, 2008). While a body of research exists that explores the effectiveness of public school leadership preparation programs, there is limited research on the effectiveness of these emerging independent-school focused programs (Cole, 2010).

Other nonprofit and for-profit organizations. Leadership development programs for educators are offered through numerous nonprofit organizations including the Center for Creative Leadership, New Leaders (formerly New Leaders for New Schools) and Leadership + Design. While programs from these organizations may be tailored or adapted for independent school needs, they are not designed expressly for the development of independent school leaders. One for-profit organization, Independent School Management (ISM) does exist to serve the advancement of independent schools, touting itself as the only "comprehensive management-support firm for private-independent schools in the United States and abroad" (Independent School Management, 2020). ISM offers consulting services, research and publications, and leadership development workshops, including an annual heads conference, for schools that pay to send individuals. Other for-profit consulting firms exist to offer training, coaching, and feedback for independent school leaders (Cole, 2010).

The proliferation of these programs since the 1990's speaks to a growing awareness of the importance of school leadership on school outcomes (McCarthy, 2015). I will note again the lack of peer-reviewed literature offering design recommendations for leadership development programs that are specific to independent schools. Although independent school leadership is distinct in many ways from public school leadership, some of the literature examining public school leadership preparation offers potentially helpful insight. For example, the Wallace Foundation (2013) offers five essential school leader practices that should inform principal preparation programs, a list grounded in extensive empirical research: "(1) shaping a vision of academic success for all students; (2) creating a climate hospitable to education; (3) cultivating leadership in others; (4) improving instruction; (5) managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement" (p. 4). Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) identify that most effective principal preparation programs had a few common elements: a research-based cohesive curriculum, administrative internships, active recruitment of identified talent, problem-based active learning strategies, a cohort structure, and individualized mentoring and coaching.

Additional research is needed to determine which of the leadership practices and program design elements from principal preparation programs overlap with the needs of prospective independent school leaders, and what practices are unique to independent school leadership that would need to be incorporated. In addition to the essential practices of public school leaders that the Wallace Foundation outlined, independent school leaders carry the responsibilities of attracting, enrolling, and retaining students and families, fundraising, and working with a board of trustees. Juhel (2016), in a qualitative study of sixteen independent school heads, finds that heads see their role primarily as that of "community leader" (p. 603). This research suggests that leadership development programs for prospective heads should focus on four areas: (1) team management; (2) relational skills and relationship-building practices; (3) board management skills; and (4) communication skills and practices (Juhel, 2016, p. 603). A study of independent school heads in New Hampshire similarly suggests that successful leadership consists of "communication, fundraising, leading by example, being present" and, "living the core values or mission of the school" (D'Entremont, 2016). The present research will contribute to the literature on independent school leadership and whether existing leadership development opportunities are effective and sufficient to support independent school growth.

Conceptual Framework

Through the literature review outlined above, I recognized that leadership development opportunities for independent school employees are likely to be found both within schools, through opportunities like on-the-job learning and mentorship, as well as outside of school buildings, through opportunities like workshops, conferences, and degree programs. As I investigated the availability and effectiveness of these opportunities with current CAIS school leaders, I interpreted their descriptions of learning through the lens of situated learning theory (Greeno, 1998). Situated learning theory conceives of learning as a change in participation in the valued practices of particular social groups (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Learning as a kind of participation widens the unit of analysis from the notion of learning as individual cognition, representation, and internalization of knowledge (Greeno, 1998; Sfard, 1998). Rather, content cannot be separated from the context in which it is learned. Learners are exposed to knowledge and, through activity and interaction in context, co-construct meaning and become increasingly involved in a social group that speaks and acts in particular ways (Greeno, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Drawing on a situated learning perspective, Greeno and Gresalfi (2008) consider opportunities to learn as "*affordances* for changing participation and practice" (p. 172). This capstone investigation will explore the extent to which opportunities to learn leadership exist for prospective leaders at CAIS schools. To identify opportunities to learn independent school leadership, then, is to identify whether and how employees are afforded opportunities to change their leadership participation and practice. Whether an affordance is available depends on an individual's ability to access specific opportunities to change their practice and the "dispositions and abilities of the individual" to take advantage of those opportunities (Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008, p. 172). In other words, affordances consider the interaction between the opportunity and the characteristics of the learner that determine how they will make use of the opportunity (Norman, 1988). Opportunities to learn are also not limited to a specific context. Learning in one setting might meaningfully change an individual's participation in another context if the elements of the context are similar (Greeno and Gresalfi, 2008). Understanding the context in which leaders develop their practice of leadership, therefore, becomes vital for recognizing what works, for whom, and under what circumstances (Honig, 2006).

Characteristics of the learner, including their trajectory of learning and participatory identity, can determine the extent to which a person is afforded the ability to actually 'learn' from an opportunity to learn (Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008). A learning trajectory considers the "changes in an individual's ways of participating over time in a community," and is dynamic in the sense that it is impacted by circumstances in the environment and the individuals' response to those circumstances (Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008, p. 171). Each individual is on their own unique learning trajectory, because different opportunities to learn have become available at different times, depending on an individual's positioning in a given interaction as well as the individual affordances they bring to the situation (Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008).

Participatory identity can be understood as an individual's pattern of engagement with learning activities. Personal identity, which may be associated with particular ethnic, socio-economic class, and gender memberships, has an impact on participatory identity (Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008). "An important part of participatory identity," according to Greeno and Gresalfi (2008), is a learner's sense that the content and practices are "meaningful and important for one's growth and development" (p. 185). Personal identity memberships may contribute to an individual feeling like an outsider in a community of practice, impact their participatory identity, and thereby exclude them from an opportunity to learn (Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008). Participatory identity therefore impacts an individual's learning trajectory and may be important in evaluating the opportunities to learn that exist for prospective leaders at CAIS member schools.

Figure 1 provides an overview of opportunities to learn leadership as affordances. One on side, an affordance for learning is determined by the characteristics of the opportunity, including the physical resources and networks associated with it, the accessibility of the opportunity, and the cultural context within which the opportunity is offered. On the other side, an affordance is determined by the characteristics of the learner, including their beliefs, ideas, dispositions, and goals that may be informed by their learning trajectory and participatory identity. Figure 1 shows that the outcome of an affordance for learning is a change in the learner's participation and practice, illustrating Wenger's (1998) principle that "learning is a matter of engagement" determined by an individual's ability to "contribute actively to the practices" of a community (p. 228).

Figure 1

Opportunities to Learn Leadership as Affordances for Learning
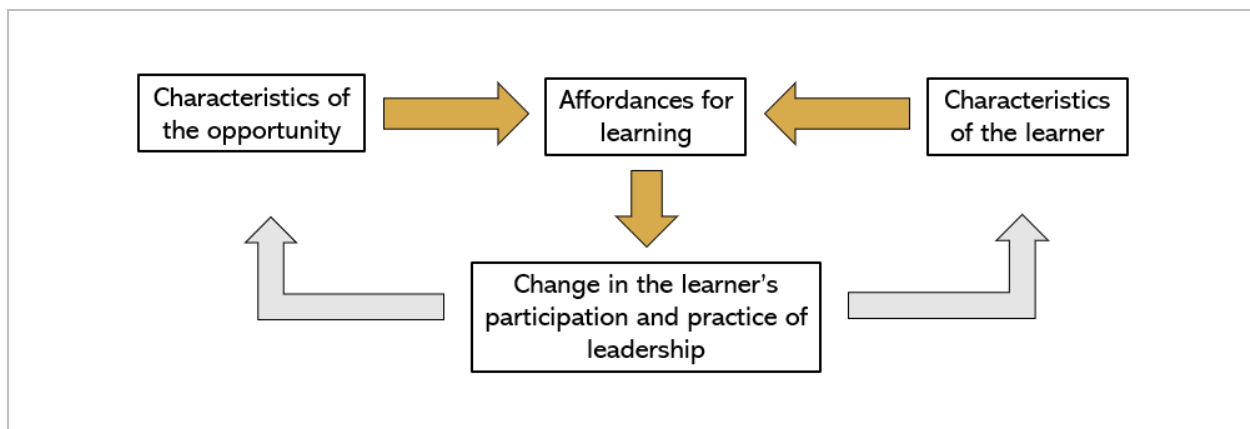
Research Questions

This study seeks to understand the leadership development needs of CAIS member schools and identify the opportunities to learn that currently exist to support the development of prospective leaders. Applying the framework of opportunities to learn as affordances for changing participation led me to develop three research questions to guide this investigation (Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008).

Research Question 1

To what extent do leaders at CAIS member schools perceive that current leadership development activities are sufficient to support the future leadership needs of their schools?

I wanted to validate the CAIS leadership's belief that supporting the development and retention of prospective independent school leaders is an important focus for their work. I found in the literature review on leadership turnover and succession planning that there is reason to expect high leadership turnover and increasingly short tenure for senior leaders in the coming years. I also found support in the literature for the concern that independent schools are not doing enough to cultivate a leadership pipeline within their organizations as a component of succession planning. Through investigating this research question, I wanted to discover if there is evidence for these concerns in the specific context of CAIS member schools.

Research Question 2

2a. What do CAIS member school leaders point to as the opportunities to learn that are instrumental to developing as an independent school leader?

2b. What conditions enabled these leadership development opportunities to become affordances for learning?

To answer the first part of this question, I set out to identify current leadership development opportunities that are available to prospective independent school leaders by asking current CAIS school leaders how they came to be prepared for leadership. I also asked them to comment on the development experiences of other leaders that they have seen or supported in their careers. I define 'instrumental' opportunities as those that led to the learner changing their leadership participation and practice. To answer the second part of the question, I listened to the ways that CAIS school leaders described these opportunities and identified the common conditions, including characteristics of the opportunities and the learner, that afforded them the ability to learn.

Research Question 3

To what extent do leaders perceive that there are sufficient affordances for learning available for independent school employees to develop as leaders?

This question is like the first research question but focused on the needs of aspiring leaders rather than the needs of schools. In investigating this question, I used the conceptual framework to look

for barriers or breakdowns in existing opportunities to learn leadership for school employees. Where employees were *not* afforded opportunities to change their leadership participation and practice, I sought to understand where the gaps existed in their ability to access these affordances.

Project Design

In order to answer the research questions above, I conducted a survey of CAIS member school heads focused on leadership development. I then conducted interviews with school leaders at various levels in order to deepen my understanding of affordances for learning leadership in CAIS member schools.

Head of School Survey

Survey Questions. The first tool that I developed was a survey that I administered to CAIS member school heads (see Appendix A). The survey included thirty-four questions that I adapted for the independent school context from a national survey of nonprofit executives that assessed trends in nonprofit leadership, including topics like turnover intentions and succession planning. A version of this national survey has been administered three times to over 3,000 nonprofit executives to inform the Daring to Lead report, produced in 2001, 2006, and 2011 in partnership between CompassPoint and the Meyer Foundation (Cornelius et al., 2011). I also adapted items from survey instruments designed by Cole (2010) and Ring (2015) for doctoral capstone projects on leadership development in independent schools.

The combination of these instruments allowed me to design a context-specific survey instrument assessing both head of school turnover over intentions and succession planning efforts as well as their perceptions of leadership development activities in their schools. The survey was designed to thoroughly answer Research Question 1, and to provide some insight into Research Questions 2 and 3 that could be further explored through leader interviews. The survey included primarily Likert scale and choice items and was segmented into five sections: (1) demographic information; (2) career path; (3) succession planning; (4) personal leadership development; and (5) leadership development.

Survey Participants. I included as survey participants the head of school or the equivalent senior leader at all CAIS member schools on an email listserv that CAIS was using to send out brief weekly surveys. There were 93 member schools affiliated with CAIS at the time that I sent the survey. I received 38 responses to the survey (41% response rate). I designed the collection mechanism so that participation in the survey was anonymous and included in an introduction to the survey an explanation of the anonymity of the responses.

Survey Procedure. I conducted the survey using an online platform and the survey was estimated to take about seven minutes to complete. To invite participation in the survey, the executive director of CAIS sent an email to the listserv of school heads with a message from him explaining the survey, a message of introduction from me, and a link to the survey using Qualtrics. In my introduction message, I included my affiliation with Vanderbilt and offered my Vanderbilt email address for contact information but did not include my affiliation with the CAIS member school where I am an administrator. Nonetheless, some individuals receiving the

email may have recognized my name from previous professional networking and made an association between this research and my current school of employment. The email inviting survey participation was sent in lieu of the brief survey that CAIS would have normally sent to school heads that week. A reminder email was sent four weeks later, which yielded additional responses.

Survey Analysis. I analyzed the results of the survey using descriptive statistics, drawing conclusions only about the population of school leaders from whom I collected data rather than using inferential statistics to draw conclusions about a larger population from the sample surveyed. I created some data visualizations using Excel and additionally relied on the analysis reports offered through Qualtrics showing frequencies for individual survey items. For some items, I grouped responses to create grouped frequency distributions. For example, school heads were asked how many years they had been in their current role in an open-ended response item. I grouped the results into the categories '1 to 5,' '6 to 10,' and so on until the final category of 'more than 20 years' in order to visually represent this finding. For most variables, I was interested in looking at the distribution of responses and, in some cases, measures of central tendency to summarize the findings. I have included visualizations of selected relevant survey results in the findings section, shown in percentages. Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

School Leader Interviews

Interview Questions. The second tool that I developed was an interview protocol that I carried out in 60-minute interviews with CAIS school leaders at various levels (see Appendix B). I designed these questions to elicit reflections from the leaders on the ways that they, and others that they have seen enter leadership roles in independent schools, were or were not prepared to take on the responsibilities of their roles. My intent was for these reflections to authentically point to the formal and informal ways in which they developed their leadership practice. For example, before asking leaders directly about their own leadership development experiences, I asked them to share what they believe constitutes exemplary leadership, how that view has changed over time, challenges that they have faced as leaders, and how they have learned to face these challenges. Through these qualitative questions, I elicited stories and examples from the interview subjects to illuminate the learning experiences that were most central to developing their leadership practice.

The protocol then proceeded to direct questions about leadership development opportunities that they, as well as other aspiring leaders in their organizations, have accessed. With preliminary findings from the Head of School survey indicating the need for schools to more effectively identify and develop of prospective leaders for internal promotion, a final question in five parts asked about schools' practices in these areas. I designed these interview questions to answer Research Questions 2 and 3.

Interview Participants. I selected interview participants with the guidance of the CAIS director of professional learning, who provided me with a short list of likely interview subjects from a variety of schools as a starting point. She included school leaders who had participated in CAIS programming in the past, thinking that they would be likely to support my research, and she intentionally selected for a range of experience, job type, school type, and demographic characteristics. Using the online directories of CAIS member schools, I expanded the list to include leaders at a similar level from a similar variety of CAIS member schools. My positionality in the community of CAIS independent school leaders afforded me awareness of the schools on the list and an understanding of the job titles on the school directories, so that I could select a purposive sample. I ended up interviewing seven leaders, with roles including associate head of school, assistant head of school, elementary director, and director of equity. Interviewees are referred to as numbered participants in the findings section in order to protect their anonymity.

Interview Procedure. In an initial email sent from my Vanderbilt email address, I explained the purpose of the study and requested an interview with the leaders. For those that responded in agreement, I conducted interviews virtually over Zoom. I began each interview by providing a brief introduction to the research questions and the purpose of the interviews, and then I recorded the interview as I worked through the questions in the interview protocol.

> *Positionality in the Interview Procedure.* In several, though not all, of the interviews, my position as an academic leader at a fellow CAIS member school came up during the unrecorded introduction to my research and the Vanderbilt program. All participants also had the opportunity to learn of my position at a CAIS member school through professional networks or an internet search. During the interview protocol, my personal experience with these topics impacted both my own statements and gestures of affirmation in response to participants' answers and my ability to ask targeted follow-up questions informed by my awareness of the context. In many ways, I contributed to this research as an "insider," the advantages of which include the ability to ask "more meaningful or insightful questions" due to existing knowledge of the context, the ability to earn trust and secure more honest answers, and the ability to better understand the language used by research participants (Darwin Holmes, 2020, p. 6). Disadvantages of being an insider in this research include my own inherent bias and sympathy toward the subjects, a potentially myopic view when asking questions or interpreting answers, an assumption of my 'insider' understanding on the part of the respondents, and the possibility of respondents being less willing to reveal sensitive information (Darwin Holmes, 2020). I can see this last disadvantage as particularly relevant in this context, given the financial and enrollment threats faced by independent schools and the relatively small size of the professional network in which these school leaders operate (NAIS Research, 2021).

Interview Analysis. With the interviews meant to investigate Research Questions 2 and 3, which are both about opportunities to learn, I was interested in looking for evidence using the conceptual framework as an organizing structure. To analyze the interview transcripts, I first attempted to use a deductive coding approach with a set of a priori codes that aligned with the conceptual framework of affordances for learning. I analyzed two interview transcripts with the following codes: (1) characteristics of the opportunity; (2) characteristics of the learner; and (3) change in leadership participation and practice. I found that nearly all of the learning opportunities that participants described had contributed to a change in their leadership participation and practice. Based on the design of my interview questions, participants were not offering examples of learning opportunities that they failed to learn from, which made the third code unnecessary. I also felt that the conditions that enabled these opportunities to become affordances for learning were falling into more specific categories than those described by codes (1) and (2). Finally, I realized that I first needed to code the interviews to answer Part 1 of Research Question 2, using an inductive approach to identify the opportunities to learn that were most commonly mentioned in the interviews.

In order to develop inductive codes, I re-watched the interviews while reading along with the transcripts. I noted the opportunities to learn that participants mentioned and attempted to identify categories for characteristics of the opportunity, learner, or environment that enabled participants to learn. The codes that I developed for 'opportunities to learn' included: (1) leadership experience in the school context; (2) leadership experience outside of the school context; (3) professional collaboration; (4) self-reflection; (5) mentorship; (6) observation of leadership; (7) workshops and conferences; (8) graduate school; and (9) reading. The codes that I developed for 'conditions impacting affordances' included: (1) timing/special circumstances; (2) longevity or familiarity with context; (3) escalation of responsibility; (4) expanding perspective outside of role/function; (5) expanding perspective outside of school context; (6) sponsorship; (7) functional expertise; (8) interpersonal awareness; and (9) self-awareness. A codebook with descriptions and examples of each code can be found in Appendix C.

Findings

Findings are organized according to research question, with each major finding displayed in a box and explored in the paragraphs that follow.

Research Question 1. **To what extent do leaders at CAIS member schools perceive that current leadership development activities are sufficient to support the future leadership needs of their schools?**
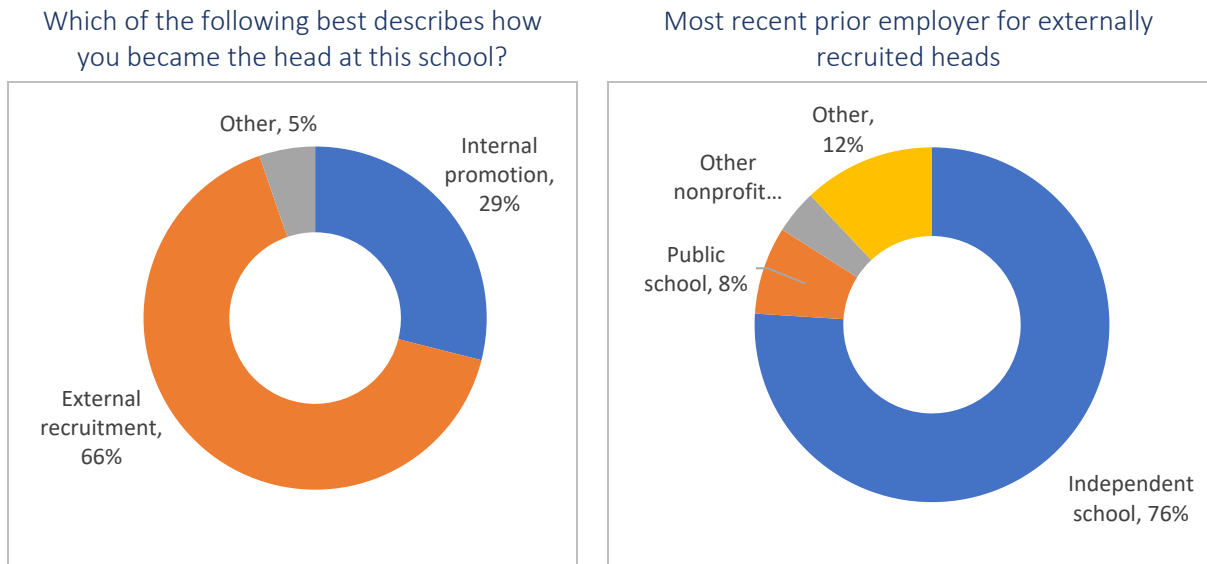
RQ1, Finding 1

The CAIS member schools whose heads were surveyed are experiencing increasing turnover in the headship position. The heads feel that their schools' existing succession planning efforts are not sufficient to support the expected turnover.

Two survey items pointed to the turnover that the surveyed schools have seen in the headship position within the last ten years and the further turnover that can be expected within the next five years. As seen in Figure 2, only 37% of surveyed heads responded with the intent to stay in their current position for more than 5 years. At the same time, 69% of the heads have held their current position for 10 or fewer years, with 47% of those having held the position for 5 or fewer years.
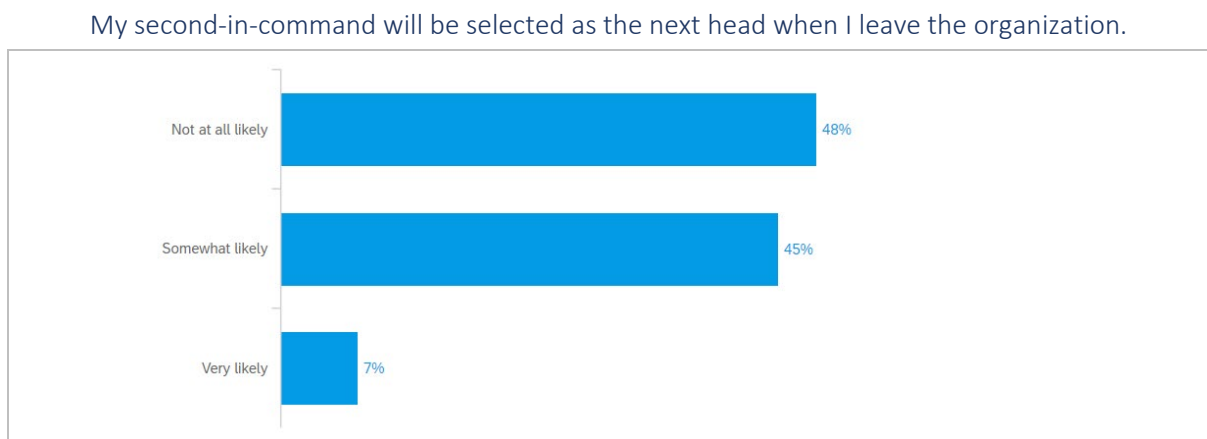
Figure 2
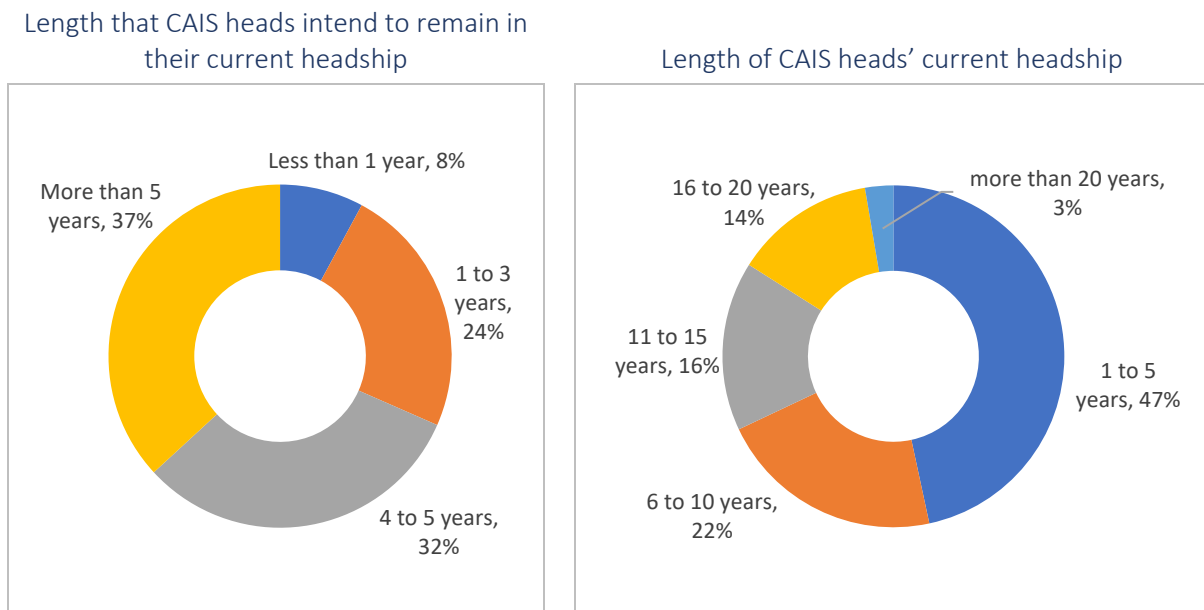
I also learned that independent schools may be losing prospective leaders to other independent schools when they fail to retain them in the leadership pipeline. As seen in Figure 3, most heads of school surveyed were external hires, 76% of those who were externally recruited coming from another independent school.

Figure 3

Which of the following best describes how you became the head at this school?

Most recent prior employer for externally recruited heads

Other, 5%

Internal promotion, 29%

External recruitment, 66%

Other, 12%

Other nonprofit…

Public school, 8%

Independent school, 76%

When asked about future employment intentions, only 39% of surveyed heads indicated that their anticipated next position would be retirement or semiretirement. Half indicated that they would consider a position at another independent school for their next position. Furthermore, Figure 4 shows that among those schools with an associate head position or other 'second-in-command' role, 48% say that the person in that role is not at all likely to become the next head of school. 55% say that if not made the next head of school, that second-in-command is only somewhat likely or not at all likely to remain at the school. These responses could indicate that those in a second-in-command position are expecting a pipeline to the headship, which they may leave the school for another independent school to obtain.

Figure 4

My second-in-command will be selected as the next head when I leave the organization.

Not at all likely — 48%

Somewhat likely — 45%

Very likely — 7%

My second-in-command will remain with the organization if not selected as the next head.

Not at all likely 14%

Somewhat likely 41%

Very likely 45%
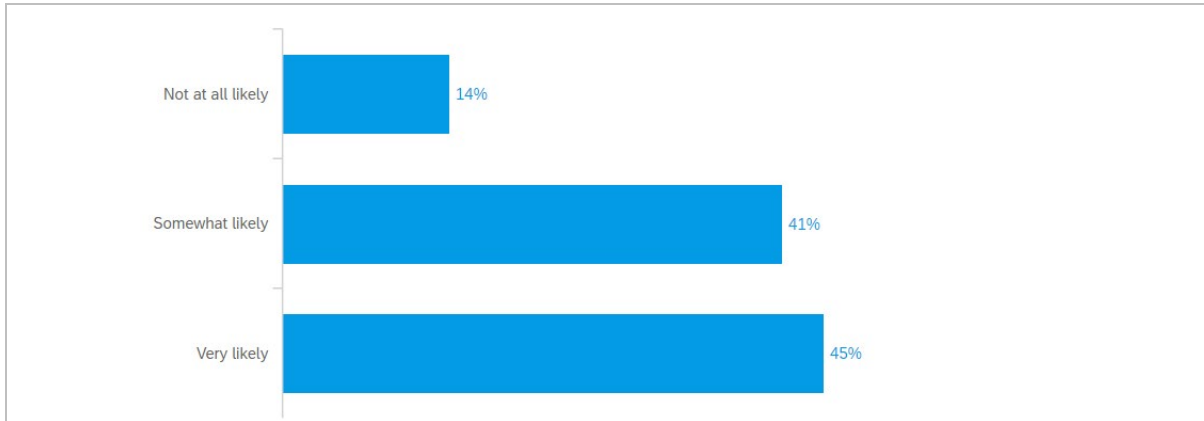
The surveyed heads were also asked to directly reflect on any intentional succession planning efforts that exist at their schools. The responses suggest that school leaders see a need to increase their schools' efforts to plan for succession. As seen in Figure 5, only 46% of heads agree or strongly agree that their school has an emergency succession plan for the head of school and only 41% have a planned departure succession plan for the head of school. The surveyed CAIS heads would like to see their schools better cultivate a leadership pipeline in preparation for future leadership transitions. Figure 6 shows that 60% of heads somewhat or strongly agree that their school invests in leader development to be prepared for future leadership transitions, with the remaining 40% of heads disagreeing or neither agreeing or disagreeing with the statement. In another survey item, 76% of heads indicated that they think at least once a month about needing more leadership development opportunities for their employees.

Figure 5

My school has an emergency succession plan for the head of school.

Strongly disagree 22%

Somewhat disagree 22%

Neither agree nor disagree 11%

Somewhat agree 30%

Strongly agree 16%

My school has a planned departure succession plan for the head of school.

Strongly disagree 16%

Somewhat disagree 22%

Neither agree nor disagree 22%

Somewhat agree 22%
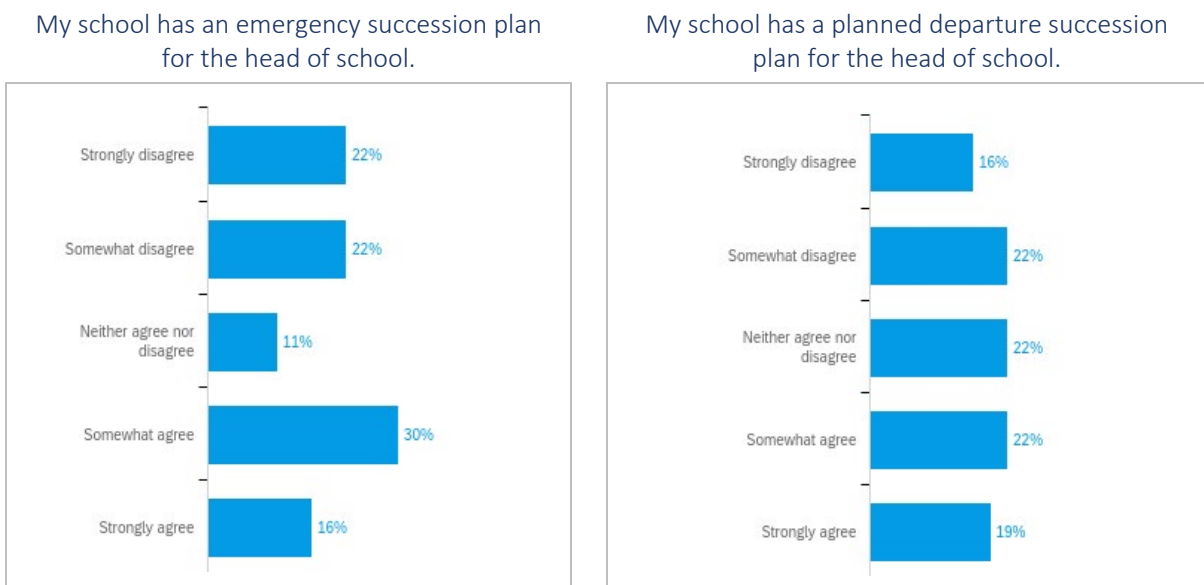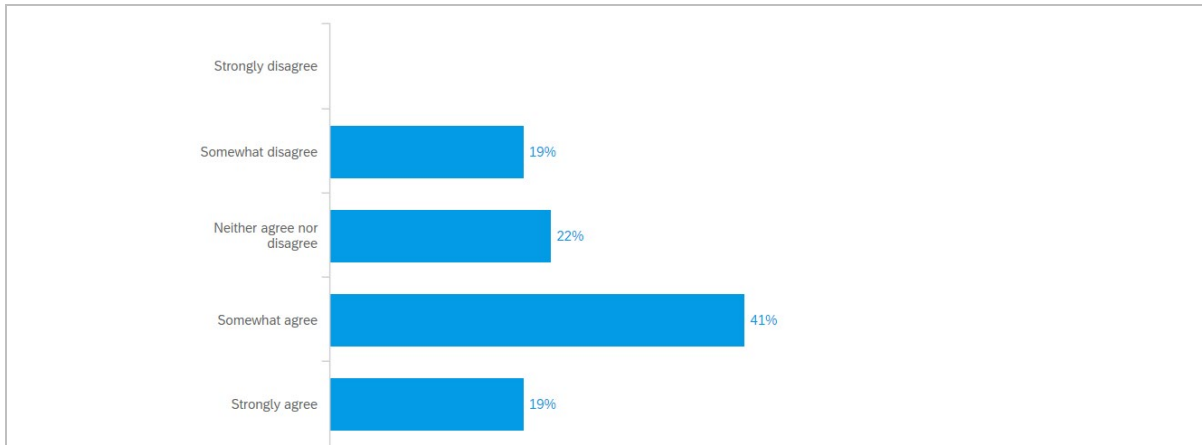
Strongly agree 19%

Figure 6

My school invests in leader development to be prepared for future leadership transitions.

The surveyed heads were also asked to reflect on their own leadership development and how adequately prepared they felt for various responsibilities upon becoming school heads. They reported these as the five most prevalent opportunities for developing their leadership practice: professional development workshops or courses (97%), a degree-granting program at a university (95%), reading (78%), stretch assignments and on-the-job learning (65%), and mentorship (57%). Figure 7 shows the percent of heads who felt "adequately prepared" or "very prepared" in each key area of independent school leadership.

Figure 7

Heads of school feeling "very prepared" or "adequately prepared" for areas of school leadership
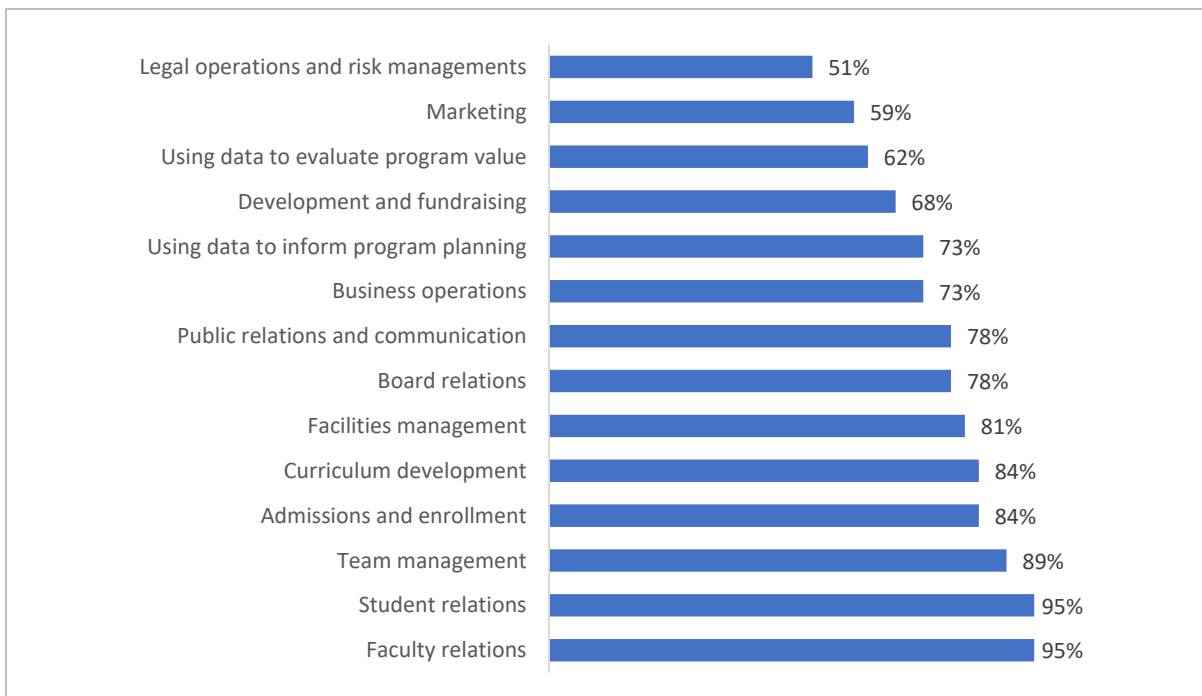
The heads were most prepared for functions of their job pertaining to student relations (95%), faculty relations (95%), and team management (89%). They were least prepared for the functions of their job pertaining to legal operations and risk management (51%), marketing (59%), and using data to evaluate program value (62%). If professional development courses, degree programs, reading, on-the-job learning, and mentorship are the primary ways that independent school leaders develop their practice, CAIS schools might consider how to broaden the content covered within these learning opportunities to include the full range of independent school leadership functions in order to better prepare future leaders.

RQ1, Finding 2

According to the CAIS school heads surveyed, their schools are not as effective as they need to be at identifying and developing prospective successors to senior leadership positions. A major issue is the availability and accessibility of leadership development opportunities for all school employees.

Survey responses indicate that there is a gap between what current leaders believe is the importance of identifying and developing future leaders and the availability and accessibility of leadership development opportunities for all employees. As seen in Figure 8, only 33% of heads felt that their schools were very effective or extremely effective at identifying appropriate successors for senior leadership positions. Only 36% felt that their schools were very or extremely effective at developing prospective successors.

Figure 8

How effective do you believe your school's practices are for each of the following?

Identifying appropriate successors

Not effective at all	11%
Slightly effective	22%
Moderately effective	35%
Very effective	19%
Extremely effective	14%

Developing successors for senior leadership positions

|	
Not effective at all	5%
Slightly effective	19%
Moderately effective	41%
Very effective	22%
Extremely effective	14%

The surveyed heads' views of leadership development practices at their schools were explored through seven further items. Responses indicated that *formal* leadership development activities, like classes, workshops, and mentorship programs, are provided primarily by organizations external to

the school. Only 38% of heads agreed that these opportunities are available within their schools, with 89% agreeing that these are available outside of their schools for their employees. However, 84% of heads agree that *informal* leadership development opportunities, like performance evaluations, informal mentorship, and stretch assignments, are available to employees at their schools.

The surveyed heads largely believe that leadership development opportunities are important for employees, and 84% agree or strongly agree that leadership development opportunities for employees are supported by the senior administration at their schools. 73% of heads agree or strongly agree that leadership development opportunities are an important way for employees to advance in the organization, and 86% agree or strongly agree that they are an important way to recognize high performing or high potential employees. However, as illustrated in Figure 9, only 29% agree or strongly agree that leadership development opportunities are available to all employees.

Figure 9

Leadership development opportunities are offered to all employees.
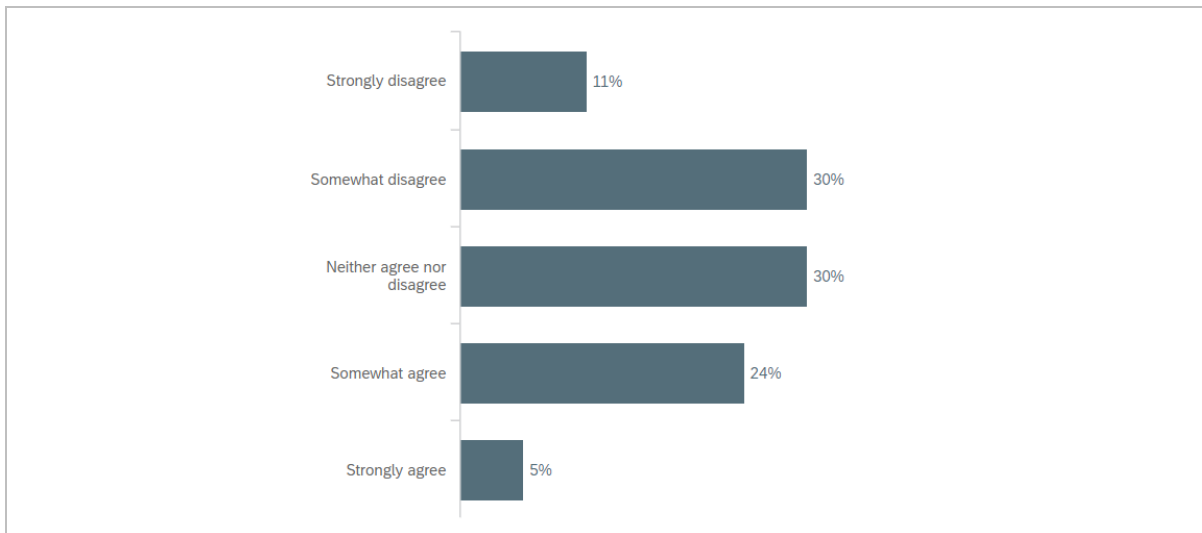
In summary, the CAIS heads of school surveyed would like to see more leadership development opportunities for their employees and believe that these opportunities are important for the long-term health of the school. Survey respondents reported deficits in the availability of formal learning opportunities within schools, the breadth of responsibilities for which they felt adequately prepared, and the accessibility of learning opportunities to all employees.

Research Question 2.

2a. What do CAIS member school leaders point to as the opportunities to learn that were instrumental to their development as an independent school leader?
2b. What conditions enabled these leadership development opportunities to become affordances for learning?

Through interviews with seven CAIS school leaders, I identified nine opportunities to learn that were instrumental to their own leadership development or that of a colleague. These opportunities are displayed below in Figure 10, along with a number showing how many unique times the practice was mentioned across the seven interviews. Similarly, I identified nine characteristics of the learner, opportunity, or environment that enabled these opportunities to become affordances for learning. These characteristics are also displayed in Figure 10, with the totals across the seven interviews.

Figure 10

Instrumental opportunities to learn leadership	Characteristics of the learner, opportunity, or environment that create affordances for learning
• leadership experience in the school context (186); • leadership experience outside of the school context (73); • professional collaboration (67); • self-reflection (67); • mentorship (53); • observation of leadership (52); • workshops and conferences (20); • graduate school (18); • reading (15).	• expanding perspective outside of role/function (92); • self-awareness (76); • expanding perspective outside of school context (67); • escalation of responsibility (55); • interpersonal awareness (43); • longevity or familiarity with context (41); • sponsorship (36); • functional expertise (28); • timing/special circumstances (27).

RQ2, Finding 1

> **On-the-job experiential learning opportunities were the most instrumental to the leadership development of the interviewed CAIS school leaders. These became affordances for learning when the opportunity allowed for an escalation in the learner's level of responsibility and/or a broadening of the learner's perspective.**

On-the-job experiential learning opportunities, including holding leadership roles, working on strategic projects, serving on committees, collaborating professionally, and observing the leadership of others, were the most instrumental learning opportunities described by interviewees. Leaders expressed that schools may provide limited training to new leaders, but that most learning happens on the job after starting a new role or stretch assignment. One interviewee, in describing the leadership development of department chairs, explains that, "Often I see that they jump into the role and they kind of get bamboozled by it and learn it on the road" (Participant 1, personal

interview, June 18, 2021). Another describes that he held several leadership roles throughout his career, which led to "a lot of learning by doing" (Participant 2, personal interview, June 18, 2021). Others, when asked about their preparation process for their role, spoke broadly about the years of work experiences and projects that came before.

That learning leadership happens through experience is supported by research: "It is highly unlikely that anyone would be able to develop fully as a leader merely through participation in a series of programs, workshops, or seminars. The actual development takes place in the so-called white space between such leader development events" (Day et al., 2014, p. 80). It is in this 'white space,' while doing their job, that leaders experience authentic learning opportunities. Becker and Bish (2017) found that managers attribute most of their leadership development to experiential learning. Billett (2004) conceives of the workplace as a "learning space," where there is no separation between thinking and doing work and learning (p. 312). Recall the definition of learning as a kind of participation. Learners are exposed to knowledge and, through activity and interaction in context, co-construct meaning and become increasingly involved in a social group that speaks and acts in particular ways (Greeno, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991). For on-the-job leadership learning, the activity in context may be, for example, doing a job, completing a project, or making a decision. The co-construction of meaning comes from negotiating the best way to do the task and the impact of the work. Learning is demonstrated by a change in the leader's practice and participation of leadership as a result of the work opportunity.

For the CAIS interviewees, learning opportunities provided affordances for learning when they escalated the learner's level of responsibility. Five of the seven participants talked about a series of internal promotions over their careers, from early childhood program director to division head, teacher to associate head of school, and academic technology specialist to assistant head. The other two participants attained a similar escalation in responsibility by moving between schools to attain promotions. Escalating responsibility meant solving problems for, and being accountable to, a growing number of stakeholders. One interviewee commented that coaching a varsity team made him answerable to a highly engaged group of parents for the first time. Another described a promotion to Assistant Head that meant her taking on student disciplinary issues in addition to her prior academic responsibilities: "Now, every faculty member comes to me if they are freaking out…about anything" (Participant 1, personal interview, June 18, 2021). The interviewed leaders also retained the perspectives they had gained from previous positions and find themselves "pinch hitting" wherever they are needed, from organizing pizza day to covering classes (Participant 7, personal interview, September 15, 2021). Most had learned to highly value transparency and communication in leadership, citing the frustration they remember feeling when they held lower levels of responsibility.

On-the-job experiences also became affordances for learning when they broadened the learner's perspective, enabling the learner to either (1) better appreciate how their role fit into the school's overall operations; (2) gain insight into other roles and how they strategically served the school, or;

(3) experience relevant practices in contexts other than the school. A broadened perspective enabled developing leaders to co-construct the meaning of leadership practices in new ways. One leader described this as "zooming out" and another as the informal development that happens by "paying attention and being "involved" in a community (Participant 4, personal interview, August 5, 2021; Participant 2, personal interview, June 18, 2021). Another described working collaboratively with a fellow leader who had come up through different roles: "we wanted to shadow each other and learn each other's roles" (Participant 1, personal interview, June 18, 2021). Specific roles that operate across all offices at the school, such as a technology coordinator or equity director, enabled four of the interviewees to acquire a broad cross-functional awareness of school operations. Special projects internal to the school, like working on accreditation self-studies, and certain kinds of projects external to the school, like serving on an accreditation visiting committee or organizing an unconference, were mentioned as opportunities for broadening awareness across job functions. External professional collaborations, such as shadowing leaders at other schools or participating in roundtable discussions with other school leaders, also enabled the developing leaders to co-construct new understandings about leadership in their own contexts.

RQ2, Finding 2

> **Self-reflection emerged as a key leadership development practice for some of the interviewed CAIS school leaders. Additionally, personal characteristics of self-awareness and interpersonal awareness enabled other affordances for learning.**

Two interviewees did not point to on-the-job learning experiences as instrumental to developing their practice of leadership. These individuals instead pointed to self-reflection and education as the means by which they developed their understanding of how to practice and participate in leadership. For one, graduate school was instrumental to developing her beliefs about leadership and she has a strong practice of self-reflection and believes that "leaders should be in self-reflection all the time" (Participant 6, participant interview, September 13, 2021). For another, reading and listening to scholars on questions of identity, along with "journaling like a madwoman," led her to develop a clear philosophy of leadership that informed her practice and participation (Participant 3, personal interview, June 1, 2021). Reflective practices also emerged in interviews with other participants, including talking for hours with former colleagues who have become friends, taking time to reflect on the kind of leader you want to be, and talking often with colleagues on the job. Another interviewee talked about reflecting on her own identity and focusing for a long time on "what it meant to be a young woman in leadership" (Participant 4, personal interview, August 5, 2021). Opportunities for self-reflection can serve as a means for a learner to develop a system of beliefs about leadership and thereby change their participation and practice of leadership.

Self-reflection can also shape a learner's participatory identity and thus impact their interaction with other opportunities to learn, enabling new affordances (Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008). Billett (2004) writes that "individuals engage actively in the process of determining the worth of what they experience and how they might engage with it and learn from it" (p. 316). Moreover, being able to

consider the impact that an opportunity might have on others, which I have coded as 'interpersonal awareness' in these interviews, can also create new affordances. Together, a learner's self-awareness and interpersonal awareness "shapes their exercise of their agentic actions" in choosing to engage with and construct knowledge from learning opportunities (Billett, 2004, p. 316). In interviews, this looked like a learner expressing self-awareness as "I don't think I would have stayed as long if it hadn't changed so much" and interpersonal awareness in a statement like "I don't like doing anything that the faculty & students aren't involved in" (Participant 1, personal interview, June 18, 2021). Another expressed both kinds of awareness in the statement, "I was the only woman in the history department, which was fine, but I learned to communicate as a teacher in pretty male ways" (Participant 4, personal interview, August 5, 2021). A learner having agency over their learning trajectory seems to come with a degree of both interpersonal and self-awareness.

Research Question 3. **To what extent do leaders perceive that there are sufficient affordances for learning available for independent school employees to develop as leaders?**

RQ3, Finding 1

> **'Sponsorship' creates affordances for learning but interviewees noted that this can be a problematic practice. CAIS school leaders wondered whether there is a more inclusive process that schools could use.**

For some interview participants, the path to leadership involved being identified by someone in a position of formal authority as an employee with leadership potential. A leader with authority can choose to 'sponsor' an employee, using their influence to help the employee get a new job assignment or promotion by advocating for them to whomever makes the hiring decisions (Catalyst, 2019). A sponsorship relationship differs from mentorship because it tends to be driven by the sponsor, short-term and transactional (Catalyst, 2019; Levine et al., 2021). Recent NAIS research found that 13% of current heads and 8% of aspiring heads had been sponsored by someone (NAIS Research, 2021). I recognized versions of this practice described by interview participants without their using the word 'sponsorship'. One interviewee referred to these as "on the sly" promotions, meaning that the position is not posted for other internal or external candidates to be considered but rather offered directly to an internal candidate who has been identified by a senior leader in a position of authority (Participant 1, personal interview, June 18, 2021).

Four of the seven interviewees indicated that at some point in their leadership trajectory they had been 'tapped' to step into a new position in this way. They used phrases like "he asked me to be the associate head" (Participant 2, personal interview, June 18, 2021) or "she asked me to the be the Dean" (Participant 1, personal interview, June 11, 2021). Their descriptions of sponsorship were paired either with a senior leader recognizing their functional expertise in their existing role and asking them to take on a position of greater responsibility or having developed relationships after a long tenure at the school that turned into sponsorships. Heads or division heads were described as "keeping an eye out" for potential and, upon recognizing it in an employee, "building their skill"

(Participant 1, personal interview, June 18, 2021). This tended to be described positively, as a perk of working in small tight-knit communities like independent schools. Interviewees that did not self-identify as having been sponsored recognized that this practice is something that happens in independent schools, saying things like, "I can think of a teacher who is a little bit of a golden boy and sort of gets projects handed to him" (Participant 4, personal interview, August 5, 2021) and "…they get named to be on a committee, and then, when we do the NEASC [accreditation] study they get to, you know…everybody gets sort of put into their little succession" (Participant 3, personal interview, June 1, 2021).

Some of the interviewed leaders justified the practice, with one saying, "I get why [it] happens, because you really see someone is perfect for the position and you don't want to false advertise," (Participant 1, personal interview, June 18, 2021). However, they also expressed discomfort with the idea that this creates opportunities for some both not others, saying things like "but it bothers me" (Participant 1, personal interview, June 18, 2021) and, "…but I'm a believer that we should involve more people in those entry level things" (Participant 2, personal interview, June 11, 2021). The leaders were interested in seeking alternative processes for making leadership opportunities accessible to more people, to better move the school forward: "You have [potential] leaders and they see others that are given positions, and they feel qualified and they're not growing…I'm not sure if they would choose to stay and our school would lose the strongest people" (Participant 5, personal interview, September 22, 2021). Another leader noted, "Without process, it's like, 'Oh well, everybody knows he's an aspiring leader', but, well, who else? Maybe who else do we think might be an aspiring leader?" (Participant 4, personal interview, August 5, 2021).

Billett (2001) finds that affordances for learning in the workplace are dependent on the "invitational qualities" of the workplace, and that employees who are not invited to participate in stretch assignments beyond their routine tasks will not be able to "extend their knowledge" (p. 66). Workplace affordances like sponsorships are complicated, and may be based on organizational hierarchy, cliques, personal relationships, cultural practices, race, gender, and other identity affiliations in addition to individuals' competence (Billett, 2001). In the experience of one CAIS member school leader, "We call it a meritocracy and it's not – it's not, because the people who are more deserving of those roles are actually getting passed over" (Participant 3, personal interview, June 1, 2021). A more inclusive process for schools to bring aspiring leaders into the pipeline may be called for, with one interviewee looking to "create some systems where those opportunities are coming more available, more frequently" (Participant 2, personal interview, June 11, 2021). Another noted, "I worry about how we do it right now, and I want to figure out a better way to do it" (Participant 4, personal interview, August 5, 2021). While the interviewed school leaders identified the benefits of mentoring school employees and supporting their growth, they were also seeking more inclusive and transparent processes for identifying and cultivating leadership potential.

RQ3, Finding 2

> **Interviewees suggested that cross-functional awareness about roles and responsibilities across the organization creates affordances for learning but needs to be provided to more employees.**

I learned through these interviews that an essential affordance for learning is an expanding awareness of the functions of the school outside of an employee's day-to-day role. These paragraphs explore the barriers to this affordance, as cross-functional awareness is not easy to attain. In two cases, interviewees identified that graduate school work, the most expensive and difficult to access leadership development opportunity, provided their first opportunity to 'zoom out' and see how other roles at their school might function in support of the school's mission or strategy. Through graduate school, aspiring leaders can select courses that expand their understanding beyond their day-to-day job functions or can use assignments as opportunities to interrogate or explore other areas of school administration. Opportunities to learn about other job functions are also afforded to employees through being given a project to do by a senior leader that requires cross-functional collaboration, which is a kind of sponsorship and is subject to the same inclusivity limitations described above.

Another interviewee commented that it is difficult to establish within the school context that "you can contribute to a conversation that's about anything" (Participant 5, personal interview, September 22, 2021). Interview participants expressed that it is easier to engage in cross-functional conversations in external contexts, like graduate school, association commissions and other professional collaborations outside of school, and on visiting accreditation teams to other schools. In those contexts, leaders felt that they were less often viewed as a limited specialist in their area and more able to explore functions contributing to school growth outside of their professional experience. Participant 7 identified siloes as a major challenge, commenting that aspiring leaders in a departmental silo might not "have the wherewithal…to step outside of that role to build up their external expertise" (personal interview, September 15, 2021). Within the school context, Participant 5 explained that, "You have to be really strong to share your view and your voice on issues that aren't always attached to your position, so that they see you as competent and a resource and that you have experience in a variety of different areas" (participant interview, September 22, 2021). Not every aspiring leader is afforded access to these external venues or has the 'wherewithal' or 'strength' to pursue cross-functional involvement.

Power dynamics were clearly at play as interviews discussed cross-functional involvement. One interviewee commented that it was only through having an approachable dean of faculty as a supervisor that she learned, "If I didn't understand why something was happening, I was allowed to go ask the person who made that decision" (Participant 4, personal interview, August 5, 2021). This interviewee spoke about how elements of her personal identity, like age and gender, informed her comfort level with participating in these conversations. Finding senior mentors throughout her career with whom she identified personally helped her establish her own participatory identity,

which enabled her to ask and learn from these kinds of questions to people in positions of authority. Understanding who has authority also affords a kind of power to the developing leader: "I want to know who I should go to that has the power to change that decision" (Participant 5, participant interview, September 22, 2021). Participant 6 identified that one of the greatest challenges faced by independent school leaders in getting things done is a lack of understanding the "actual organizational structure – whose job is what and clarity around that" (participant interview, September 13, 2021). Schools should consider means for providing this clarity so that the burden of expanding their cross-functional awareness is not placed entirely on the developing leaders themselves.

RQ3, Finding 3

> **Although most interviewees suggested that on-the-job and other site-based experiential learning opportunities create affordances for learning leadership, some also expressed a concern that it can perpetuate a status quo that limits innovation.**

This finding emerged in four of the seven interviews to some extent and featured prominently in the interviews with Participants 3 and 6, both of whom have served in equity and inclusion roles. In a conversation about identifying and developing future independent school leaders, Participant 3 observed that, "I see that people who are willing to say 'yes' and believe in the status quo get promoted" (Participant 3, personal interview, June 1, 2021). The status quo, as described by Participant 3 is hierarchical, patriarchal, top-down, and results-oriented, and supports a "keep busy, don't connect with your body, don't take any days off, overwork yourself until you pass out, wear many hats" approach to work (personal interview, June 1, 2021). I heard echoes of this perspective from Participant 6:

> Everybody's just worried about the bottom line. There's more to leadership than the 'money' of the thing and there's more to leadership than the 'doing' of the thing. There's a 'being' in leadership that's critically important, that I think often gets forgotten in the hustle and bustle of the 'doing'. (participant interview, September 13, 2021).

A results-oriented approach was also mentioned as a problematic example to be setting for students, who are overscheduled and anxious having internalized the message that "more is more is more is more" (Participant 2, personal interview, June 11, 2021; Participant 6, participant interview, September 13, 2021).

If functional expertise is defined by the above status quo, affordances for learning leadership will continue to be extended to employees who demonstrate excellence within that construct. The four leaders who informed this finding spoke to a need for schools to instead demonstrate that they value humanness and relationships. "We need to shift the locus of power so it's relational. If you're not reassessing and readjusting power than we're not doing the work of changing [schools] in transformational ways" (Participant 3, personal interview, June 1, 2021). Participants 4 and 5 referred throughout their interviews to supporting and listening to colleagues, establishing lifelong friendships, leading with humor, building up others, and creating sustainable change as the hallmarks

of what leadership has meant to them. Participant 6 felt passionately that exploring one's own identity, including one's racial identity and biases, is an essential step toward seeing and supporting the humanity in others. These interviewed leaders encourage schools to look at how employees engage with the humanity in others when identifying future leaders.

Recommendations

Each major recommendation is displayed in a box for emphasis and explored in the paragraphs that follow.

Recommendation 1

> **I recommend that CAIS plan an upcoming Annual Conference on Governance on the theme of succession planning, with a specific focus on internal talent development. CAIS might also provide a research-informed deliverable to conference registrants and make this resource available online to others for a fee.**

As stated in the findings section, the CAIS member schools surveyed are experiencing increasing turnover in the headship position and their heads feel that existing succession planning efforts are not sufficient to support the expected turnover. CAIS holds an Annual Conference on Governance that could be an appropriate forum through which to support member schools with succession planning. I recommend that an upcoming Annual Conference on Governance be offered on this theme, including a keynote speaker and workshop series designed to: (1) help board of trustee members understand the research around succession planning, in particular the "case for internal talent development," and; (2) provide practical guidance for school boards to undertake succession planning, including clearly delineating the role that the school head and leadership team play in the process (Khalsa, 2017, para. 17; Paradis, 2021). CAIS might also consider contracting with a consultant or independent researcher to prepare a deliverable that could be included with conference registration and made available online to others for a fee. In this deliverable, CAIS could offer guidance specific to the different types and sizes of schools in the association and provide generic samples of written succession plans that could serve as templates for schools to follow. This would align with the CAIS leadership's aim to support member schools with research and design ideas in lieu of their turning to a consulting firm.

Providing boards and heads with direction about how to conduct formal leadership development within their schools, as one component of succession planning, will also address the surveyed CAIS school heads' concerns that their schools are not as effective as they need to be at identifying and developing prospective successors to senior leadership positions. They noted, in particular, that the availability of formal in-house leadership development opportunities for their employees was not sufficient. Developing a formalized succession plan that includes formalizing mentorship and sponsorship opportunities has also been found to "increase the presence of underrepresented leaders," which aligns this conference theme to recent CAIS governance conference themes of diversity, equity, and inclusion (McKinsey & Company, 2020). Succession planning and internal talent development is also well aligned with the most recent focus of NAIS, whose trade magazine "Independent School" released a fall 2021 issue with the title "Talent Development" (NAIS, 2021). This publication also provides CAIS with possible conference workshop topics and a host of recently published experts who are thinking about talent development in the current independent school context.

In addition to the scholarly literature cited and findings presented in this study, the resources cited in this recommendation and listed below can serve as a starting point for further research as CAIS considers planning a conference on this topic:

1. "Talent Development," the fall 2021 issue of Independent School Magazine from NAIS.
2. "Succession Planning: Getting it Right," a 2017 article written by Siri Akal Khalsa for Independent School Magazine.
3. "Developing Future Leaders from Within," a 2021 article written by Deana Paradis for Net Assets: Advancing Business Excellence in Independent Schools.
4. "Building Leadership Capacity: Reframing the Succession Challenge," a 2011 report from Bridgespan Group specific to nonprofits.
5. "Understanding Organizational Barriers to a More Inclusive Workplace," a 2020 report on survey findings from McKinsey & Company.
6. "Succession Plan for Spruce Street School," a 2012 artifact from an independent school shared through the NAIS People of Color Conference.

Recommendation 2

> **I recommend that the CAIS Commission on Membership and Accreditation and the CAIS Commission on School Growth and Collaboration work together to develop an abbreviated self-study process that schools could implement annually as an evidence-based practice (not as an additional requirement for continued accreditation). This would afford all participating CAIS school employees the opportunity to widen their lens beyond their role and better understand the cross-functional operations of independent schools.**

This recommendation addresses two of the findings in this study: (1) employees broadening their perspectives by gaining cross-functional awareness of school operations creates affordances for learning leadership; and (2) schools would benefit from removing barriers and creating opportunities for all employees to gain cross-functional awareness. While there are many means by which school leaders can break down silos between roles and offices within their schools, this recommendation is written to leverage the current expertise and functions of CAIS. This project is imagined as a collaboration between CAIS' Commission on Membership and Accreditation, which oversees the evaluation and accreditation services of the Association, and CAIS' Commission on School Growth and Collaboration, whose purpose is to "foster creativity, diversity, and innovative thinking" by providing "experiences and resources that support and develop the CAIS community" (CAIS, 2021).

The recommendation is for these two commissions to work together to develop an abbreviated self-study process for schools, which schools could opt to implement annually as an evidence-based practice rather than an additional accreditation requirement. Several leaders that I interviewed pointed to accreditation self-studies as an opportunity that afforded them, or others in their schools, substantial leadership development and the ability to widen their lens. The annual self-study proposed here could be designed around the same accreditation standards currently used in CAIS'

decennial accreditation process but follow a less time- and resource-intensive model, to be developed by the Commissions, for producing a self-evaluative report (CAIS, 2021). CAIS only accredits PK-8 schools; CAIS upper schools are required to be accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC, 2021). Therefore, the CAIS Commissions would want to work together to either: (1) synthesize the CAIS and NEASC standards and processes to produce a single annual self-study model; or (2) develop two models, with a unique process and set of standards for lower and upper schools. Accreditation standards explore all school functions, from governance and enrollment to the experience of the student and health and safety, thus affording employees the opportunity to broaden their understanding of school operations. The necessity for all school employees to be involved in some way in the self-study process would need to be preserved, along with the opportunity for some employees to take on leadership or facilitative roles.

The Commissions would want to design the conclusion of the annual self-study process to enable schools to receive feedback on their evaluation – possibilities include the submission of a self-study report to the CAIS Commission for review, an exchange of the self-study report with another school head, and/or a less time- and resource-intensive version of a visiting team evaluation of the report. A visiting team could be comprised of member school employees of all functions and levels of experience. This would provide additional opportunities, annually, for employees to broaden their perspectives by reading other schools' self-study reports, visiting other schools, and broadly discussing school operations with a diverse group of colleagues – thus addressing the finding that widening one's perspective outside of the school context can also provide new affordances for learning. If the Commissions went this direction, one option for minimizing the logistical burden on CAIS to coordinate annual visiting committees would be to create a set of guidelines that all schools would be expected to use to reach out to other schools in order to create their *own* visiting committees, allowing this to be a self-sustaining and hands-off operation for CAIS. Finally, the Commissions would want to develop a workshop for training school employees in how to conduct the annual self-study, which could be offered biannually to member schools as part of the programming included in their membership.

Recommendation 3

> **I recommend that CAIS leadership, with support from the Commission on School Growth and Collaboration and the Commission on Diversity in Independent Schools, develop a 'train-the-trainer' style immersive summer workshop, with ongoing cohort-based meetings through one academic year, to prepare school leaders to foster equity-focused mentorship cultures in their schools.**

This recommendation is informed by two findings: (1) that sponsorship is an effective practice for creating affordances for learning but may not be an equitable or inclusive practice; and (2) that self-reflection is an important leadership development practice and perhaps a necessary ingredient for transforming schools. The intention of this recommendation is to bring multi-leveled mentoring-partnership programs to CAIS member schools in which all employees become equipped to reflect on their practice and careers with colleagues in ways that are supportive, open, inclusive, and treat

differences as assets (Endo, 2020). In this kind of equity-focused approach to mentoring, mentor-partners form a mutually beneficial relationship to learn from one another and learn about themselves, and the mentoring of a new colleague is not restricted to just one relationship, but rather involves multiple levels or networks of mentor-partners (Endo, 2020). Although an equity-focused mentoring program does not directly address the practice of sponsorship, research shows that sponsorship and mentorship work best in concert and that sponsorship can grow out of mentoring relationships (Center for Women and Business at Bentley University, 2017). The intent, therefore, is for an equity-focused mentoring program to yield more equitable affordances for learning through expanding sponsorship opportunities.

In order for schools to create and sustain equity-focused mentoring programs, school leaders must ensure that "all parties are able and willing to enter into mentoring partnerships" (Endo, 2020, p. 173). This includes supporting mentor-partners with equity-focused professional development around self-reflective topics like identity development, positionality, and unconscious bias, as well as around cultural competence, power, and privilege (Endo, 2020). With these elements in place, schools can be encouraged to focus on designing mentoring models that make sense for them. It may be most important for schools to develop a 'mentoring culture,' which can be understood as "a deliberate and ongoing focus on creating opportunities for both formal and informal mentoring throughout the organization" (Center for Women and Business at Bentley University, 2017, p. 9). Programs themselves may come and go and evolve, but an equity-based mentoring *culture* can create a "standard and consistency of mentoring practice that really works" (Zachary, as cited in Center for Women and Business at Bentley University, 2017, p. 9).

In order to enable member schools to create and sustain in-house mentoring programs, CAIS should develop a training program for new leaders that is built on a train-the-trainer model. An effective example of this model that could serve as a template is the National SEED Project, which facilitates an immersive week-long training for participants who are then equipped to create and lead seminars in their own school contexts (National SEED Project, 2021). Trained leaders are also able to refresh their learning at shorter, three-day renewal workshops. The focus of the National SEED Project is to "drive personal, institutional, and societal change toward social justice," which is a much broader focus than this proposed CAIS program (National SEED Project, 2021, para. 1). The focus of the CAIS training program might be something like, 'to foster equity-focused mentoring cultures in schools.' This program may need to be developed by the CAIS leadership in consultation with experts in identity work, cultural competency education, and mentoring/coaching models. Alternatively, the CAIS Commission on School Growth and Collaboration and the CAIS Commission on Diversity in Independent Schools could collaborate to develop the curriculum.

Because this is by far the most intensive recommendation and CAIS may be constrained by time or resources, I offer here some possibilities for the design of the program that are not prescriptive. There are many shapes that a program like this could take. The program might be suitable for school heads, associate/assistant heads, division heads, and department chairs, or perhaps only those entering newly into one of these leadership roles. Schools may choose to send only the leader responsible for faculty mentoring or new faculty onboarding, but the program could be designed for anyone in a leadership position to expand their capability to support and mentor colleagues. The

program could consist of an initial multiple-day immersive training over the summer, where leaders could focus on developing a self-reflective leadership practice, begin or continue to do their own identity work, develop cultural competency skills, learn the basic tenets of mentoring partnerships, and workshop the creation, reimagining, or facilitation of their school's mentoring programs. The leaders would also need practice in facilitation, to take the relevant trainings back to their schools. The program may also include monthly virtual meetups with the cohort throughout the year to enable collaborative reflection. Like SEED, the program could come with the expectation that leaders create and facilitate trainings at their schools, perhaps culminating in a final collaborative reflection with the cohort (National SEED Project, 2021).

Conclusions

In this project, I sought to understand the alignment between the current leadership development practices and the future leadership needs of CAIS member schools. The purpose of this exploration was to aid CAIS in its mission to support schools' continued pursuit of excellence by providing them with empirically-based recommendations for professional learning programming around leadership development that they might design and offer. The need for this research is supported by a recent NAIS survey of current and aspiring heads, which found that 80% of schools have a head who has been in the job for less than 10 years and that more than half plan to transition out of their current roles in the next five years (NAIS Research, 2021). Moreover, more than 60% of administrators in other roles intend to transition out of their jobs in that same timeframe (NAIS Research, 2021). NAIS encourages schools to "offer ample support and room for growth" in order to foster an internal leadership pipeline (NAIS Research, 2021, p. 7). When I interviewed the CAIS executive director and director of professional learning in the fall of 2020, they echoed this need to assist member schools with the retention and development of prospective leaders.

To conduct a leadership development needs assessment in CAIS member schools, I conducted a survey of CAIS member school heads and interviewed seven current CAIS school administrators. I analyzed the data through the lens of the conceptual framework of opportunities to learn as affordances for learning in order to produce a summary of findings (Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008). I found that CAIS schools have seen and will continue to see the same turnover in the headship position cited in the above NAIS research. Current leaders do not think that their schools' efforts are sufficient for identifying and preparing successors to senior leadership positions. The interviewed administrators identified on-the-job and other experiential learning opportunities as those that provide aspiring leaders with the most affordances for learning leadership. Because these opportunities often come through sponsorship, after an employee's potential or functional expertise is recognized by a senior leader with authority, the administrators were concerned about the equity and inclusivity of this practice. I found that both an expanded perspective on school operations and a practice of self-reflection helped administrators access more affordances for learning and enabled them to change their participation in the practice of leadership.

The recommendations that I generated for these findings include: (1) an Annual Conference on Governance on the theme of succession planning and talent development; (2) the development of an annual self-study process through which schools can engage all employees in developing a wider view of school operations; and (3) the development of a train-the-trainer workshop to prepare school leaders to transform the mentoring culture in their schools into one that is equity-focused. The primary limitation for CAIS to make use of these recommendations is a resource limitation of time, money, and human power, as each recommendation requires some amount of further inquiry, research, and design. I utilized existing CAIS infrastructure wherever possible in order to lower the barrier for CAIS to create these changes. The third recommendation is the most resource-intensive and the most 'completely new' for CAIS, so I provided an example of an existing model from

another organization that could serve as a template. In designing these recommendations, I was also limited by my positionality in the CAIS community. While I tried to imagine the design and development of these professional learning programs from the perspective of CAIS, I found myself frequently imagining being the school leader who would be the target audience for these proposals, and evaluating the feasibility of the recommendations from that personal and professional lens. When I found myself doing this, I tried to reimagine myself instead as any of the surveyed or interviewed CAIS leaders who informed the findings for this study, in order to be sure that I was proposing recommendations in alignment with their needs.

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Appendix A
Head of School Survey Instrument

Default Question Block

Informed Consent

You are invited to take part in a site-based project on leadership development in independent schools in Connecticut. I obtained your contact information from the Connecticut Association of Independent Schools (CAIS), which is serving as the partner organization for this project. This survey is open to heads of school or the equivalent senior leader at CAIS member schools.

This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand the nature of this project and your potential involvement in it before deciding whether to take part. This project is being completed by me, Rachel Wright, a doctoral candidate at Vanderbilt University.

Background Information: The purpose of this project is to understand the leadership development needs of CAIS member schools in order to make informed recommendations to CAIS for future professional development programming for school leaders.

Procedures: If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete an online survey (one time) with an estimated 20-minute completion time. Here are some sample questions:

- In what sector/type of organization were you employed prior to your current position?
- Does your school have an associate head or other second-in-command?
- In the past 6 months, how often did you think of needing more leadership development opportunities for your employees?

Voluntary Nature: Participation is voluntary. You are free to accept or turn down the invitation. I will respect your decision if you decide not to participate. If you decide to participate now, you can still change your mind by not submitting the completed survey. You may stop at any time. The information gathered will be anonymous.

Risks and Benefits of Participation: Participating in this survey involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life. Participating would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. The project's potential benefit is to gain a better understanding of the current state of leadership development needs at CAIS member schools for the design of relevant future professional development programming. Ultimately, the outcome could contribute to continued independent school stability and growth.

Payment: There is no payment or compensation of any kind for your participation.

Privacy: All responses to the survey will be reported in the aggregate. No personal identifiers will be collected. Details that might identify participants will not be shared. I will not have your personal information or use your responses for any purpose outside of this project. Data will be kept secure by password protecting of the electronic files.

Contacts and Questions: You may ask any questions you have now or later by contacting me via email at rachel.wright@vanderbilt.edu. If you desire a summary of the results, please email me your request. On the subject line please indicate "Leadership Development Project Results Summary."

Obtaining Your Consent: If you feel you understand the project well enough to make a decision, please indicate your agreement with the terms of consent by clicking the "I Consent" button below. To protect your privacy, no consent signature is required. Please print/save this form for your records.

Click 'I Consent' to enter the survey.

○ I Consent

○ I Do Not Consent

Block 2

This survey is open to school heads or the equivalent senior leader at CAIS member schools. Are you a school head or the equivalent senior leader?

○ Yes

○ No

Block 1

Demographic Information

What is your age?
- ○ Less than 25 years
- ○ 25 – 34 years
- ○ 35 – 44 years
- ○ 45 – 54 years
- ○ 55 – 64 years
- ○ 65 years or older

Which of the following best describes you?
- ○ Asian or Pacific Islander
- ○ Black or African American
- ○ Hispanic or Latino
- ○ Native American or Alaskan Native
- ○ White or Caucasian
- ○ Multiracial or Biracial
- ○ A race/ethnicity not listed here

What is your gender?
- ○ Male
- ○ Female
- ○ Prefer not to say
- ○ Prefer to self-describe:

What is your highest level of education?
- ○ High school or GED
- ○ Bachelor's degree (undergraduate)
- ○ Master's degree (graduate)
- ○ Post-graduate degree
- ○ Other (please specify):

Did you graduate from an independent high school?
- ○ Yes
- ○ No

○ Other (please explain):

[   ]

Block 3

Career Path

How long have you been in your current position as head of school?

[   ]

Which of the following best describes how you became the head at this school?
○ Internal promotion
○ External recruitment
○ Other (please specify):

[   ]

In what sector or type of organization were you employed prior to holding your current position?
○ Independent school
○ Public school
○ Other type of school
○ Other nonprofit sector
○ Other public sector
○ Private sector
○ Other (please specify):

[   ]

Knowing that the future is impossible to predict, how long do you imagine you will continue in your current position at this school?
○ Less than 1 year
○ 1 to 3 years
○ 4 to 5 years
○ More than 5 years

What do you anticipate your next position will be (select all that apply):
☐ Head of another independent school
☐ Other position at an independent school
☐ Consultant
☐ A position in another nonprofit
☐ A position in government/public sector

☐ A position in the private sector

☐ Retirement or semi-retirement

☐ Other:

Block 4

Succession Planning

Your succession into the headship was:

○ After a planned departure of the previous head

○ After an unplanned or emergency departure of the previous head

○ Other (please specify):

Does your school have an associate head or other second-in-command?

○ Yes

○ No

How long has the second-in-command been in that position?

Please choose the appropriate response for each item.

	Not at all likely	Somewhat likely	Very likely
My second-in-command will be selected as the next head when I leave the organization.	○	○	○
My second-in-command will remain with the organization if not selected as the next head.	○	○	○

Please choose the appropriate response for each item.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
My transition into the headship was orderly and did not disrupt the work flow of the school.	○	○	○	○	○
When I depart the school, I expect that the transition to my successor will be orderly and not disrupt the work flow of the school.	○	○	○	○	○
My school invests in leader development to be prepared for future leadership transitions.	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
My school has an emergency succession plan for the head of school.	○	○	○	○	○
My school has a planned departure succession plan for the head of school.	○	○	○	○	○

Block 7

Personal Leadership Development

When you became the head of school, how prepared did you feel in each of the following areas of independent school leadership?

	Not at all prepared	Somewhat prepared	Adequately prepared	Very prepared
Team management	○	○	○	○
Admissions and enrollment	○	○	○	○
Board relations	○	○	○	○
Business operations	○	○	○	○
Curriculum development	○	○	○	○
Development and fundraising	○	○	○	○
Faculty relations	○	○	○	○
Legal operations and risk managements	○	○	○	○
Public relations and communication	○	○	○	○
Marketing	○	○	○	○
Student relations	○	○	○	○
Facilities management	○	○	○	○
Using data to inform program planning	○	○	○	○
Using data to evaluate program value	○	○	○	○

What leadership development activities have you utilized to develop your personal leadership? Check all that apply.

☐ Traditional university school leadership preparation program

☐ University preparation program focused on independent school leadership

☐ Other degree-granting university program (Master's, PhD, EdD, JD, MBA) - please specify:

☐ Professional development workshops or courses

☐ Leadership experience in another sector

☐ NAIS Aspiring Heads program

☐ Executive coach

☐ Mentorship

☐ Stretch assignments and on-the-job learning

☐ Reading

☐ Other (please specify):

Block 5

Leadership Development

Please choose the appropriate response.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Leadership development programs and activities are important for employees.	○	○	○	○	○
I am confident that I can design and implement leadership development programs and activities for my employees.	○	○	○	○	○

Please choose the appropriate response.

	Not at all	Infrequently	About once a month	Every week	Every day
In the past 6 months, how often did you think of needing more leadership development opportunities for your employees?	○	○	○	○	○

Please choose the appropriate response.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Formal leadership development activities, like classes, workshops, and mentorship programs, are provided at my school for my employees.	○	○	○	○	○
Formal leadership development activities, like classes, workshops, and mentorship programs, are available through organizations outside of my school for my employees.	○	○	○	○	○
Informal leadership development opportunities, like performance evaluations, informal mentorship, and stretch assignments, are available at my school.	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Leadership development opportunities are offered to all employees.	○	○	○	○	○
Leadership development opportunities for employees are supported by the senior administration.	○	○	○	○	○
Leadership development opportunities are an important way for employees to advance in the organization.	○	○	○	○	○
Leadership development opportunities are an important way to recognize high performing or high potential employees.	○	○	○	○	○

Block 6

Final Question

Overall, how effective do you believe your school's practices are for identifying and preparing successors for senior leadership positions, including the head position? Please choose the appropriate response for each iterm.

	Not effective at all	Slightly effective	Moderately effective	Very effective	Extremely effective
Identifying apporopriate successors	○	○	○	○	○
Developing successors for senior leadership positions	○	○	○	○	○

Please provide any additional comments you may wish to share on the above question:

Appendix B
Leader Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about yourself, your professional background, and your position at xx school.

2. Tell me about your school community.

3. Tell me what you believe constitutes exemplary leadership. Has this view changed over the years? Explain how.

4. Describe your preparation process for taking on your current leadership role at this school.

5. Upon assuming your current leadership role at this school, what parts of the job were you most comfortable with? Why do you think so?

6. What parts of the job were most challenging? Why do you think so?

7. Based on your experiences, what are the top 3 challenges that new leaders face when taking on a leadership role at this school?

8. Did you receive any training, development, or support with regard to these three challenges?

9. Describe any opportunities that you have had to develop your leadership practice within your school.

10. Describe any contexts outside of your school where you have developed your leadership practice.

11. How have your experiences affected your perceptions regarding the need for preparing future school leaders?

12. Think about employees at your school that you have identified as having leadership aspirations or potential.

    a. How have you identified them?

    b. Would they be prepared to have your job next year? If not, why not?

    c. What do you think they can do or should to prepare for leadership?

    d. What opportunities do they have to practice and/or reflect on leadership?

    e. What might be missing from their current leadership development opportunities?

Appendix C
Interview Transcript Analysis Codebook

Opportunities to Learn		
Code	Definition of Code	Example
1. leadership experience in the school context	References to learning 'on the job' by doing the work of leadership in the context of an independent school	"I do think a lot of it comes with having opportunities to grow and to get into these roles, and you learn by doing."
2. leadership experience outside of the school context	References to learning through previous work experiences, external organizations or associations, or in personal contexts such as a family or relationship	"I went to all these Chamber of Commerce trainings that are so helpful and then I had one that was on customer service – which, by the way, we need so much more of in schools."
3. professional collaboration	References to learning by working with other leaders, both internal and external to the school	"Three minds are better to hash it out than one and we all bring different experiences."
4. self-reflection	References to developing leadership practice through reflection on one's own ideas, beliefs, identity, or positionality	"I worked in the nonprofit world in a children's museum, and I love that because it taught me the kind of leader I did want to be."
5. mentorship	References to a mentor, defined as an individual who informally or formally helps the learner navigate their career and provides guidance (Catalyst, 2019)	"She had a great way of seeing people in a different light and pushing them into to really different and distinct roles."
6. observation of leadership	Descriptions of lessons learned by observing others in leadership roles	"What I learned from him is he wasn't not paying attention when he was quiet. He was really listening."
7. workshops and conferences	References to attending conferences or workshops, both internal and external to the school	"Another opportunity to connect is through CAIS work, so any workshops or meetups particularly this past year, when they had meetups for folks of color or equity professionals."
8. graduate school	References to masters or other advanced degree program	"After my sixth year I took a leave of absence to go to the Klingenstein year-long private school leadership program."
9. reading	References to reading books, publications, or other professional literature, or to listening to speakers, TED Talks, or podcasts	"I was listening to a podcast by Sheldon Eakins of Leading Equity and it was like, oh, there it is. That's the meat of it."

Conditions Impacting Affordances for Learning		
Code	Definition of Code	Example
1. timing/special circumstances	References to a learning opportunity that is impacted by contemporaneous circumstances, such as COVID or the Black@ movement	"We don't have limitless resources, so managing that and the world that we live in…we can't meet demands for more and more and more, but we also have to be realistic about the landscape that we're in."
2. longevity or familiarity with context	References to a learning opportunity that is impacted by an individual's familiarity with the school context due to longevity and/or long-term relationship-building	"People in our small schools understand that the job is a lifestyle and that they need to oftentimes do things in a volunteer manner."
3. escalation of responsibility	References to a learning opportunity that is associated with a pattern of escalation of leadership responsibilities	"Moving to the moving to upper school only, being asked to be a Dean, and then being asked to take over all the registrar positions, being asked to be the scheduler and then finally being asked to be the assistant head of the upper school…"
4. expanding perspective outside of role/function	References to a learning opportunity that is associated with the learner expanding their perspective outside of their role or function at the school	"I think it's so important for leaders to always be on the lookout for opportunities to blow up those false narratives and help people understand how the system works."
5. expanding perspective outside of school context	References to a learning opportunity that is associated with the learner expanding their perspective outside of the context of their school of employment	"I love doing work with them, and it's a public-private institute, so the equity work isn't just for independent school educators, it's for public school educators now.
6. sponsorship	References to a learning opportunity that is impacted by a sponsor, defined as a senior leader who uses influence to help the learner obtain assignments, promotions, or jobs (Catalyst, 2019)	"Our former head of school was beautiful at taking people and pushing them into different roles. That's when she asked me to be a Dean… [I] was like 'really?'"
7. functional expertise	Description of a learning opportunity that is impacted by the learner's demonstrated expertise in a role or function that is central to the school	"I'm insanely organized and that has always been appreciated by the division head."
8. interpersonal awareness	Description of a learning opportunity that is impacted by an individual's awareness of the ideas, beliefs, identity, or positionality of others	"Faculty can get incredibly frustrated when there isn't kind of an open line of communication."
9. self-awareness	Description of a learning opportunity that is impacted by an individual's awareness of one's own ideas, beliefs, identity, or positionality	"I have had this perception of leadership since my graduate work."