

"WHAT YOUR COLLEAGUES ARE SAYING . . ."

What sets *Leading Resilient Schools* apart is the rare combination of deep experience and practical wisdom that Stollar, Prendergast, and Lee bring to every page. Their insights on communicating with clarity to drive coherence are refreshingly grounded rather than theoretical. They understand that coherence isn't built through structures alone; it thrives when leaders use intentional messaging and sensemaking routines to reinforce shared meaning. By recognizing that clarity is subjective and exists when educators at every level can articulate priorities with confidence, the authors offer leaders a transformative framework. Their collective wisdom cuts through the noise of educational fads, providing actionable strategies that truly work. This is the kind of book that can change how leaders think and lead.

Dennis M. Williams Jr.

Director of Secondary Education, North Penn School District
Lansdale, PA

Leading Resilient Schools offers a timely and powerful roadmap for education leaders navigating the complexities facing today's school systems. Stollar, Prendergast, and Lee skillfully translate research into practical leadership moves that strengthen vision, culture, and collective efficacy. This book is an invaluable resource for leaders committed to building resilient communities that adapt, persevere, and thrive through change.

Bryan O'Black

Superintendent of Schools, Shaler Area School District
Pittsburgh, PA

Leading Resilient Schools provided essential guidance as I developed a clear school vision, strengthened a cohesive professional culture, and worked to reduce teacher turnover in Pennsylvania's most diverse school. The book's practical lessons supported our efforts to build resilience across our students, staff, and community while navigating today's complex political, social, and emotional challenges.

Joseph Intrieri

Principal, Central Dauphin East High School
Harrisburg, PA

As a former student of Dr. Stollar and now a middle school principal, I've had the chance to see this work come full circle. *Leading Resilient Schools* puts into words the kind of leadership our schools need—grounded, thoughtful, and focused on people. It offers clear ideas and real examples that help leaders move their schools forward, even when things feel uncertain. *Leading Resilient Schools* gives leaders practical strategies we can actually use to build stronger school communities.

Tuesday Hufnagel

Principal, Dover Area Middle School
Dover, PA

This is a must-read book for school leaders—new or seasoned—who desire to improve their schools through resiliency. Drawing on research and authentic leadership experiences, the book delivers a powerful framework, with practical strategies, relatable scenarios, and reflective practices that foster resiliency. While reading, you will quickly recognize the authors’ deep insights into this topic and experience many enlightening “aha” moments.

Vicki Denmark

International Educational Consultant

Retired School and District Leader

Atlanta, GA

Leading Resilient Schools

Leading Resilient Schools

Adapting for Collective Efficacy,
Impact, and Coherence

Lori Stollar
Lindsay Prendergast
Piper Lee

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FOREWORD

In January 2014, the snow didn't just fall—it stayed. Day after day, schools were closed. By the time we returned, it felt like we had barely been in session at all. If memory serves, we may have attended only four days that entire month.

The district responded the only way it knew how: extend the day by an hour for six weeks and add additional days to the end of the school year. Overnight, our schedules shifted. Expectations changed. Time was “reclaimed.”

I remember sitting with that decision and thinking, *My poor kindergartners cannot do another hour of school. It's already a long day.*

Our kindergarten teachers felt it too.

So we made a decision.

We did not turn that additional hour into more structured instruction. We did not fill it with mandates or pacing guides. Instead, we gave five- and six-year-olds what they actually needed.

They had a snack.

They went to recess.

They had time to be readers.

That was it.

On paper, we did not follow the requirement.

In practice, we followed our students.

And I have never regretted that decision for a single moment.

Looking back, I realize now that what we were doing in that moment was not defiance. It was leadership. It was a recognition that resilience is not about rigidly adhering to systems that no longer serve people. It is about responding to reality with clarity, courage, and purpose.

We did not “add time.”

We redesigned the experience.

And that distinction matters.

Because in education, we too often *confuse* compliance with resilience.

“If we don’t know our kids, we can’t serve our kids” (Drummond-Konopasek & Drummond-Konopasek, 2026).

That belief has grounded Danny’s and my work for years. It is simple, but it carries enormous weight. It reminds us that education is not about systems first—it is about people.

In *When All Means All*, we argue that knowing students is not an initiative. It is the foundation. And yet, like many of the phrases we use in education, it is often easier to say than it is to operationalize.

“All means all.”

“Every student. Every day.”

We say them. We believe them. And yet, too often, they remain just that—words. Because belief without systems is aspiration. Not action.

And if we are honest, that same gap exists when we talk about resilience.

We tell leaders to be resilient.

We tell teachers to be resilient.

We celebrate resilience as if it is an individual trait.

But here is the truth we must confront:

Telling people to “just be resilient” without changing the conditions in which they work is no different than saying “all means all” without building the systems to support every learner.

It sounds right.

It feels right.

But it changes nothing.

This is why *Leading Resilient Schools* arrives at *exactly* the right moment in education. This book does not romanticize resilience. It reframes it.

FOREWORD

Lori Stollar, Lindsay Prendergast, and Piper Lee challenge a deeply embedded myth in our field—that resilience is about individual endurance. Instead, they make a compelling and necessary case that resilience is something we build through leadership, through systems, and through intentional design.

As I read this book, I kept coming back to that original belief: If we don't know our kids, we can't serve our kids. And then this book pushed that belief further: **If we don't know our staff, we cannot serve our kids.**

That is the shift this profession needs.

Because student-centered systems cannot exist without staff-centered leadership. You cannot build a school that serves every student if the adults in that system are overwhelmed, disconnected, or operating without clarity. You cannot expect innovation in classrooms when fear lives in staff meetings. You cannot sustain excellence for students when the systems surrounding educators are fragmented, reactive, or incoherent.

Resilient schools are not built on heroic leadership.

They are built on:

- Coherence
- Trust
- Shared purpose
- Systems that hold under pressure

One of the most powerful contributions of this book is its emphasis on vision as a stabilizing force. In struggling systems, initiatives often feel like puzzle pieces from different boxes—disconnected, competing, and exhausting.

In resilient systems, vision becomes a filter.

- It creates clarity.
- It aligns effort.
- It sustains energy.

This aligns with what we have seen in our own work: When educators understand the *why*, they can navigate almost any *how*. But vision alone is not enough.

This book goes deeper—into culture, trust, and collective efficacy. It names a truth many leaders feel but cannot always articulate: The strength of a school is not defined by its plans but by its people and the relationships between them. If “all means all” ensures every student belongs, then psychological safety ensures every adult belongs. Without that, we do not have resilient schools. We have compliant ones.

And compliance has never transformed anything. The focus on collective efficacy further strengthens this work. Research has long shown that collective efficacy is one of the most powerful influences on student learning (Hattie, 2012). Resilient schools are not built on individual excellence alone. They are built on shared belief. The belief that together, we can navigate challenges, solve problems, and improve outcomes for students.

When that belief exists:

- Schools do not fracture
- They do not retreat
- They move forward—together

Not bouncing back. Bouncing forward.

This book also brings something education desperately needs right now: coherence. In a time of initiative overload, it does not add more. It helps leaders align what already exists. It brings together vision, culture, instruction, and systems so schools move from reacting . . . to leading. Because sustainability is not about doing less. It is about doing what matters most—with clarity and alignment.

As I reflect on the connection between *When All Means All* and *Leading Resilient Schools*, I come back to this:

We cannot achieve “all means all” without resilient systems. We cannot build resilient systems without intentional leadership. Both require us to move beyond words. Both require us to examine what we have built—and what we have not.

Both require us to ask:

- Do our systems reflect our beliefs?
- Do our practices align with our values?
- Are we creating conditions where both students and staff can thrive?

This book does not offer quick fixes. It offers something far more valuable: a roadmap.

FOREWORD

For leaders ready to move:

- From reacting → to designing
- From managing → to leading
- From surviving → to building

And most importantly, it reminds us: Resilience is not an individual pursuit.

It is a collective one.

Built in teams.

In conversations.

In shared commitments.

In daily decisions.

Lori Stollar, Lindsay Prendergast, and Piper Lee have given the field something we need right now—not just language but direction. Not just ideas but a path forward.

So as you begin this book, I leave you with this:

- Where are you relying on words without systems?
- Where are you asking people to be resilient without changing conditions?
- Where is there an opportunity to lead more intentionally, more coherently, and more courageously?

Because the future of our schools depends on our willingness to move from belief . . . to action.

We know that all must mean all.

Now the question is:

Will we build the systems to make it true?

—Adam Drummond-Konopasek

Author of *Instructional Change Agent: 48 Ways to Be the Leader Your School Needs* and *When All Means All: The Constellation of Learning Approach to Student-Centered Schools*

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This book is rooted in the belief that resilience is never built alone, and neither was this work. First and foremost, we are deeply grateful to the people who have been our steady encouragers from the very beginning:

Lori extends heartfelt gratitude to her husband, Nick, whose quiet strength and unwavering encouragement sustained her daily, and to her daughters, who continued to inspire her through their compassion and resilience. Lori also holds special appreciation for her grandsons; it is for their future—and for the generation they represent—that this work remains so deeply personal and purposeful.

To Lindsay's husband, Pete, whose constant patience and unwavering support made the long hours and ambitious goals possible. To my dear parents, brother and sister-in-law, and the entire Prendergast family, whose wisdom and life lessons are infused in these pages beyond measure.

To Piper's parents and children, thank you for your steady encouragement, patience, and belief in this work. Your love, flexibility, and daily inspiration continued to fuel my purpose and reminded us why building resilient, human-centered schools matters so deeply.

We are equally thankful to the many friends and colleagues who trusted us with their stories and experiences. We are especially grateful to Amanda Brueggeman, our incredible coauthor of *Habits for Resilient Learners* and tireless thought partner throughout the development of this work. To the many educators and leaders whose insights helped shape the thinking throughout this book, your openness and professional courage added authenticity and depth to these pages.

Our sincere appreciation goes to the remarkable team at Corwin. Your steady guidance, thoughtful feedback, and belief in the importance of this message helped bring this project to life in meaningful ways. We are also thankful for the professional pathways and connections that created the space for our partnership to begin and flourish.

Finally, this book is dedicated to educators everywhere who show up each day with commitment, care, and courage. Your work matters more than ever. It is our hope that *Leading Resilient Schools* both honors your efforts and supports the important work still ahead.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Lori Stollar is an experienced district leader, executive director, and nationally recognized consultant specializing in change management, strategic planning, and professional learning system design. She serves as executive director of PA EDGE (Pennsylvania Association for Elevating, Developing, and Growing Educators), where she leads statewide efforts to strengthen leadership practice and educator development. With a career spanning curriculum leadership, innovation, and higher education teaching, Lori bridges research and practice to support continuous improvement. Her doctoral research on professional learning

communities reflects her commitment to collaboration and resilience. She is a sought-after leadership coach who helps school and district leaders navigate complex change with clarity and purpose. Lori holds a bachelor's degree from Shippensburg University, a master's degree in teaching and curriculum from The Pennsylvania State University, and a doctoral degree in educational leadership from Widener University.



Lindsay Prendergast brings two decades of experience in global education, where her roles have ranged from leadership coach to principal, consultant, and classroom teacher. As a senior leader with The Danielson Group and founder of EdHabits consulting (www.edhabits.com), she collaborates with districts, schools, and educators to promote equitable teaching and learning. She coauthored the bestselling *Habits of Resilient Educators: Strategies for Thriving During Times of Anxiety, Doubt, and Constant Change* (Prendergast & Lee, 2025), *Habits of Resilient Leaders: Personal Practices That Drive Professional*

Impact (Prendergast & Lee, 2025), and *Habits for Resilient Learners: Empowering Students to Thrive Through Challenge and Change* (Prendergast et al., 2026), as well as dozens of articles and manuscripts in the field of education. Lindsay's work centers on leading systems change and advancing instructional leadership with practical and

impactful insights. Recognized as an ASCD Emerging Leader and Champion in Education as well as an AAIE Fellow, Lindsay is an established thought leader who frequently shares her expertise on leadership development, growth-centered supervision, and assessment practices through ASCD, Learning Forward, Edutopia, AAIE, EARCOS, AMLE, Cognia, and more.



Piper Lee brings over twenty-six years of experiential wisdom in education, including teaching, administration, instructional coaching, and leadership development. Her dedication to enhancing student learning and teacher effectiveness drives her national work as an instructional leadership coach. Piper has partnered with students, educators, leadership teams, and families across various contexts, including support for district leaders and principals in one of the largest school districts in the country. Post-pandemic, she coached superintendents and principals alongside Lindsay Prendergast, dedicating

extensive time to data analysis, facilitating professional learning communities, and classroom observations. These experiences shape her evidence-based approach and inform the purpose of this book. Piper champions the philosophy that rigorous relationships are foundational to transformative school cultures and effective leadership. She holds a bachelor's degree in elementary education, a master's in curriculum and instruction, and an education leadership certification from Winona State University. Grounded in practical strategies and informed by deep field experience, Piper equips education leaders to navigate complexity and foster environments where both students and educators thrive.

Introduction

WHY THIS BOOK? WHY NOW? WHY RESILIENCE?

Leading a school has never been simple. But today, it is unmistakably complex. School leaders are navigating persistent uncertainty, heightened community expectations, staffing shortages, political pressure, and the emotional weight of supporting both adults and students through sustained disruption. Many leaders describe their schools as functioning but not always thriving. Even strong systems can feel brittle under the strain of constant change.

And yet schools remain one of the most powerful engines for human flourishing.

We wrote *Leading Resilient Schools* because resilience cannot rest on the shoulders of individual leaders alone. When resilience is treated as a personal trait—something leaders must summon through grit or endurance, for example—it becomes unsustainable. But when resilience is intentionally ingrained in a school’s vision, culture, structures, and learning systems, it becomes collective, renewable, and transformative. This book is grounded in a hopeful truth: resilient schools are built, not wished into existence. They are shaped through deliberate leadership practices that strengthen coherence, trust, and shared responsibility, especially during moments of uncertainty.

THE IMPERATIVE: RESILIENCE AS A SYSTEM, NOT AN INDIVIDUAL PURSUIT

Schools today are expected to be agile, inclusive, high-performing, and humane all at once. Leaders are asked to innovate while maintaining stability, to prioritize well-being without sacrificing outcomes, and to lead decisively while honoring voice and belonging. These tensions are not signs of failure; they are signals that schools must be led differently. Resilience, as described in this book, is not about “bouncing back” to a previous version of school. It is about building the capacity to adapt, learn, and move forward together. Resilient schools develop shared clarity of purpose, cultivate cultures of trust, invest in human capacity, and make evidence-informed decisions that strengthen both relationships and results. Resilience becomes a stabilizing, enduring force for progress when it is woven into the everyday systems and culture of a school, rather than resting on the efforts of a single heroic leader.

HOW THIS BOOK SUPPORTS YOU, THE EDUCATION LEADER

Leading Resilient Schools is designed for principals, directors, leadership teams, and all educators who are committed to creating schools where people and learning thrive, especially when conditions are challenging. Rather than offering quick fixes or isolated strategies, this book presents a coherent leadership framework for strengthening resilience across an entire school community. The chapters focus on the conditions that allow resilience to grow:

- vision
- culture
- trust
- collective efficacy
- coherence
- evaluative thinking
- instructional leadership
- future readiness

Throughout the book, you will encounter leadership scenarios drawn from diverse school contexts, research-grounded frameworks translated into practical action, reflection prompts for both individual leaders and leadership teams, and tools that support sensemaking, alignment, and shared ownership. These practices are not linear steps. They are interconnected habits of leadership that can be revisited, strengthened, and refined over time.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

You may be reading this book at the start of a new leadership role, during a moment of renewal, or amid deep challenge. However you arrive, this book is designed to meet you where you are. While the chapters are intentionally sequenced, they are best understood as part of an integrated system. You may choose to read the book sequentially, focus on a specific leadership priority, or engage with the chapters as part of a leadership team or professional learning cohort. Resilience grows faster and deeper when it is developed in community. Many of the ideas in this book are most powerful when explored collaboratively, through dialogue, shared reflection, and collective problem-solving.

In **Chapter 1**, you will explore how a clear, collective vision functions as a stabilizing force at the heart of a resilient school. You will examine what defines a resilient school,

INTRODUCTION

why resilience often feels elusive in today's uncertain educational landscape, and how leaders position vision as an antidote to fragmentation and reactive decision-making. Through tools such as strategies for co-creating shared purpose, you will learn how a clearly articulated vision strengthens coherence, fosters belonging and engagement, and empowers future-focused leadership.

Chapter 2 explores how a thriving school culture, when shaped through daily leadership behaviors—rather than isolated initiatives—serves as the engine of a resilient school. You will examine why school culture matters, how the presence or absence of a healthy culture either strengthens or undermines resilience, and why psychological safety and relational trust are foundational conditions for sustained improvement. Drawing on Edmondson's research on psychological safety, Clark's stages of trust, and our ADAPT framework, you will learn how leaders align culture around shared purpose and deepen trust through intentional actions. These practices build shared accountability, embedding resilience not only in strategy but in everyday interactions across the school community.

In **Chapter 3**, you will explore how human-centered leadership practices build the resilient teams that sustain a school. You will examine how leadership that prioritizes well-being, belonging, and empathy strengthens resilience, and how the three interconnected dimensions of human-centered leadership shape trust, engagement, and collective capacity. Through practical strategies, including empowering staff, creating individualized growth pathways, and expanding distributed leadership opportunities, you will learn how investing in people fuels retention, adaptability, and professional growth. Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates that resilient schools are built when leaders intentionally design systems and relationships that enable educators to thrive, not merely endure.

In **Chapter 4**, you will explore how collective teacher efficacy serves as a central driver of both resilience and student success. You will examine how a shared belief in collective impact strengthens persistence, adaptability, and shared ownership of outcomes across the school community. Through leadership actions that create enabling conditions and align structures that support collective work, you will learn how schools intentionally strengthen collective efficacy. This chapter articulates how the connection between professional learning communities (PLCs), collaborative professional learning, and school culture ensures that resilience becomes a shared organizational capability rather than an individual effort.

In **Chapter 5**, you will explore how developing a discipline of curiosity and evaluative thinking shapes schools into resilient learning organizations. You will examine how evidence becomes the driving force of resilient schools when leaders build conditions that support inquiry, reflection, and collaborative analysis. This chapter shows how

shifting from compliance-driven data use to evidence-informed foresight enables schools to turn information into purposeful action that advances teaching and learning. Through strategies for applying evidence-informed adaptability, you will learn how resilient organizations continuously learn, refine practice, and strengthen both relationships and results through intentional, inquiry-driven decision-making.

In **Chapter 6**, you will explore how building coherence across vision, goals, strategies, and daily practice strengthens both resilience and results. You will learn how coherence mapping helps leaders align initiatives, clarify priorities, and combat initiative fatigue through meaningful alignment rather than added complexity. The chapter highlights how communicating alignment with clarity, when supported by tools such as vision-and-goals alignment rubrics, supports collective action and shared ownership. By clarifying purpose and priorities, leaders help schools sustain focus, conserve energy, and move forward in a unified direction. In doing so, resilience is reinforced by systems that promote consistency and intentional progress.

In **Chapter 7**, you will explore how instructional leadership strengthens resilient schools by connecting curriculum, instruction, assessment, and data to collaborative professional learning. You will examine how trust-centered relationships form the bedrock of collaborative inquiry, enabling practices such as instructional rounds that deepen shared understanding of teaching and learning. The chapter highlights how leaders leverage relational insights to provide targeted support while sustaining relational rhythms that keep improvement continuous rather than episodic. Through these approaches, instructional leadership becomes a central lever for resilience, enabling educators to collectively refine practice, respond to challenges, and sustain high-quality learning across the school.

In **Chapter 8**, you will explore how leaders reframe their approach to guide resilient schools in a world marked by brittleness, anxiety, nonlinearity, and incomprehensibility (the BANI framework). You will examine how a future-ready orientation, adaptive problem-solving, and intentional sensemaking enable leaders to advance the school's vision even amid uncertainty. The chapter highlights leadership structures that support resilience, strategies for recognizing blind spots that can undermine progress, and practices that strengthen agility through action and iteration. By developing these mindsets and systems, leaders position their schools to respond to complexity with clarity, courage, and sustained coherence.

In **Chapter 9**, you will explore how resilient schools intentionally design systems that promote organizational agility, relevance, and belonging. You will examine the significance of agility in today's rapidly changing world and how mindfulness-based systems and strong social capital mediate a school's ability to adapt. Drawing on principles from the Agile Manifesto for Learning, the chapter highlights practical

approaches for engaging stakeholders as partners, connecting learning to real-world contexts, and implementing agile pedagogies in daily practice. Ultimately, you will learn how flexible structures and collaborative networks equip students and educators to thrive while advancing the promise of resilient, future-ready schools.

In the final chapter, **Chapter 10**, you will examine how resilient schools move from isolated initiatives to embedding resilience as an enduring organizational identity. You will explore common leadership blind spots that unintentionally erode resilience and learn how shifting from heroic leadership to shared responsibility strengthens trust, coherence, and long-term stability. The chapter highlights leadership stewardship over time, describes systems designed to hold under pressure, and provides strategies for sustaining resilience across transitions without losing coherence. Ultimately, you will develop a living vision for carrying the work forward, ensuring resilience remains continuously renewed through adaptive commitment, collective ownership, and durable leadership practices.

Across the book, readers will encounter authentic stories from educational leaders, structured Pause and Reflect activities to apply new learning, and dedicated journaling and reflection prompts included at the conclusion of every chapter.

LEAD YOUR SCHOOL'S RESILIENCE JOURNEY

As you begin this book, you will notice an early emphasis on the responsibility leaders hold not only to guide others, but to intentionally cultivate the conditions that allow their entire school community to thrive. Building a resilient school begins with the leader's willingness to pause, reflect, and lead with purpose, creating the time and space needed to understand, practice, and apply the ideas explored throughout each chapter. Leadership often calls you to care for the needs of students, educators, and families, yet the sustainability of that work depends on your ability to lead in ways that strengthen both your own capacity and the collective capacity of your organization. When leaders operate without intentional systems that protect well-being, clarity, and shared purpose, even the most dedicated efforts can become exhausting and fragmented. This book positions resilience not as an individual trait, but as a leadership practice that shapes how schools make decisions, respond to challenges, and sustain momentum over time.

DON'T TRAVEL ALONE: LEARN AND LEAD TOGETHER

In our previous book, *Habits of Resilient Leaders* (Prendergast & Lee, 2025), we introduced the habit "Don't Travel Alone," emphasizing that resilience is strengthened through intentional networks of support, perspective, and shared learning. That

message is equally essential, if not more so, when leading resilient schools. No leader builds a resilient organization in isolation. The most adaptive and thriving schools are guided by leaders who learn in community, test ideas collaboratively, and draw strength from trusted partners during times of both progress and uncertainty.

As you begin this book, consider how you might engage with its ideas alongside others. Studying these chapters with a leadership team, PLC, mentor, or coaching partner can significantly deepen the impact of the work. Conversations sparked by shared reading often reveal new interpretations, challenge assumptions, and surface practical strategies that might otherwise remain undiscovered. The reflection activities and planning opportunities embedded throughout the book are intentionally designed to support collaborative dialogue, making them even more powerful when explored collectively. When leaders learn together, accountability strengthens, implementation becomes more intentional, and momentum is easier to sustain. Whether you invite a colleague to serve as a thought partner, convene a leadership study group, or integrate the book into an ongoing professional learning structure, you will find that the journey toward building a resilient school becomes richer, more focused, and more achievable when traveled with others. Each chapter in this book represents an opportunity to lead differently: to align personal leadership practices with organizational systems that support resilience at every level of the school. By committing to these practices consistently, you will strengthen your leadership, build a more adaptive and empowered professional culture, and expand the positive impact your school has on every learner it serves.

Chapter

1

Anchoring Resilience in a Clear Vision

Abby Walton had just stepped into her fifth year as principal of Lakeside High School, a diverse urban school that had endured more than its fair share of turbulence. The district had cycled through three superintendents in as many years, enrollment fluctuated with every policy shift around charter expansion, and her staff seemed weary from a constant parade of new initiatives. On her first day back that fall, Abby walked into the library to greet teachers at the opening meeting, carrying an agenda that outlined everything, from revised grading practices to a new district-mandated literacy program. She saw the polite smiles but also the exhaustion in her staff's eyes. She knew what they were thinking: Here comes another year of putting out fires. Abby herself had begun to wonder if her role was simply to manage chaos. But in quiet moments, she also felt the pull of a larger question: What is the story we are telling as a school? Without clarity of vision, the changes felt random—like puzzle pieces from different boxes scattered on the same table. That afternoon, she reread notes from a leadership seminar she had attended during the summer. One line stood out: "A resilient school is not defined by avoiding change but by anchoring in purpose through it." She realized that her staff didn't need one more "program"—they needed a North Star. That evening, Abby drafted a plan to reframe the year's work around a collective visioning process, something that might bring coherence back to a weary community.

THE POWER OF CLEAR VISION IN A RESILIENT SCHOOL

Across the world, school leaders are asked to manage competing priorities, respond to unexpected disruptions, and foster the well-being of both students and staff—all while advancing academic excellence. This balancing act can feel overwhelming, and many leaders describe it as a constant tug-of-war between the urgent and the important. Fear and uncertainty often act as kryptonite, undermining creativity and collaboration just when they are needed most.

Yet among the many demands placed on education leaders, one responsibility consistently emerges as essential: establishing and sustaining a shared vision that

unites the entire school community. This vision—like Abby’s North Star—is not simply a decorative statement on a website or hallway wall. It is the compass that keeps students, teachers, and families oriented toward a collective purpose, particularly when uncertainty threatens to pull them in divergent directions. A collective vision strengthens the foundation of a school community and cultivates resilience. It ensures that schools do more than just survive moments of disruption; it ensures that they thrive in spite of them. Leading a cohesive vision, therefore, is not an abstract leadership exercise. It is a deeply human and practical strategy that nurtures commitment, belonging, and motivation in every member of a school. When schools lack clarity of vision, decisions feel scattered, initiatives pile up without coherence, and trust erodes. But when vision is present and alive in the daily work, it grounds everything (see Figure 1.1). Teachers know why their work matters, students feel part of something larger, and families can see how the school’s purpose connects to their own hopes. For leaders navigating volatility, vision is not fluff. It is fuel.

Figure 1.1 • *How Clear Vision Influences Resilience*

A Clear Vision Supports Resilience By . . .	The Absence of Clear Vision Undermines Resilience By . . .
Providing a unifying North Star that anchors decisions and actions	Making changes feel random and disconnected, like “puzzle pieces from different boxes”
Building coherence so that new initiatives connect to a larger purpose	Eroding trust when decisions appear arbitrary or misaligned
Helping all stakeholders see meaning in their work, stay motivated, and connect school goals to their collective hopes	Shifting focus to short-term crisis management rather than long-term growth
Enabling community members to absorb the impact of unforeseen disruptions with mindsets of hope and optimism	Allowing external disruptions (policy shifts, budget cuts, etc.) to destabilize the community

RESILIENCE IN CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION LEADERSHIP

The word “resilience” has been used so frequently in the post-pandemic education landscape that it risks becoming a cliché, causing those in the field to roll their eyes rather than lean in to learn more. In today’s educational climate marked by shifting policies, social unrest, integration of artificial intelligence, and lingering pandemic aftershocks, however, it has urgent relevance. For individuals, Angela Duckworth’s (2016) work on grit, or sustained passion and perseverance toward long-term goals,

shows that resilience often emerges through persistence in the face of adversity. For schools, resilience means ensuring that setbacks don't stall progress but instead become stepping stones toward stronger practices and healthier communities.

Resilience has long been a focus across psychology, business, and education, revealing themes that apply directly to schools. Organizational research confirms the importance of focusing on resilience at the system level. Hamel and Välikangas (2003) described resilience as an organization's ability to make sense of its environment, generate options, and redeploy resources or, essentially, to adapt faster than others. In education, Zadok et al. (2024) demonstrated that transformational leadership practices strengthen collective teacher efficacy (which you will explore in Chapter 4), thereby boosting organizational resilience. In today's volatile context, resilience must mean more than "bouncing back." It means bouncing forward and emerging from challenges with sharper clarity, stronger systems, and renewed purpose. Schools that cultivate resilience safeguard both the continuity of learning and the well-being of their people (Limon et al., 2021; McLeod & Dulskey, 2021). Leaders who set conditions for adaptability not only buffer against disruption but also create fertile ground for innovation (Hermans, 2021; Chen-Levi et al., 2024). The lesson for school leaders is clear: resilience is not a mysterious trait reserved for the fortunate few, but a set of routines, mindsets, and practices that can be intentionally developed (Hillmann & Guenther, 2021).

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A RESILIENT SCHOOL

It is important to understand that resilience is not just about survival. Resilient organizations, such as schools, use adversity as a catalyst for improvement. Resilient schools acknowledge difficulty, then mobilize resources to respond in ways that are purposeful and growth oriented. A resilient school maintains its core functions, even under stress, and often emerges stronger. Imagine a school where a sudden, catastrophic hurricane closes the building for weeks. A resilient school does not lose momentum; it pivots quickly to remote learning, communicates clearly with families, and provides emotional support for staff and students. Learning continues, perhaps not perfectly, but with purpose and adaptability. And research shows that schools with strong collective purpose and shared vision adapt more effectively over time (Schechter & Shaked, 2017; Zadok et al., 2024). In practical terms, a resilient school:

- **Preempts foreseeable challenges** by building systems and contingency plans before a crisis hits.
- **Responds effectively to disruptions** without losing balance or focus on student well-being.

- **Adapts routines and structures** to safeguard both academic progress and human needs.
- **Learns from adversity** by treating disruption as data for growth, not merely an obstacle to endure.

Resilient schools send a clear message to staff and students alike: “We may not control what comes our way, but we are equipped to respond.” Resilient schools do not just handle one emergency and then relax; they develop systems and mindsets to continually learn, adjust, and innovate.

WHY RESILIENCE MAY FEEL ELUSIVE TO ACHIEVE

If resilience is so valuable, why might so many schools struggle to achieve it? The truth is that resilience is hard work. Under severe stress, people and organizations often “snap” rather than “snap back.” Denial, exhaustion, or paralysis can easily take hold (Coutu, 2002). Hamel (2000) refers to a “resilience gap,” noting that the world is growing more turbulent faster than most organizations are becoming resilient enough to cope. In more stable times, it may have been sufficient to bounce back after an occasional setback, but in the modern environment, resilience has taken on a broader meaning: it is about continuous adaptation. Hamel and Välikangas (2003) argue that sustained success now “rides on resilience” and on a school community’s ability to dynamically reinvent strategies as circumstances change. Considering the complex and nuanced communities that comprise a school, however, leaders face no clear path to consistently and authentically cultivating resilience amongst the broader organization. Hamel and Välikangas (2003) also articulate critical challenges that leaders may face in these four key hurdles that undermine resilience:

1. **Cognitive challenge:** Organizations must overcome denial, nostalgia, and arrogance, confronting reality even when it is uncomfortable.
2. **Strategic challenge:** Resilience demands continually generating new ideas and options. Organizations must embrace a willingness to replace or reinvent strategies that are no longer working.
3. **Political challenge:** Leaders and teams must shift resources away from yesterday’s priorities to invest in tomorrow’s opportunities, which can be difficult in bureaucratic or tradition-bound systems.
4. **Ideological challenge:** Many organizations cling to optimizing their current model (doing things “the way we’ve always done”) rather than pursuing more radical innovation.

Building resilience amidst these challenges, coupled with situational and environmental disruptions, requires trust, collaboration, and flexibility. These are conditions that are not easy to sustain. In high-pressure environments, trust can fray quickly. Teachers may hesitate to share bad news or experiment with untested ideas if they fear judgment or blame. And when educators already juggle multiple mandates, the call for continuous adaptation can produce change fatigue. Without strong support and a clear sense of purpose, even well-intentioned efforts to build resilience falter. Interpersonal trust and open team communication, which you will explore in Chapters 2 and 3, are crucial for resilience, as they enable staff to coordinate efforts and support one another through change (Schechter & Shaked, 2017).

By midyear, Abby's efforts were in full swing. She had convened small groups of teachers, parents, and even students to help articulate what Lakeside wanted its graduates to know and be able to do. What emerged was a draft "Portrait of a Lakeside Graduate," full of language about critical thinking, empathy, and perseverance. For the first time in years, Abby noticed staff leaning in rather than pulling back. Yet the turbulence didn't stop. In January, an unexpected budget cut forced the district to slash elective courses. Overnight, Lakeside lost its robotics program and half of its arts offerings—programs that had been lifelines for many students. Teachers were frustrated, parents were angry, and Abby herself felt defeated. How could they talk about "vision" when they were losing what made school meaningful for so many kids? At a faculty meeting, she considered canceling the agenda in order to manage the crisis. But then she looked at the vision statements posted around the room from their earlier workshops. One read, "Lakeside students will leave us confident in solving problems with creativity and resilience." Abby paused, then asked the group: "If we truly believe this about our students, what would it look like for us to live it out right now?" The room grew quiet, then a teacher spoke: "Maybe it means we get creative with what we have left." The conversation shifted from loss to problem-solving. Within weeks, staff had reorganized clubs and cross-curricular projects to integrate technology and the arts in new ways. It wasn't perfect, but it was resilience in action—anchored in vision.

THE MINDSETS OF A RESILIENT SCHOOL

A resilient school is characterized by a strong, shared sense of purpose and collective perseverance toward that purpose. Lee and Duckworth (2018) illustrate that in outstanding organizations, passion for [the mission] and perseverance in the pursuit of that goal become social norms at the individual, team, and institutional levels. Translated to education, this means everyone—from teachers to administrators—is united by a commitment to put students' needs first and to persistently pursue student

success, no matter what obstacles arise. While systems and structures matter, resilience begins with mindset. Resilient schools cultivate particular attitudes and beliefs:

- **Realism:** Openly acknowledging challenges rather than sugarcoating them. A drop in enrollment or a policy change is not hidden but addressed directly.
- **Purpose-driven optimism:** Believing deeply that the work matters and that challenges can be overcome in service of students. Optimism is not the random belief that things are always going to be great, but the belief that we have the capacity to make things great because the future is completely undetermined.
- **Ingenuity:** Using creativity and improvisation to solve problems with whatever resources are at hand. Resilient schools see constraints as invitations to innovate.
- **Collective efficacy:** The shared belief among staff that together they can handle what comes. Research shows that this shared belief is a “dynamic catalyst” for the school’s adaptability and strength (Zadok et al., 2024).

These mindsets are not accidental. They are cultivated by leaders who model them and build structures that reinforce them. Resilience is purposeful adaptability. It is not about stoicism or chaos. It is realism, optimism, creativity, and collective strength directed toward student success.

Pause and Reflect

How does the distinction between “bouncing back” and “bouncing forward” influence the way you think about resilience in a school setting?

Which of the mindsets (realism, purpose-driven optimism, ingenuity, or collective efficacy) feels most visible in your setting? Which feels less developed, and why?

AN ANTIDOTE TO UNCERTAINTY: A CLEAR, COLLECTIVE VISION

“When educators know *why* they are doing the work and *where* they are headed, uncertainty loses its grip. Vision transforms resilience from a reactive posture into a proactive strategy. It anchors decision-making, provides coherence, and inspires perseverance” (Prendergast & Lee, 2025). A clear, cohesive school vision can transform resilience from a reactive posture into a proactive strategy. It anchors decision-making, provides coherence, and inspires perseverance. Michael Fullan and Joanne Quinn (2015)

warn against “ad hoc policies” that lack coherence, instead advocating for a moral purpose that unites stakeholders around a shared future. Resilient schools are those where vision fuels coherence, ensuring that new initiatives connect to a larger narrative of growth. Vision that inspires and purpose that endures provide stability when the ground feels unsteady. In the face of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (often summarized as VUCA), clarity is the antidote.

Instead of being trapped by limiting constraints characterizing the world around us, school leaders can deliberately cultivate practices that ground their communities in clarity and purpose. Johansen et al. (2025) argue that the leaders of the future thrive not because they eliminate uncertainty, but because they have the tools to navigate it. In education, those tools become most powerful when translated into habits that shape daily decisions and interactions. This reframe transforms the historically significant acronym VUCA into a new leadership stance: Vision, Understanding, Clarity, and Agility. This alternative approach offers a framework for resilience that equips school communities to navigate disruption with confidence (Johansen et al., 2025).

Vision to guide decision-making

In a resilient school, vision is more than a statement on a website. It is a touchstone that informs choices both large and small. For example, when a school leader faces complex choices around what high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) to adopt, they can filter the decision through their vision: *Does this initiative advance our shared commitment to instructional excellence and student agency?* If the answer is yes, adoption feels less like another mandate and more like a purposeful step forward.

Understanding of both challenges and assets

Resilience does not emerge from ignoring barriers. It grows from acknowledging challenges while also naming strengths. A principal might convene a faculty meeting not just to discuss gaps in math achievement, but also to spotlight the teachers whose practices are yielding strong results. This dual lens of realism about problems, paired with recognition of assets, keeps morale intact and creates momentum for collective problem-solving.

Clarity in communication and expectations

Ambiguity breeds anxiety. In uncertain times, leaders who communicate consistently and transparently reduce stress for teachers and families. For instance, during a sudden pivot to remote learning, schools that established clear daily schedules, simple platforms, and regular updates saw higher levels of engagement. Clarity does not mean perfection. It means setting expectations that are realistic, visible, and revisited as conditions evolve.

Agility to adapt and respond wisely

Finally, resilience demands agility, a concept you will explore more deeply in Chapter 9. Schools that cling rigidly to outdated practices are less prepared for disruption. Agility in education can look like adjusting professional learning formats when staff capacity wanes or creating flexible student groupings to address learning gaps. The key is to cultivate a mindset where change is not feared but embraced as an opportunity to refine practice in service of the vision.

Together, these shifts from deficit-oriented thinking about VUCA to positive and proactive approaches offer practical guidance:

- return to your vision when making choices
- balance critique with appreciation
- clarify expectations at every level
- build in structures for adaptation

Together, these habits transform uncertainty into opportunity and anchor resilience in a clear, collective vision.

Use the table in Figure 1.2 to reflect on how the new VUCA framework (Vision, Understanding, Clarity, and Agility) can be applied in your setting. Record your current practices, identify opportunities for application, and consider examples from other leaders to inspire action.

Figure 1.2 • Applying a New VUCA Framework

Element of VUCA	
Vision (Guiding decision-making with a shared purpose)	Example from Another Leader An assistant principal in Oregon used the district’s vision of “excellence for every learner” to filter curriculum adoption choices.
	Question for Reflection How do I communicate the <i>why</i> to my staff, students, and families?
	My Current Practice
	Where Might I Apply This in My Setting?

Element of VUCA	
Understanding (Recognizing both challenges and assets)	Example from Another Leader A principal in New Jersey paired data on achievement gaps with showcases of successful teaching practices, boosting morale and building momentum.
	Question for Reflection How can I create a balance of realism and optimism?
	My Current Practice
	Where Might I Apply This in My Setting?
Clarity (Communicating expectations transparently)	Example from Another Leader A head of school in Kenya created concise “learning snapshots” for parents during remote learning, building trust and consistency.
	Question for Reflection Where might unclear expectations be creating stress or disengagement?
	My Current Practice
	Where Might I Apply This in My Setting?
Agility (Adapting to changing conditions)	Example from Another Leader A director in Texas shifted professional learning from full-day workshops to micro-sessions when teacher capacity was stretched.
	Question for Reflection How do I foster a mindset of experimentation rather than fear of failure?
	My Current Practice
	Where Might I Apply This in My Setting?

By spring, Abby reflected on how far Lakeside had come. The vision process had not eliminated the turbulence (new policies were already looming for the following fall), but it had changed how the community responded. One Friday morning, she visited a seventh-grade classroom where students were presenting research projects. A shy student stood up and began: "In our school's vision, it says we want to leave here confident problem-solvers. That's why I chose this topic." Abby felt her throat tighten. The language of vision was no longer confined to posters; rather, it was shaping student identity. That same week, Abby hosted a parent forum. The discussion was lively, but instead of frustration dominating the conversation, parents spoke about wanting to partner in sustaining the vision for their children. One father said, "Even when the news is discouraging, I know what this school stands for." Abby realized resilience didn't mean she had solved every crisis. It meant that the school now had an anchor. Teachers approached challenges by asking how decisions aligned with their shared vision. Students could name the values their school stood for. Families felt a sense of belonging. Driving home that evening, Abby thought back to the start of the year, when exhaustion was written across her staff's faces. The turbulence hadn't stopped, but something important had shifted. Lakeside was no longer simply reacting to change. It was learning to bounce forward together, stronger than before.

THE ROLE OF THE LEADER IN CULTIVATING RESILIENCE

Leadership is arguably the linchpin in building and sustaining resilience. School leaders, from principals to department heads, set the tone and create conditions under which resilience either flourishes or fades. Leaders with a strong strategic vision can guide a school through multifaceted challenges, ensuring the school not only navigates disruptions but also finds ways to benefit or learn from them (Schechter & Shaked, 2017). Leaders can ensure that schools not only navigate disruptions but also capitalize on them, fostering adaptability and continuous improvement (Hermans, 2021; Chen-Levi et al., 2024).

Resilient school leaders consciously build a supportive, trust-filled culture characterized by psychological safety, which you will study more deeply in Chapter 2. They understand that teachers and staff can only be resilient when they feel safe to take risks and make mistakes in the pursuit of improvement. People rise to high expectations if they are also given "the psychological safety and trust, plus tangible resources" needed to experiment and learn from missteps (Edmondson, 2019, p. 183).

Leaders accomplish this by:

- Reinforcing a collective vision ("This is where we are heading together").
- Encouraging experimentation and curiosity.

- Listening openly to concerns and feedback.
- Modeling adaptability and transparency.

Strong leaders also invest in their people, ensuring that staff have the resources, time, and encouragement to grow. In this sense, cultivating resilience is not about heroic leadership but about enabling collective strength.

CO-CREATING VISION: FROM SHARED MEANING TO COLLECTIVE RESILIENCE

At its core, vision is about meaning. When educators understand the *why* behind their work, and when students, families, and community members understand the *why* behind leaders' decisions, motivation deepens, burnout decreases, and belonging grows. As advocates for marginalized groups with disabilities remind us, "Nothing about us without us is for us" (Charlton, 1998, p. 39). A vision developed in isolation risks alienating the very people it is meant to inspire. Effective vision-building, therefore, is an act of collective authorship.

For leaders newer to the concept of organizational resilience, this may feel like a shift. Traditionally, vision statements were crafted by a small leadership team and unveiled to the community. Resilient schools take a different approach. They treat vision-building as a structured, participatory process that surfaces diverse perspectives and connects aspiration to daily practice. When teachers, students, families, and community partners help shape the vision, they are far more likely to see themselves in it and, even more importantly, to act on it.

Pause and Reflect

To what extent does your current vision reflect the voices and lived experiences of students, families, educators, and community partners, and whose perspectives might still be missing?

How are you intentionally connecting daily decisions and short-term responses to your long-term vision so that your community experiences it as a living practice rather than a static statement?

This participatory work does more than build buy-in. It builds capability. Research from the Institute for the Future highlights imagination as a critical organizational skill in times of disruption (Gorbis & Jeffery, 2025). Co-creating a vision gives school communities regular practice in imagining possibilities, weighing evidence, and

adjusting course together. Over time, these habits strengthen collective resilience. When unexpected challenges arise, the community is already accustomed to generating solutions collaboratively rather than waiting for top-down direction.

The process also cultivates hope. Positive psychology research defines hope as the belief that goals are achievable and that pathways toward them can be generated (Snyder, 2002). When school communities participate in envisioning a better future, they build both elements: clarity of goals and confidence in their collective capacity to reach them. Hope becomes not just an emotional outcome but a strategic asset that fuels persistence during periods of uncertainty.

This matters because today's school leaders are operating in two modes simultaneously. As Gorbis and Jeffery (2025) note, organizations in turbulent contexts must manage immediate disruptions while simultaneously building for the long term. In schools, this may look like addressing daily staffing gaps while advancing a multi-year strategic plan. The tension is real, and constant. Vision provides the throughline that keeps short-term decisions aligned with long-term direction.

However, co-creating vision requires intentional leadership moves. Johansen et al. (2025) describe the importance of "constructive depolarization," or the ability to bridge divides and keep people productively engaged even when perspectives differ. In education communities, where values and priorities can run deep, this skill is essential. By framing conversations around the future the community wants to create, leaders can shift dialogue from positional debate to shared problem-solving. As Gorbis and Jeffery (2025) suggest, focusing on the future often makes tough conversations more productive because it invites stakeholders to imagine and prioritize together.

For schools, this is the practical takeaway: vision is not a poster on the wall. It is a leadership practice and an organizational routine. Schools that build structured opportunities for community voice, future-focused dialogue, and shared meaning-making are simultaneously strengthening their resilience infrastructure. When this work is done well, the impact is tangible. Decision-making becomes more coherent. Change efforts encounter less resistance. Teams recover more quickly from setbacks because they remain anchored to a shared purpose. Most importantly, the vision begins to function as operating DNA, guiding daily choices while keeping the organization oriented toward long-term flourishing.

As you explored earlier in the chapter, meaningful change stalls because schools remain tethered to legacy systems or rely on vision statements that were never fully owned by the community. Resilient leaders recognize that vision-building is neither a solo act nor a one-time event. It is an ongoing process of facilitation, foresight, and collective commitment. Moreover, investing time and structure in this work is not a luxury. It is the foundation of a school's ability to adapt, persevere, and thrive. When vision is

co-created, actively used, and continuously revisited, it becomes the anchor that steadies the school through disruption and the compass that guides it toward a stronger future.

Vision is where resilience begins. A clearly defined, collectively authored vision anchors identity, sharpens priorities, and sustains hope when circumstances shift. But vision alone is not enough. For resilience to endure, it must move from aspiration into lived experience, shaping how people interact, make decisions, and respond to challenge each day. In the next chapter, we turn from vision to culture, exploring how resilient schools intentionally cultivate the norms, relationships, and shared commitments that transform a compelling future into a daily reality.

THE BIG IDEAS

In this first chapter, the message is clear: resilience is not a passive trait, but an active practice. Schools that thrive in uncertain times are those that take the time to clarify their vision, invite their communities into shaping it, and use it as a compass for both everyday decisions and long-term aspirations. Vision-building is hard work, but it is also energizing work. It restores coherence where there is fragmentation, sparks hope where there is fatigue, and equips school communities to not just bounce back, but bounce forward. In the chapters ahead, we will explore how this foundation of vision connects to culture, trust, and collective efficacy, showing that resilience, while demanding, is entirely within reach when we commit to building it together.

Let's Reflect

1. Across the various examples of the role of vision as a source of resilience in schools, which ones most align with your aspirations for cultivating a resilient school?
2. After reading this chapter, what connections do you see between resilience and the cultivation of trust, collaboration, and adaptability?
3. In what ways does the idea of “bouncing forward” shift your understanding of what it means for a school community to be resilient?

WHAT'S NEXT?

Chapter 1 introduced resilience as both a mindset and a system for schools, laying the groundwork for the journey ahead. In the chapters that follow, you will move intentionally from vision to practice, beginning with Chapter 2's focus on cultivating a thriving, trust-filled culture. There, you will examine how leaders shape the emotional

and relational conditions that make resilience possible, strengthening psychological safety, clarifying shared expectations, and building the collective efficacy that fuels continuous growth. As the book unfolds, you will see how evaluative thinking, coherence, equity, and agility work together to transform resilience from an abstract idea into daily leadership moves. Each chapter builds practical pathways for embedding these approaches into routines, structures, and relationships, enabling schools not only to withstand disruption but also to learn, adapt, and grow stronger because of it.