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Board-Head Relationships:

The Role of Relational Trust and Intentional Care

in Fostering Head of School Well-Being

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Abstract

Given the challenges of school leadership and high rates of school leader attrition, scholars have increasingly given attention to the wellbeing of heads of schools. However, that research has not considered the way governing boards potentially influence head of school wellbeing. We fill this gap by examining how relational dynamics between heads of school and governing boards are associated with head of school wellbeing. Using data from about 140 heads of schools who participated in the Society for Classical Learning's 2023 Thriving Schools Survey, we find that (a) relational trust between heads and boards and (b) care of the head by the board are associated with multiple indicators of head of school wellbeing.

Keywords: *Governing Boards; School Leadership; Wellbeing; Relational Trust; Caring Leadership*

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Introduction

Christian school leaders as well as scholarship about Christian education are increasingly giving attention to the sustainability of Christian schools. Concerns over issues such as financial stability, recruiting high-quality teachers and leaders, attracting families as alternative schooling options proliferate, adequate pre-service and ongoing professional training, and teacher burnout and turnover have been raised (Cheng et al., 2023; Johnson et al., 2024; Swaner et al., 2022). Left unaddressed, these issues undermine Christian schools' potential to fulfill their missions and to remain in operation over the long run.

This study addresses another aspect of the sustainability of Christian schools, namely, head of school wellbeing. On the one hand, much of the research literature on school leadership underscores the need to provide leaders with technical skills to manage their schools, including how to provide certain forms of leadership like instructional or distributive leadership or how to perform required day-to-day functions such as navigating public relations, budgeting, analyzing data, or human resource management (Eckert & Iselin, forthcoming; Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Hallinger, 2011; Hess & Kelly, 2007; Lee & Cheng, 2021). Despite the importance of ensuring that school leaders are proficient in these technical skills, there has been growing attention to the psychological and physical wellbeing of principals (Doyle Fosco, 2022; Wang, 2024). Christian schools, in particular, have begun including separate domains of school leader wellbeing in measurement tools designed to assess school quality or have undertaken measures to address school leader burnout (Society for Classical Learning, 2023; Swaner et al., 2021).

Maintaining the wellbeing of the head of school is essential for their job longevity and performance. Challenging working conditions, job stress, and emotional exhaustion are linked to head of school turnover and diminished leadership effectiveness (Doyle Fosco, 2022; Tekleselassie & Choi, 2021). Since heads of school influence many aspects of school quality, including student achievement, teacher retention, and positive climate, ensuring their wellbeing is paramount (Boyd et al., 2011; Branch et al., 2013; Grissom et al., 2021; Horng et al., 2010; Karakus et al., forthcoming). Moreover, the psychological and physical wellbeing of heads of school contributes to their personal flourishing and the flourishing of their school community (Swaner et al., 2021). For this reason, their wellbeing should be actively fostered and protected.

How, then, can this aim be met? A review of prior research provides evidence for the efficacy of various strategies. These strategies include offering professional training to help heads of school fulfill job responsibilities more effectively and efficiently, as well as using psychological interventions focused on mindfulness, self-care, building self-efficacy, or building a sense of purpose and accomplishment (Doyle Fosco, 2022). One potential avenue for fostering head of school wellbeing, however, has not been explored in the research literature: the role of the school's governing board. Many Christian schools are led by a governing board that not only evaluates the head of school but also supports them. Given the nature of this relationship, there is significant potential for governing boards to nurture the wellbeing of heads of schools, especially by providing the support needed to fulfill professional responsibilities while also tending to their psychological and physical needs.

In this study, we examine how two aspects of the board-head relationship potentially support various dimensions of head of school wellbeing. The data from this study come from 139 heads of classical Christian schools who responded to the Society for Classical Learning's 2023

Thriving Schools Survey. Specifically, we consider how (a) relational trust between the head and the board and (b) intentional, holistic care of the head by the board could potentially affect five different indicators of head of school wellbeing. The first indicator is based on a set of questions that asked heads to report their level of satisfaction with their boards. The second indicator is a single question that asks heads to state whether they have ever thought of leaving their job—a thought that arises especially among heads who experience burnout. The next indicator is a single item asking heads if they often feel lonely as a school leader. The fourth and fifth indicators of heads' wellbeing are based on a set of items designed to measure whether heads are flourishing in their religious lives and in their relationships with their families, respectively.

Our results suggest that governing boards that foster mutual trust with their heads of school and provide them with intentional, holistic care are consequential for the wellbeing of their heads. For the remainder of this article, we provide a more complete review of the relevant research literature and key concepts, describe the data and empirical methods that are used for the analysis, present the findings in detail, and conclude with a discussion of the implications of our findings for Christian school research and practice.

Literature Review

Head of School Retention, Attrition, and Burnout

A school's success or failure depends upon, among a number of factors, the quality of its leadership (Grissom et al., 2021). However, obtaining a high-quality leader is difficult. Research has, for example, documented the lack of pre-service training for potential leaders and the reliance on ad hoc strategies for recruiting and hiring leaders, which ultimately hinder schools from identifying the best candidates (Lee & Mao, 2020). Even after strong candidates are

identified and hired, the challenge of retaining them remains as they face the rigorous demands

of the job and a litany of responsibilities.

Those on-the-job challenges, unfortunately, can lead to head of school attrition, which

not only creates disruption in the life of the school but also incurs both real and opportunity costs

associated with searching for a replacement. Indeed, some studies have found that head of school

turnover can lead to declining student achievement, increased teacher turnover, and other

indicators of institutional instability (Bartanen et al., 2019; Harbatkin & Henry, 2019). The

magnitude of turnover is not trivial. In a longitudinal study following a representative sample of

8,300 principals in the United States from the 2020-21 to the 2021-22 academic years, Taie and

Lewis (2023) estimate that 11% of traditional public school principals, 13% of charter school

principals, and 10% of private school leaders left their positions.

Considering the private and Christian school sectors more closely, the National

Association of Independent Schools (2020) reports that 22 percent of new heads in 2019-2020

were preceded by someone who held their position for less than three years, and nearly one third

of the schools reported having three or more heads in the last decade. Similarly, the Association

of Christian Schools International (2020) in a member survey of 2,500 member schools

conducted in 2019 found that just over half of all heads served at their current schools no more

than five years. Nearly half of the preceding heads also served for only the same amount of time.

A possible reason for high rates of head turnover is burnout, defined as mental,

emotional, and physical exhaustion resulting from job-related stress (Boyce & Bowers, 2016;

Stamm, 2010; Yan, 2020). Burnout is a strong predictor of principal turnover and is linked to

sustained heavy workloads, lack of support, and long, erratic workweeks (Gmelch & Gates,

1998; Mahfouz, 2020; Maslach et al., 2001). Moreover, the isolating nature of leadership roles

can exacerbate burnout. For early-career school leaders especially, the difficulties of on-the-job learning and transitioning to a new role often heighten feelings of loneliness (Stephenson & Bauer, 2010). Altogether, school leaders shoulder the responsibility for their school's success and must navigate this burden without succumbing to exhaustion or ultimately leaving the position. Fortunately, governing boards can play a crucial role in supporting heads of school to mitigate these challenges.

The Role of Governing Boards in Supporting Heads of School

Board-Head Relationships

Research from public administration, school leadership, and nonprofit management and leadership highlights the importance of the relationship between governing boards and the executive leaders or staff they oversee in ensuring effective management and organizational success. This literature covers a wide range of settings including municipal governance, not just schools (Bridges et al., 2019; Chait et al., 2005; Davidson et al., 2021; Delagardelle, 2008; Gabris & Nelson, 2013; Goodman et al., 1997; LaRocque & Coleman, 1993; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). Focusing specifically on independent schools, Mott (2018) argues that "supporting the head of school may be the single greatest responsibility of the board," characterizing the partnership between the board and head as "without question the difference between excellence and success or mediocrity and failure" (p. 11). This type of support for the head of school can come from governing boards, at least in schools that have them. In such schools, governing boards do not merely hire and evaluate the head; they also provide strategic, professional, practical, and personal support.

However, not all such schools, unfortunately, are characterized by a healthy relationship between the board and the head. Strained board-head relationships present an additional

challenge for heads of school, forcing them to negotiate these relational dynamics alongside the usual demands of school leadership and everyday job responsibilities. More critically, strained board-head relationships undermine the effectiveness of the head of school, often resulting in adverse effects that spill over onto the broader school community. As Yaley (2021) observed in his study of boards and heads, "unstable, fractured, and/or unhealthy" board-head relationships lead to "disruption, uncertainty, and strain on the school" (p. 104).

Other research identifies several reasons why board-head relationships may go awry. Some scholarship suggests that conflict often arises when board members and heads misunderstand their respective roles or are motivated by self-interest that is misaligned with the interest of the school (Bridges et al., 2019; Chait et al., 2005). Other research has pointed out that many boards are themselves unstable, marked by attrition and turnover, which undermines their ability to support the head of school and foster a healthy relationship. Based on interviews of approximately 2,000 board members conducted over two decades, Littleford (2023) observed that "stable and strong schools with the longer serving heads have trustees who serve for longer periods and chairs who serve at least 3 years and often, 5, 8 or more. Yet the typical independent school board chair today serves only a two- or three-year term" (p. 3). He also notes that frequent turnover among board members leads to power vacuums, often filled by individuals outside the board. Such turnover erodes fidelity to the school's mission and strategic plan, making it even harder for heads of school to lead well and navigate relationships.

Relational Trust

Healthy board-head relationships are ultimately marked by relational trust, a concept that has been developed by educational researchers Bryk and Schneider (2002). They observe that schools comprise a vast network of relationships made up of mutually dependent individuals

engaging in a series of social exchanges. For instance, teachers need rapport from students and support from parents to teach effectively. Students and parents, on the other hand, expect their teachers to provide instruction and maintain effective learning environments. In the case of boards and heads, heads depend on their boards to provide their employment, strategic vision, and necessary support so that the vision can be carried out. Boards, in turn, depend on the head to execute the strategic vision and lead the school both in the day-to-day and in the long run. This interdependence can create feelings of vulnerability because it is initially uncertain whether expectations will be met. However, when individuals deliver on their obligations and meet or even exceed the expectations of others, the feelings of vulnerability are reduced and relational trust is formed.

Healthy relationships between heads, boards, and other members of the school community are marked by relational trust. That is, members recognize the obligations they owe to others, hold expectations for receiving what they are owed from others, and fulfill their promises. Furthermore, relational trust is characterized by the belief that each individual acts with good intentions and for the right reasons. Relational trust between the head and all board members fosters the rapport and goodwill needed to withstand stressful situations, provide constructive feedback, extend meaningful support, and maintain clarity over roles, decisions, and strategy. Perhaps unsurprisingly, relational trust is a key ingredient for school effectiveness. In their multi-year study of 400 Chicago elementary schools, Bryk and Schneider (2002) found that higher levels of trust between school leaders, teachers, families, and community leaders led to improvements in school culture, which allowed for the implementation of reforms that contributed to significant improvements in student outcomes.

Since Bryk and Schneider's seminal work on relational trust, many studies have provided additional supporting evidence that relational trust between school leaders, teachers, parents, and students is a strong predictor of school effectiveness (Adams & Forsyth, 2009; Forsyth et al., 2014; Niedlich et al., 2021; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Sun et al., 2023). However, much less research has examined relational trust in the context of public school boards, let alone governing boards in independent private schools (Daly & Finnigan, 2012; Saatcioglu et al., 2011). This study is intended to fill that research gap by exploring the role of trust between governing boards and heads in the independent private school sector.

Intentional Care

In addition to building relational trust, governing boards can also directly care for the head of school. Recent scholarship has formally developed a framework of school leadership that includes the concept of care. Smylie et al. (2016) define care as "some action provided on behalf of another" (p. 5). It "involves observation and assessment of, identification with, and response to situations, needs, interests, joys, and concerns of others" aimed at and motivated "toward the betterment of others" (Smylie et al., 2016, p. 6). In their study of caring within school communities, Louis et al. (2016) add that caring is characterized by an attentiveness to the needs of others. These needs are understood more broadly than, say, providing students with the academic support necessary for achievement, as a more narrow conception of schooling might suggest. Other needs include students' psychological, spiritual, and physical wellbeing. Likewise, a school that is organizationally marked by care does not provide teachers or leaders with the support needed merely to fulfill their professional responsibilities. Care is more holistic, considering a wider range of teachers' and leaders' needs (Noddings, 2005).

Recent attention to the psychological and physical wellbeing of teachers and school leaders is a step toward addressing their needs more holistically (King et al., 2024). Strategies to mitigate stress and improve longevity in these positions have been developed and evaluated in recent studies. Many of these studies conclude by recommending steps for personal self-care, including activities such as physical exercise, rest or relaxation, mindfulness practices, spending time with family and friends, setting work boundaries, and engaging in religious practices (Doyle Fosco, 2022; Wang, 2024). There have also been calls for school leaders to prioritize the wellbeing of their teachers and their own families (Lefdal & DeJong, 2019; Murphy & Torres, 2014; Smylie et al., 2016). Additionally, in faith-based school settings, there have been calls for leaders to attend to their religion wellbeing, as they are often expected to serve as spiritual role models (Swaner et al., 2021; Swaner et al., 2022). However, it is also important not to assume that the school leader is solely responsible for the wellbeing of others within the school community, thereby adding yet another duty to an already extensive list of responsibilties. Adopting collective or distributive school leadership approaches, where authority and responsibility are shared, can help improve the wellbeing of all members of the school community (Eckert, 2024; Eckert et al., 2024).

Governing boards of independent private schools can tend to the wellbeing of their heads of school. Since the personal wellbeing of heads significantly influences the effectiveness of the school, it may be prudent for boards to be attentive to this aspect. Boards could consider caring for the head's physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing, and may even extend this care to the wellbeing of the head's family, addressing not only financial compensation but also more sensitive matters when appropriate. There has been little to no consideration about how governing boards can care for their heads. In fact, in a study of 100 superintendents in traditional

public school districts, Hawk and Martin (2011) found that governing boards generally do not provide superintendents with support for reducing stress and, in some cases, may even be a source of stress.

In light of the literature we have discussed, we hypothesize that reported levels of wellbeing will be higher for heads of school whose relationship with their board is marked by mutual trust and who perceive that the board intentionally cares for them. We test these hypotheses using the empirical strategy we detail in the next section.

Methods

Data and Summary Statistics

We use data from The Society for Classical Learning's (SCL) 2023 Thriving Schools Survey. Based in the United States, the Society for Classical Learning is a classical Christian school association that supports its member schools in a variety of ways. The online survey, accessible from January to March 2023, was emailed to 504 heads of school from SCL's database. In the end, 147 individuals completed the survey (a 29% response rate). Respondents were queried about personal and professional information, as well as aspects of their schools like enrollment counts, school age, staffing levels, organizational well-being, and strategic governance.

Table 1 lists summary statistics of various characteristics of the respondents in the sample. Most respondents in the sample report being White (92.8%) and male (70.5%). On average, the heads of schools were 48 years old with 20 years of experience in education. About one quarter of respondents report having some type of post-baccalaureate degree: Three quarters have a master's degree, 14% have an EdS or EdD, and 12% have a PhD. Average compensation is $104,000.

<<Table 1 Here>>

Table 2 lists summary statistics about the respective schools of the respondents. About 80% of the schools are open five days per week and employ fewer than fifty full-time employees. The average school in the sample enrolls 227 students and has been operating for 18 years. Across all schools, the range of enrollment varies greatly: 25% of the schools enroll fewer than 100 students, 32% enroll 100 to 199 students, 31% enroll 200 to 500 students, and 12% enroll over 500 students.

<<Table 2 Here>>

Empirical Strategy

Independent Variables. The two independent variables of interest are a measure of relational trust and a measure of intentional care. The former is constructed from responses to four Likert-type items. As shown in Table 3, each of the four items asks respondents to state their level of agreement or disagreement with statements such as "The board trusts my leadership" or "The head trusts the board." There are five possible response options: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree. Responses to each of the four items are coded and averaged to create the measure of relational trust. The measure of intentional care is similarly constructed but from three items that ask respondents to indicate their level of agreement with statements such as "The board cares for my family." Chronbach's alpha for the measure of relational trust and intentional care are 0.89 and 0.92, respectively, suggesting a high degree of internal consistency.

<<Table 3 Here>>

Dependent Variables. On the Thriving Schools Survey, heads of school responded to a series of Likert-type items designed to provide some sense of their wellbeing. Table 4 displays

the text of the items from the survey and the associated indicator of wellbeing they were intended to measure. The first indicator of wellbeing is a measure of the heads' satisfaction with the governing board. That measure is constructed coding and averaging responses to two separate Likert-type items asking about satisfaction with the board chair and the other board members, respectively. For each of the two items, respondents could select from five options: very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, satisfied, and very satisfied. These two items have a high degree of internal consistency with a Chronbach's alpha of 0.94.

<<Table 4 Here>>

The second and third indicators are made up of one item each. One item asked respondents if they have considered quitting their job within the last three years. The other item asked respondents if they often feel lonely as a school leader. Respondents could reply either yes or no to each of those two items.

The penultimate indicator of wellbeing measures whether respondents' religious lives are flourishing. The measure of religious flourishing is made up responses to five Likert-type items asking respondents to state their agreement or disagreement with statements like "My relationship with Christ is flourishing," "I am a member in good standing of a local congregation," and "I observe the Sabbath most weeks" (see Table 4). Respondents could select from among five response options: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree. Responses to each of the five items are coded and averaged to form a single measure of the extent to which respondents' religious lives are flourishing. With a Chronbach's alpha of 0.91, this set of items possesses an ample level of internal consistency.

The fifth and final indicator of wellbeing is a measure of whether respondents' respective families are flourishing. It is made up of four Likert-type items asking respondents to indicate

their agreement with statements like "I set good boundaries on my schedule for quality time with

my spouse" or "My relationship with my children is flourishing." Once again, respondents could

select from among five response options: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree,

agree, strongly agree. Responses to each of the four items are coded and averaged to form a

single measure of the extent to which respondents' families are flourishing. Chronbach's alpha

levels indicate a sufficient level of internal consistency for this measure as well ($\alpha = 0.78$).

Model Specification

To examine the relationship between relational trust, intentional care, and school leader

well-being, we estimate a series of linear regression models of the form:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Trust + \beta_2 Care + \beta_3 X + \varepsilon. \tag{1}$$

In the equation, Y is one of the five dependent variables described above, $Trust$ is the measure of

relational trust, and $Care$ is the measure of intentional care. The models also control for several

observable characteristics. Specifically, X is a vector that includes school leader characteristics,

namely, age, gender, salary, years of experience, ethnicity, and educational attainment. The

vector X also includes school characteristics: whether the school uses a five-day model, total full

time equivalent employees, enrollment size, and school age. Finally, ε is the usual stochastic

error term.

Both the measures of relational trust and intentional care are standardized along with the

measures of satisfaction, flourishing of religious life, and family flourishing. Thus, coefficient

estimates of β_1 and β_2 can be interpreted as changes in the dependent variable in terms of

standard deviation units for every one standard-deviation increase in the independent variable net

of the leader and school characteristics that are included as control variables in the models. The

two dependent variables regarding whether the respondent has thought of quitting within the last

three years or often feels lonely are binary, given that respondents could only answer yes or no. In that case, coefficient estimates of β_1 and β_2 are interpreted as percentage-point changes in the probability of thinking about quitting or often feeling lonely for every one standard-deviation increase in the independent variable net of the included control variables.

Results

Table 5 presents our regression results. We generally find that higher levels of relational trust and intentional care are associated with higher levels of reported wellbeing for the head of school. Relational trust, in particular, seems to more consistently predict each indicator of wellbeing. For instance, all else equal, an increase of one standard deviation in relational trust is associated with an increase of 61 percent of a standard deviation in satisfaction with the governing board. The likelihood that a head has considered quitting within the last three years and often feels lonely decreases by 26 and 29 percentage points, respectively, for every one-standard-deviation increase in mutual trust. The magnitude of these associations is statistically significant at conventional levels. These magnitudes are also substantively meaningful considering that in the entire sample 41 percent of heads report considering quitting in the last three years and 64 percent of heads report often feeling lonely. As shown in the fourth column of Table 5, relational trust is also positively correlated with how well the head is doing in terms of their religious life. An increase of one standard deviation in relational trust is associated with an increase of 23 percent of a standard deviation in the measure of religious flourishing. However, we do not find any correlation between relational trust and the measure of family flourishing.

<<Table 5 Here>>

Intentional care of the head by the board is also associated with some indicators of wellbeing for the head of school, though to a lesser extent than relational trust. For example, all

else equal, an increase of one standard deviation in intentional care is associated with an increase

of 22 percent of a standard deviation in satisfaction with the governing board and a decrease of

30 percentage points in the likelihood of having thought about quitting within the last three

years. In contrast, intentional care does not appear to be correlated with feelings of loneliness

and the reported health of one's religious life. Meanwhile, intentional care is positively

correlated with how well the head is faring in terms of family life. An increase of one standard

deviation in intentional care is associated with an increase in the measure of family flourishing of

23 percent of a standard deviation.

Discussion and Conclusions

Connections to Prior Research and Lingering Questions

Overall, we found that relational trust between governing boards and heads of school is

positively associated with heads' wellbeing, as measured by satisfaction with the governing

board, mitigating desires to leave the job, mitigating feelings of loneliness, and the quality of

their religious life. We also found, though to a lesser extent, that intentional care of heads by

boards is positively associated with indicators of heads' wellbeing. Specifically, greater levels of

intentional care of heads were associated with greater levels of heads' satisfaction with the board

and a decrease in the likelihood that heads thought about quitting their positions. Unlike

relational trust, care of the head was also predictive of whether heads thought they were

flourishing with respect to their relationships with their families. These results provide evidence

that boards have a significant role to play in ensuring the wellbeing and effectiveness of the head

of school.

This study, however, does not directly provide empirical evidence to support the claim

that relational trust and care will improve downstream outcomes such as head of school tenure,

school climate, or student outcomes. Prior research has established between trust and some of those outcomes, though it has not considered the impact of boards (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Daly & Finnigan, 2012; Forsyth et al., 2014; Louis et al., 2016; Murphy & Torres, 2014; Niedlich et al., 2021; Saatcioglu et al., 2011; Sun et al., 2023; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Regardless, our findings raise the possibility that one mechanism behind the associations between relational trust, a culture of care, and school effectiveness found in prior literature is due to the impact that trust and care has on school leaders. That is to say, trust and care create conditions for the kind of effective school leadership that is conducive to improved student outcomes. Such a mechanism is akin to the one Adams and Fosyth (2009) found in their analysis where organizational trust between teachers and parents appears to increase teacher efficacy and motivation, which in turn, improved student outcomes. Gathering cross-sectional or even longitudinal data that includes measures of board-head relational dynamics and outcomes are necessary to provide direct supporting evidence for the claim that relational trust between the board and head and care of the head by the board ultimately lead to improvements in school effectiveness. We encourage future research of relational dynamics between boards and heads to tackle that question.

That said, this study fills a gap in the prior research which has not considered the role of school boards in building mutual trust and cultivating care. In fact, other studies of school boards in public school settings suggest that the support they provide to superintendents is quite low, if any (Davidson et al., 2021; Hawk & Martin, 2011). Independent private schools do not appear to fare any better if the high levels of school leader attrition and persistent calls for board member training are indications of such (Cook, 2023; Littleford, 2023; Mott, 2018; Swaner et al., 2021; Yaley, 2021). The findings from this study suggest that giving attention to governing boards and

the ways they can support their heads of school, whether it is through cultivating relational trust, care, or other means, will be a fruitful avenue to improving head of school wellbeing and potentially other downstream consequences such as head of school longevity and student outcomes. Such efforts can help schools to address challenges with the sustainability of their institutions and to provide the necessary care for their students, teachers, and leaders (Swaner et al., 2021; Swaner et al., 2022).

Our findings also underscore an option in which ensuring the wellbeing of the head of school is not solely the individual responsibility of the head. Much of the school leadership literature has placed the onus of maintaining the heads' wellbeing on the heads themselves by suggesting that they engage with mindfulness activities or other related psychological interventions that are to be practiced individually and privately. Other alternative strategies, like setting clear work boundaries and physical exercise have been offered, but they likewise are limited to calling heads to take personal ownership of their wellbeing (Doyle Fosco, 2022; King et al., 2024; Wang, 2024). In contrast, this study offers another path for cultivating head of school wellbeing that depends on the support of other individuals within the school community, specifically members of the governing board. In some ways, the reliance on the governing board to tend to the wellbeing of the head is consistent with a distributive or collective leadership model. Although the research on distributive or collective leadership does suggest that it improves leader wellbeing by lightening workloads and enabling leaders to share the stress and burdens of their jobs with others, that research typically focuses on calling heads of schools to identify teachers to take on specific responsibilities and leadership roles (Eckert, 2024; Eckert et al., 2024). Our study raises the additional possibility of looking to the governing board to fill that role, and we encourage the research of collective and distributive literature to consider it.

We also encourage future research to survey board members in addition to heads. Admittedly, the measures in this study are solely based upon self-reports of heads of schools. Therefore, judgements about the degree of relational trust and care are only based on the perspectives of heads, even though board members' perspectives are likely important for obtaining the most valid measure of those constructs. Nevertheless, we believe that our measures based on the perspectives of heads of schools have sufficient signal to provide valid insight into the connection between relational trust, care, and head of school wellbeing. In fact, other studies aimed at measuring similar constructs have similarly relied on perspectives of a single group and led to important empirical insights (Adams, 2009; Hawk & Martin, 2011). Nevertheless, we posit that there would be much to learn about the dynamics of the relationships between heads and boards if relevant measures are obtained from both parties.

A Practical Implication: The Headmaster Support and Evaluation Committee

That limitations aside, it appears that relational trust between heads and boards as well as intentional care of the head by the board can help to ensure the wellbeing of the head. But the practical question of how to cultivate relational trust and care remains. In conclusion, we offer one specific suggestion suggested in the governance and leadership literatures. Although there are likely many informal actions that board members can take to that end, many schools have established formal processes and organizational structures to attain those ends. The Headmaster Support and Evaluation Committee (HSEC) is one practical way that governing boards can create structural clarity and relational wisdom with their heads (Cook, 2023; Mott, 2018). The HSEC is typically a standing committee of the governing board that works with the head to set clear, measurable goals based on the school's strategic plan and offers the head regular, strategic, and personal support. These goals, in turn, help the head set priorities, carry out their duties, and

are used to gauge the head's performance. Prior research about school leadership demonstrates that many of the functions and practices formally implemented by the HSEC are linked to improving student learning (Delagardelle, 2008; Goodman et al., 1997; LaRocque & Coleman, 1993; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). Presumably, the HSEC can also help foster a healthy relationship between the head and the full board, alleviate feelings of loneliness among heads, extend the heads' tenure in the job, increase their effectiveness, and strengthen the school's overall health. Future research should consider studying the HSEC to answer questions like how it operates in practice, whether its presence leads to desirable outcomes, and if so, why it has such effects. This research would likely yield insights into effective board governance and adequately supporting heads of schools.

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Table 1. Summary Statistics of Respondent-Level Characteristics

	Percent
Respondent Characteristics	
Age	
Under 40 years old	19.4
40-49 years old	32.4
50-59 years old	32.4
At least 60 years old	15.8
Gender	
Male	70.5
Female	29.4
Salary	
Under $50,000	13.4
$50,000 to $99,000	42.9
$100,000 to $199,000	34.8
$200,000 to $499,000	8.9
Experience in Education	
Under 10 years	13.6
10-19 years	23.1
20-29 years	15.1
At least 30 years	48.2
Race	
White	92.8
Non-White	7.2
Degree Attainment	
No Post-Baccalaureate Degree	26.8
Has a Master's Degree	74.8
Has a Ed.D. Degree	7.2
Has a Ed.S. Degree	6.5
Has a Ph.D. Degree	12.2
Has Another Post-Baccalaureate Degree (CPA, JD)	2.2

Note: N = 139. Degree attainment does not sum to 100 percent given that some respondents have multiple degrees.

Table 2. Summary Statistics of School-Level Characteristics

	Percent
Length of School Week	
Five Days	79.1
Less than Five Days	20.9
Total Full-Time Equivalent Employees	
Under 10	13.7
10-29	38.1
30-49	23.7
50-99	16.6
At least 100	7.9
Enrollment	
Under 100 students	25.2
100-199 students	32.4
200-499 students	30.9
500-999 students	10.1
At least 1000 students	1.4
School Age	
Under 10 years	25.2
10-19 years	31.7
20-29 years	30.2
At least 30 years	12.9

Note: N = 139.

Table 3. Independent Variables

Relational Trust
1. The head trusts the board
2. The board trusts the head
3. The board trusts my leadership
4. The relationship with my board of governors is a flourishing one

Response Options: Strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree

Intentional Care
1. The board cares for my soul
2. The board cares for my personal well-being
3. The board cares for my family

Response Options: Strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree

Table 4. Dependent Variables

Satisfaction with Governing Board
1. How satisfied are you with your board members?
2. How satisfied are you with your board chair?

Response Options: Very satisfied, satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied

Considered Quitting
1. Have you seriously considered quitting their position in the last three years?

Response Options: Yes, no

Loneliness
1. I often feel lonely as a school leader.

Response Options: Yes, no

Faith Wellbeing
1. My relationship with Christ is flourishing
2. I am a member in good standing of a local congregation
3. I observe the Sabbath most weeks
4. I set good boundaries on my schedule to make sure I have sufficient time to be involved in my local congregation
5. If possible, I attend church at least 3 Sundays each month

Response Options: Strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree

Family Flourishing
1. My relationship with my spouse is flourishing
2. My relationship with my children is flourishing
3. I set good boundaries on my schedule for quality time with my spouse
4. I set good boundaries on my schedule for quality time with my family

Response Options: Strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree

Table 5: Results

	(1) Satisfaction with Board	(2) Ever Thought of Quitting	(3) Often Feels Lonely	(4) Religious Life Flourishing	(5) Family Flourishing
Relational Trust	0.608***	-0.260**	-0.287***	0.228*	0.070
	(0.067)	(0.103)	(0.100)	(0.128)	(0.125)
Intentional Care	0.223***	-0.301***	-0.041	0.066	0.226*
	(0.076)	(0.099)	(0.095)	(0.112)	(0.124)
Leader Characteristics					
Age	0.014*	-0.002	0.005	-0.003	0.009
	(0.008)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.014)
Male	0.059	-0.397*	-0.203	0.617***	0.159
	(0.144)	(0.214)	(0.211)	(0.218)	(0.248)
Salary (in $1000s)	-0.000	0.001	0.000	-0.005***	-0.003**
	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Years of Experience	-0.004	0.008	-0.009	0.017	0.002
	(0.009)	(0.012)	(0.014)	(0.011)	(0.013)
White	-0.112	0.461	0.035	0.008	-0.470
	(0.166)	(0.312)	(0.383)	(0.538)	(0.397)
More than Bachelor's Degree	-0.027	-0.138	-0.051	-0.065	-0.097
	(0.131)	(0.182)	(0.205)	(0.222)	(0.199)
School Characteristics					
Five-day Per Week School	0.018	-0.338	-0.242	-0.353	-0.222
	(0.143)	(0.244)	(0.237)	(0.219)	(0.217)
Total Employees	0.005	0.001	0.005	0.001	0.005
	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Enrollment Size	-0.000	0.000	-0.001	-0.000	0.000
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
School Age	0.002	-0.002	0.003	0.011*	-0.007
	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Constant	-0.697*	-0.024	0.282	0.038	0.288
	(0.363)	(0.707)	(0.731)	(0.897)	(0.728)

Notes: * $p<0.10$; ** $p<0.05$; *** $p<.01$. Robust standard errors in parentheses