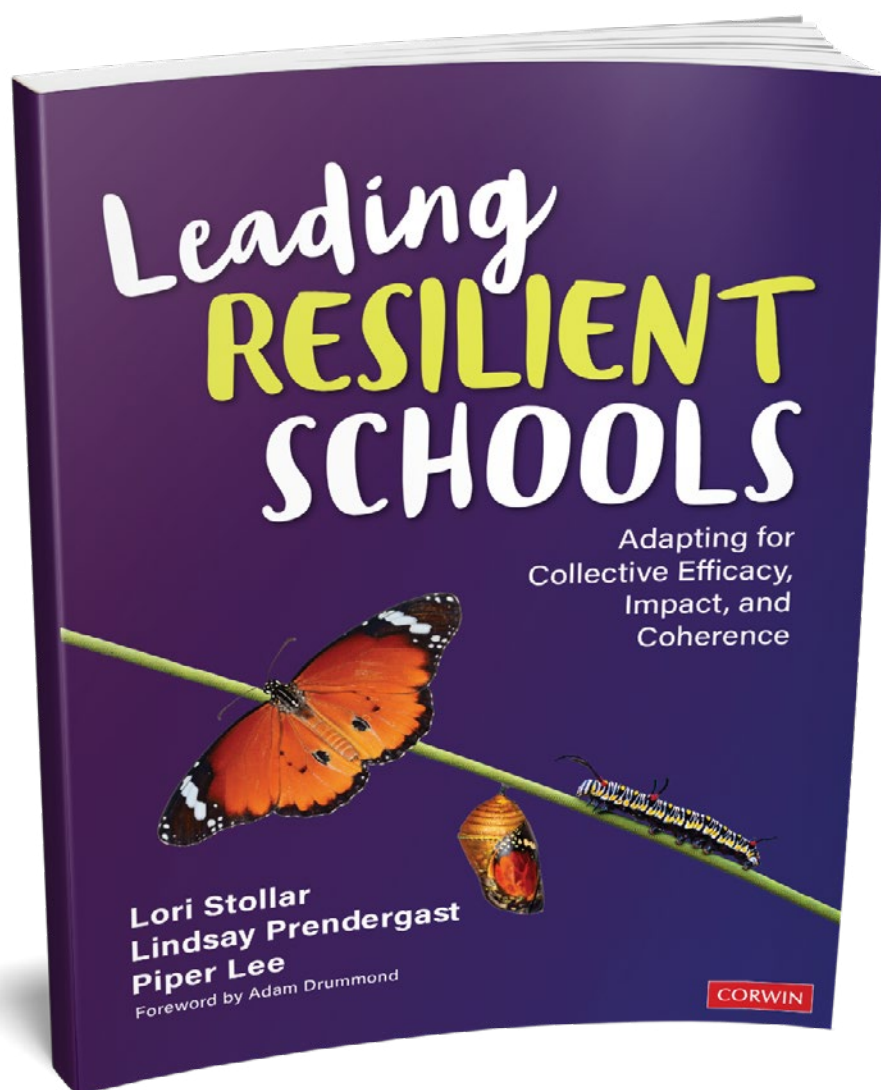


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# Introduction

## WHY THIS BOOK? WHY NOW? WHY RESILIENCE?

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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

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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

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*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

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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, 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

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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

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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.