

# Education in the Public Square: Educational Leaders' Responses to Today's External Challenges, Influences, and Politics

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Santoro (2020) argues that educational organizations fulfill a “social purpose” (para. 9) to prepare students to flourish, help others flourish, and demonstrate respect and care for their neighbors and communities. Educational organizations like schools, local educational agencies, school boards, colleges, universities, higher education coordinating boards, and education ministries exist—to Santoro (2020)—to promote the idea that people should care about other people.

Yet, there are increasingly acute influences of “the public square” on educational organizations aimed at challenging, redefining, or even negating the social purpose of schools. Examples of these influences may be state legislatures passing new laws related to school vouchers, state executive branches creating regulations that curtail academic freedom, takeovers of local educational authorities (e.g., school boards) by politically-charged groups, and parents opposing certain curriculum materials in P-12 classrooms.

The theme of this special issue of the *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership* (JCEL) is to highlight how these influences from the public square are shaping educational organizations’ abilities to fulfill Santoro’s (2020) “social purpose” (para. 9) and, specifically, the ways in which P-20 educational leaders are making sense of, navigating, and/or responding to these influences. Specifically, we seek cases exploring scenarios where educational leaders, boards of education, educators, community-based organizations, university/district partnerships, and similar entities are navigating increasingly challenging and charged political and policy dynamics that often lead to conflict in the public square.

These challenges, which have intensified in recent years, pose a direct threat to student learning and well-being and disproportionately influence both traditionally marginalized student populations and members of wider communities. Indeed, it seems as though no community or leadership space is immune to these fraught dynamics, and the rapid spread of doctrines of hateful othering in response to anti-racist movements across the globe makes

development of a leadership toolbox for confronting public square conflicts an international imperative. Yet, there remain limited resources available to leadership preparation and graduate programs for building the capacity of aspiring and current leaders to meet such challenging demands in their work. We seek to address this gap by inviting and curating this special issue of cases.

Case submissions should align with the four elements of a good JCEL case (Fossey & Crow, 2011):

- **Context** – We seek cases with rich descriptions of the local context of the case that also feature the ways in which global and/or national issues are playing out in the local context.
- **Complexity** – We seek cases that feature a fraught intersection between an egalitarian and democratic education system and the realities of local control. Further, cases should tap into the histories that inform local context while also contributing to a complex, broader societal tapestry.
- **Ambiguity** – Some, but certainly not all, potential cases could start with a fairly unambiguous problem (e.g., a demand to ban books that include queer characters), but the implications of officials’ reactions combined with community outcry could pose challenges that leaders must address on multiple fronts (e.g., legal, cultural, ethical).
- **Relevance** – This special issue theme is a relevant and timely topic. Unfortunately, these dynamics in the public square are unfolding in school board meetings, central offices, libraries, classrooms, and campuses across the United States and around the world.

Potential topics for cases may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- School choice and vouchers
- Local school board takeovers
- Parent protests
- COVID-19 pandemic safety protocols
- Book bans of P-12 curriculum materials
- Parent reviews of P-12 curriculum materials
- Threats to academic freedom in higher education
- Gender neutral bathrooms in P-12 schools and higher education campuses

### Submission Notes

We especially encourage submissions co-authored with practitioners, families and community members, non-profit partners, graduate students, and others with diverse perspectives.

**An accepted abstract is required in order to submit a full manuscript.** All abstracts received by the below deadline will be reviewed, and accepted abstracts will receive feedback and authors will be invited to submit a full manuscript. Full manuscripts will undergo the typical peer review process, so the acceptance of an abstract does not guarantee final publication of a full manuscript.

We invite abstracts that are approximately 500 words in length that describe the intended case, connection with the special issue theme, and a description of intended teaching notes and activities. This information will allow the guest editors to (a) provide constructive feedback on abstracts that hold strong promise for development into a full case; (b) ensure a wide and diverse array of topics, contexts, and perspectives without repeated storylines; and (c) share abstracts and our feedback with current practitioners to solicit their feedback on the proposed case to also share with authors.

### Timeline Overview

April 30, 2024	Primary submission deadline for abstracts via the below Google Form link <i>Instructions and template:</i> <a href="https://forms.gle/192UWt5BZGsuwVBD6">https://forms.gle/192UWt5BZGsuwVBD6</a>
May 31, 2024	Decisions and feedback returned to authors
September 1, 2024	Final submission deadline for abstracts submitted on a rolling basis
November 15, 2024	Full manuscripts due for external (i.e., peer) review
July 15, 2025	Final decisions on full manuscripts

## References

Fossey, R., & Crow, G. M. (2011). [The elements of a good case](#). *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership*, 14(3), 4-10.

Santoro, D. A. (2020, November 11). [Teacher demoralization isn't the same as teacher burnout: What COVID-19 means for the teaching workforce](#). *EdWeek*.