The Silent Leaders of Schools: An Exploratory Case Study of High School Department Chairs in Modern Orthodox Yeshivas

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Abstract

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The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore with a group of nine NYC high school department chairs from three different Modern Orthodox yeshivas, their perceptions of their role and responsibilities, their perceptions on how they manage any challenges they might face, how they support professional growth through any of the four pillar practices of teaming, collegial inquiry, mentoring, and providing leadership roles, and how their descriptions of their role as department chair connected to Learning Forward’s 10 roles for teacher leadership. I conducted two ninety-minute interviews with the nine participants, observed one department meeting for each participant, and piloted a survey to 24 department chairs within the three Modern Orthodox yeshivas in my study.

In terms of responsibilities, I found that all nine department chairs had difficulty differentiating between the terms “role” and “responsibilities” because of the ambiguity within the role, all nine chairs described administrative responsibilities in their roles which varied by discipline and by years of experience, and all three English chairs seemed to unify their departments through their curricular responsibilities. I also found that all nine chairs described enacting all ten of Learning Forward’s Leadership Roles through their various responsibilities at different times.
In terms of challenges and supports, I found that there were four types of challenges department chairs described: (a) feeling ill-prepared when first becoming chair, (b) facing conflicts with teachers in their departments during that time, (c) teaching a full course load as chair, and (d) challenges with chairing during the month of November. I identified five ways department chairs found support for these challenges: (a) from an individual on the school’s leadership team, (b) other department chairs, (c) the teachers in their departments, (d) outside mentoring programs, and (e) their partners.

In terms of pillar practices, I learned that the chairs who described feeling supported by the pillar practices when they took on the role (5/9) used these supports in their own practice with teachers in their departments. Additionally, all nine chairs described aspects of teaming, collegial inquiry, mentoring, and providing leadership roles to teachers as a means of support. Finally, I found that the chairs who responded to the survey (n=24) reported creating a holding environment for the teachers in their departments through the pillar practices teaming and collegial inquiry by having teachers in their departments share ideas, sharing decision making with their teachers, reflecting with teachers on their practice, and engaging in meaningful conversations with their teachers about teaching and learning. My findings have implications for school leaders, education leadership theorists, and education leadership preparation programs.
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Dedication

For my mother, Joyce Salame, and in memory of my father, Bob Salame, for believing in me,
always.

To my husband, Albert, for loving me, always.

To my children, David, Shelley, Bobby, and Joy, for teaching me, always.
Chapter 1: Introduction & Overview

The growing research on educational leadership emphasizes the positive influence of leadership on student achievement and within the organization when it is distributed among multiple agents (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010). The high school department chair is in a unique position to play an important role within the school system and, as such, they can have a major influence over teachers (Bryant & Walker, 2022; DeAngelis, 2013; Melville, Campbell, & Jones, 2016). However, there is much ambiguity about the role and responsibilities of a department chair – and, to the best of my knowledge, there is very little research on how principals and teachers, as well as department chairs, view the role (Feeney, 2009; Melville et al., 2016; Peacock 2014; Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007). Much of the literature within the field of educational leadership focuses on the different responsibilities of principals and assistant principals, and yet the number of department chairs likely exceeds the number of principals and assistant principals combined, making this group the most prevalent formal leadership within secondary schools (Brent, DeAngelis, & Surash, 2014; Peacock & Melville, 2019). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the complexity and ambiguity within the field of education, with calls to action that warrant immediate attention (Drago-Severson, Blum De-Stefano, & Brooks-Lawrence, 2020; Militello & Argent, 2021). As the complexity within schools continues to increase, it is important for researchers, educators, and policy makers to learn more about how other roles in the school, and in particular the role of department chair, can potentially help principals manage these complexities.

There is very limited research on the current role of the high school department chair; in fact, the majority of research is close to a decade old, and the most current research mainly
examines the role of academic chair in higher education. Therefore, research is warranted to understand and better define the purpose of the role and responsibilities of the department chair today. This is at the heart of my dissertation. In light of that, my dissertation is guided by the following questions:

1.1 Research Questions

Five research questions guide this study.

1. How do nine department chairs from NYC yeshiva high schools describe and understand their own role and responsibilities as a department chair?

2. How, if at all, do their descriptions and understandings of their role as a department chair connect to Learning Forward’s 10 roles for teacher leadership?

3. What challenges, if any, do department chairs face in their roles as department chairs and how do they manage them?

4. How, if at all, to what degree, and why, do these nine department chairs employ any one of the four pillar practices (teaming, providing leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring) in their practice with teachers in their department as department chairs?

5. How, if at all, do all department chairs from these yeshiva high schools perceive their roles and responsibilities, challenges, collaboration, leadership practice, and possible employment of the pillar practices with teachers in their departments?

In my dissertation, I build on the existing literature and research on the role of the high school department chair and the role of department chair in other settings (e.g., British high schools, university-level department chairs), to understand better the diverse ways in which the role and responsibilities are enacted and conceived in the context of a New York City Modern Orthodox Jewish day school. I interviewed and observed nine department chairs from three
schools within this context to answer my first four research questions. To answer my fifth research question, I surveyed all the department chairs in the three schools from my study to learn more about their perceptions on the roles and responsibilities, challenges, collaboration, leadership practice, and employment of the pillar practices (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016, 2018, 2020) with teachers in their departments.

I begin this chapter with an overview and definition of the Modern Orthodox yeshiva, the setting of my study. I also include the purpose of my study, my relationship to the research, and a brief overview of the literature that served as the foundation for the study, such as the characteristics of the high school department chair, their roles and responsibilities, challenges within the role, support for the role, the Learning Forward Leadership Standards for Professional Learning, and Drago-Severson’s pillar practices (2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016, 2018, 2020). I use Learning Forward’s Leadership Standards for Professional Learning and the pillar practices (Drago-Severson, 2004) as two frameworks to understand the ways nine department chairs in New York City Modern Orthodox high schools described and understood their roles and responsibilities as department chairs, the challenges they faced and how they managed them, and how they supported adult learning in their practice as department chairs. I also used the literature and frameworks to inform my interview questions and survey questions as I sought to learn more about how the department chairs in the three schools perceived their roles and responsibilities, challenges, collaboration, leadership practice, and employment of the pillar practices (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016, 2018, 2020) with teachers in their departments.

1.2 The Modern Orthodox Jewish Day School Context

This study took place in a Modern Orthodox Jewish day school. I chose this location because I am a member of the Modern Orthodox Jewish community, and I was interested in
studying the role of department chair in this unique context. There is no research to my knowledge of department chairs in this context, despite a rapid growth for several decades in Jewish day schools, furthering my interest in exploring this setting (Avi Chai Foundation, 2020). The Avi Chai Foundation defines a Jewish day school, or yeshiva, as an educational institution with a dual curriculum, religious and academic. Within the Jewish day school system, Modern Orthodox schools are a denomination distinguished by a number of characteristics. First, these schools are generally coeducational. There is a strong emphasis on both the Judaic and general studies programs, and the curriculum tends to include subject matter that is not included in the curricula of typical yeshivas (Avi Chai Foundation, 2020). To my knowledge, there are currently no studies that exist on the role of high school department chair within a Modern Orthodox Jewish day school.

The number of Jewish day school students in the United States from 1998 to 2018, when the Avi Chai Foundation conducted a census on Jewish day schools, increased by 58.5% from 184,333 students to 292,172. In particular, New York experienced a 64% increase in Jewish day school enrollment between 1998 and 2018, accounting for majority of the growth. Additionally, Modern Orthodox day school enrollment has increased 21.5% in the New York City and Suburban New York City region, with a total of 29,441 students enrolled (Avi Chai Foundation, 2020). The Avi Chai Foundation illustrates that this growth is largely within the Orthodox and Modern Orthodox sectors because these students come from homes where day school education is firmly embedded in the family’s belief system; few children from such homes are found in public schools (Avi Chai Foundation, 2020). Additionally, because Brooklyn in particular is densely populated with a large population of Orthodox Jews, there is an increase of Jewish schools in New York City to accommodate that enrollment growth (Avi Chai Foundation, 2020).
Although there was rapid growth for several decades in Jewish day schools, research in this setting has remained a relatively underdeveloped area (Avi Chai Foundation, 2020; Tamir, Pearlmutter, & Feiman-Nemser, 2017). This is another reason I chose this context for my study. To my knowledge, while some research on all types of Jewish day schools does exist (Knafo, 2012; Menachem, 2017; Sassoon, 2016; Tamir et al., 2017; Shanes, 2020), there is no research on the role of department chairs within any type of Jewish day school. My study attempted to contribute to the dearth of research in Jewish education in the area of department chairs. As a result of the lack of research focusing on department chairs within Jewish day schools, my study drew on prior research that was conducted on the role of department chair in other settings (e.g., United States public high schools, international high schools, university-level department chairs), examining how, if at all, what was discovered in other contexts regarding the role of department chair might apply in the Jewish day school context, and how what I learned might be helpful to the role of department chairs in other settings.

Department chairs are in a unique position of influence within secondary schools (Brent, et al., 2014; Melville et al., 2016; Peacock & Melville, 2019). I hope that my research, which focuses on the role of the high school department chair with the Modern Orthodox yeshiva, will provide more attention to the potential for leadership within the position, which might be helpful information for principals, teachers, and department chairs in other settings. Furthermore, I hope my research could also shed light on potential challenges and supports in the position, which might help principals learn more about possible ways to support department chairs. In addition, the current COVID-19 pandemic increased the complexity and ambiguity within the field of education as there is more reliance on leadership practices to navigate the challenges teachers, students, and parents are faced with as a result of the pandemic (Drago-Severson, et al., 2020;
Drigo-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2019). For that reason, it is even more important for educators, education leadership programs, and education leadership researchers to learn about the role of department chairs and how they might lead the teachers in their departments during this challenging, complex period.

1.3 Purpose

The qualitative research I present in my dissertation served a number of key purposes which I outline below. In particular, the purpose of my study was to explore with a group of nine NYC high school department chairs from three different Modern Orthodox yeshivas, their perceptions of their role and responsibilities, their perceptions on how they manage any challenges they might face, and how, if at all, they support professional growth through any of the four pillar practices (Drigo-Severson, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016, 2018, 2020). I also hoped to learn how, if at all, their descriptions of their role as department chair connected to Learning Forward’s 10 roles for teacher leadership (2017). I developed a survey as well that I administered to all department chairs within the three schools in my study to learn even more about the role within this context. This, to the best of my knowledge, is an unexplored area in the literature.

For example, most of the literature on secondary school department chairs is outdated, focused on public school settings in the United States, with more recent research focused on international settings (Turner, 2019). While the literature that does exist clearly shows that chairs can be incredibly influential within the high school when acting as instructional leaders, there is very little attention placed on department chairs as instructional leaders or supporting professional growth (Klar, 2013; Peacock, 2014; Turner, 2019). In addition, there is little known about the position; in fact, the role is not explicitly defined (Peacock & Melville, 2019). The
most current literature on department chairs in the United States is a historical review of the literature (Peacock & Melville, 2019). Another current study is an international qualitative study, where the authors interviewed fifteen teachers from six schools in England to identify the how and why collaborations get started within math and science departments (Wong & Dillon, 2020). Neither of these studies interview department chairs directly, and neither focus directly on department chairs as instructional leaders. In addition, the qualitative studies on department chairs in the United States are either close to a decade old, or older (e.g., Wettersten, 1992; Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007; Feeney, 2009; Melville et al., 2016). Others have focused on interviewing principals to determine their perceptions of the importance of the high school department chair (Brent et al., 2014).

When it comes specifically to the question of what is the role and responsibility of high school department chairs, then, department chairs have not been directly asked within the past five years. Department chairs in Modern Orthodox yeshivas have never, to my knowledge, been asked this question in the prior literature. In other words, the prior literature and research does not identify the role and responsibilities of the department chair in Modern Orthodox yeshivas from the perspective of the department chair, which is what I sought to understand in my study. In addition, I hoped to further shed light on the role of department chair as instructional leader, the potential challenges department chairs may face in the role, how department chairs might manage these challenges, and how, if at all, department chairs support professional growth.

1.4 My Relationship to this Research

Over the past fifteen years, I have served as an English Language Arts teacher for high school and middle school in two Modern Orthodox yeshivas. During that time, I was under the guidance of three different department chairs with different styles of leadership. As a beginning
teacher, I was very much left alone to create my own lessons, units, and curriculum, as the
department chair who hired me was very hands-off. I had felt frustrated and embarrassed to ask
questions about what I was teaching or about my struggles with classroom management. When
the role of department chair turned over to another teacher within the department the following
year, I felt as though I suddenly had a mentor who was guiding me through my beginning years
of teaching. We had regular meetings, thought of new ideas, and brainstormed solutions to
common issues we found. The department chair formed a feeling of collegiality among some of
the teachers within the department, while others continued with the previous style, preferring to
be left alone.

Soon after, I was promoted to the role of department chair and I used my own
experiences to guide my leadership practice. As reported in the literature, the role was not clearly
defined and it felt as though the department chairs within the school each had their own
interpretation of our responsibilities. While I took on more of a mentoring role, inspired by the
chair that came before me, other department chairs within the school saw the role as more
administrative, focusing on duties such as collecting lesson plans and relaying information from
the principals. Others, still, saw the role as one of content expert. I wondered how one role of
quasi-leadership could be so different within one school, and whether that was happening in
other schools as well.

Eventually, after serving as department chair for six years, and excited by the research I
worked on as an undergraduate student (Harari, Vukovic & Bailey, 2013), I stepped down and
became a Language Arts teacher and Science teacher in a new school while pursuing my PhD in
Teachers College, Columbia University. As a teacher in two separate disciplines, I was under the
leadership of two different department chairs, each with different approaches to the role of
department chair. As I learned more about adult learning and educational leadership in Teachers College, I began to wonder more about the position of department chair. Much of the literature on educational leadership centered around the roles of superintendent and principal, yet there was little about this in-between role of department chair (Brent et al., 2014).

I knew the role of department chair could have a tremendous impact on the teachers within each department based on my own experiences as teacher and as department chair. It seemed that the research aligned with what I found in both schools- there is a lack of clearly defined responsibilities, with much ambiguity (Brent et al., 2014). I was inspired to learn more about this role, and I believed that my familiarity with the role from both ends, as a teacher and as a department chair, could benefit my work as a researcher. Based on my experiences, I recognized the complexities within the position, and also the influence that individuals in this position could potentially have over the teachers within their departments. Yet, I also realized that given all of this, I needed to pay even more attention to researcher bias and reflexivity, which I discuss briefly in this chapter and in more detail in Chapter III. I hoped to study nine department chairs in Modern Orthodox yeshivas to shed light on the role, providing greater insight to the challenges and supports within the role. I believed this information could be useful for principals, department chairs, and teachers as I learned whether the department chairs in my study describe and understand their own roles in regard to influencing school policy, as described in older literature (Feeney, 2009).

1.5 Overview of the High School Department Chair, Learning Forward’s Leadership Standard, and Pillar Practices

In this section I include the most current research on the role of high school department chair; there is little research within the past five years on the subject within the United States.
However, there is research within the past few years on the role of university department chair 
(Gardner & Ward, 2018; Brinkley-Etzkorn & Lane, 2019). There are also some international 
studies (Wong & Dillon, 2020; Vanblaere & Devos, 2018) on the role of department chair as 
instructional leader. Therefore, I drew on all this research to learn how, if at all, the roles and 
responsibilities of the participants in my study aligned with the ways in which higher education 
describes the university or college-level academic chair, or not. I also provide a brief discussion 
of Learning Forward’s Leadership Standard (2017), and Drago-Severson’s Pillar Practices (2004, 
study. In Chapter II, I review the literature in greater depth.

The role of high school department chair began as a form of administrative support 
(DeAngelis, 2013; Brent et al., 2014; Melville et al., 2016). The literature describes secondary 
school department chairs as content-area specialists and instructional leaders who occupy the 
positions between administrators and teachers (Feeney, 2009; Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007; 
Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2015; Melville et al., 2016). Department chairs helped high school 
principals manage complexity by supervising instruction and through supervisory roles, 
managing their departments and reporting to the administration (Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007; 
DeAngelis, 2013). In general, chairs were also expected to lead learning within their departments 
(Melville et al., 2016).

I wondered if this was still true for the high school department chair today. I hoped to 
learn more about this through my study, and to see how, if at all, this aligned with what I learned 
in a Modern Orthodox yeshiva setting, or not. In my searches on Google Scholar and other 
databases using the Teachers College Library (e.g., JSTOR, ProQuest, Education), I was unable 
to find any research on the role of high school department chair within the context of Modern
Orthodox yeshivas, and I hoped to shed light on this unexplored area. I also hoped to learn more about the potential for leadership in this position, and so I used Learning Forward’s Leadership Standard, and in particular their ten different kinds of leadership roles for teacher leaders (Killion & Harrison, 2017) as a lens to interpret my data as I explored this area. Furthermore, I sought to understand how, if at all, and to what degree, the department chairs in my study employed any one of Drago-Severson’s Pillar Practices (2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016, 2018, 2020) to support professional growth. I also administered a survey to all the department chairs in the three Modern Orthodox yeshivas in my study to learn even more about how these department chairs perceive their roles and responsibilities, challenges, collaboration, leadership practice, and employment of the pillar practices with teachers in their department.

The High School Department Chair

Characteristics of the High School Department Chair

In my searches on Google Scholar and other databases using the Teachers College Library (e.g., JSTOR, ProQuest, Education), I was unable to find current research on the characteristics of high school department chairs. I searched using key words such as ‘high school department chair,’ ‘secondary school department chair,’ and ‘characteristics.’ I also used other terms for the role, such as ‘department head’ and ‘academic department.’ Articles published close to ten years ago describe that department chairs were often unsure about why they were chosen for the role (DeAngelis, 2013; Brent et al., 2014). Most high schools did not have a formal process for selection (Brent et al., 2014). Principals usually determined who was placed as department chairs, and some schools chose the chair based on seniority or some sort of rotation (DeAngelis, 2013). I wondered if any of this has changed over the past ten years, and whether this is similar in the Modern Orthodox yeshiva setting. On the university level,
department chairs often move into the role without having experienced any formal training, development, support, or opportunities to prepare for key aspects of the job (Brinkley-Etzkorn & Lane, 2019). I wondered if, and to what extent, the same was true on the high school level, and under the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I recognize that much of this research is almost ten years old, and that the characteristics may have changed since then. However, while outdated, this research coincided with my own experiences as a teacher and department chair over the past ten years. I furthered this research in my study to determine how if at all, and to what extent, these characteristics of department chairs from 2013 and 2014 are similar or different to those today in a Modern Orthodox school, where to my knowledge there has never been research on the role of high school department chair. I was interested in learning how the department chairs in my study described and understood their roles and responsibilities, and how if at all, and to what extent the views of the experiences of the participants in my study aligned with the characteristics of the previous department chair literature from 2013 and 2014.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

Similar to the difficulties I had in finding current research on the characteristics of department chairs, the same is true for the roles and responsibilities. I used Google Scholar and databases from the Teachers College Library to search key words, ‘department chair’ and ‘responsibilities’, or ‘department head’ and ‘roles.’ Most research I found on this topic was from close to a decade ago and beyond. However, in 2019, Peacock and Melville presented a historical perspective of the role and responsibilities of department chairs. This research describes that those in the role of department chair have historically taken on administrative responsibilities, with different subjects such as English, Math, Science, and Social Studies sharing similar
responsibilities (Peacock, 2014; Peacock & Melville, 2019). Yet, despite the similar responsibilities, department chairs often enact these administrative responsibilities in different ways (Peacock, 2014). This is because the role of department chair is largely undefined (Peacock & Melville, 2019); the responsibilities of department chairs can vary among districts and even across departments within a school, and across all school types (Brent et al., 2014; Melville et al., 2016). There are no formal standards for department chairs in the United States (Brent et al., 2014), with few states even specifying preparation requirements for the position (Brent et al., 2014). I wondered if this is still true, and if the department chairs in my study would describe and understand their roles and responsibilities in a way that was similar or different, especially given the context of COVID-19 and the setting of a Modern Orthodox yeshiva, where to my knowledge there is no research on the role and responsibilities of department chairs.

While department chairs who serve in both the high school and university levels are responsible for classroom teaching, the research over the past twenty years has consistently described that they act as both teacher and administrator as they allocate personnel, purchase materials, select textbooks, budget, work the schedule, supervise instruction, conduct teacher evaluations, and write reports (Bowman, 2002; Shoenthal, 2020; Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007). Other specific departmental activities within high schools might have been listed as securing substitute teachers, hiring and firing teachers, and conducting instruction-related functions such as curriculum development and/or serving on curriculum committees (Bowman, 2002; Feeney, 2009; Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007). I realized that this may be different now, especially given the context of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Therefore, the purpose of my study was to understand how nine department chairs in New York City Modern Orthodox yeshivas described and understood their own roles and responsibilities as department chairs within this context.
**Challenges Within the Role**

Some research indicates that as facilitators between the administration and their department, department chairs on both the high school and university levels feel pressure from the teachers within their department and pressure from the administrators above, along with a pressure to get things done (Feeney, 2009; Freeman, Karkouti, & Ward, 2020; Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2015). Due to the nature of the position, their reform ideas (e.g., curriculum changes and/or new programs) must receive support from multiple stakeholders, including the administrative staff and their teachers (Freeman et al., 2020; Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2015). Usually, just as I had done, high school department chairs enact this role by modeling after a former department chair or through tradition, and I wondered if this was still true (Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007). However, this was inadequate as many department chairs listed the need for leadership skills as a major challenge (Melville et al., 2016). According to this research from 2016, there is usually no clear and easy path to follow; department chairs list this ambiguity of the role as a major challenge (Feeney 2009; Melville et al., 2016; Peacock, 2014; Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007).

The ambiguity can be a great source of tension; the multifaceted nature of the role creates inconsistencies that existed from the very inception of the role (Peacock, 2014). Similarly, teachers, principals, and chairs often hold different expectations for the role (Peacock, 2014). This was listed as a challenge pre-pandemic, and I wondered to what extent and how this was different now. Teachers tend to view the role of department chair as more managerial, while administrators see it as more supervisory, revealing the ambiguity attributed to the position (Brent et al., 2014). While chairs generally follow their own expectations, at times they are modified to better align with what the principal might expect (Peacock, 2014). Research from
2007 describes that this lack of clarity can lead to role strain with contradictory expectations and conflicting functions (Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007). Additionally, this ambiguity and lack of direction compels department chairs to create their own roles as they navigate equivocal job descriptions (Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007). I wondered how, if at all, and to what extent, this may be different now given the complexities and new challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to role ambiguity, department chairs have consistently reported in research throughout the past twenty years that they are severely limited by time (Freeman et al., 2020; Melville et al., 2016; Peacock 2014). There is a constant pressure to get things done and department chairs report feeling asked to do too much in too little time and with too little resources (Feeney 2009; Peacock, 2014). While I recognize that much of this research is from over a decade ago, my own experiences as department chair align with these challenges. I therefore wondered to what degree and how this has changed or would be further supported through my research. I hoped to add to this body of research in my study as I learned more about the current challenges department chairs face.

**Support for the Role**

Similar to the prior sections, the research in this area is limited and it was difficult to find current sources. I searched Google Scholar and Teachers College Library databases using the key words ‘department chair’ or ‘department head’ and ‘supports.’ I hoped to further this research in my study as I learn more about the current supports for department chairs. In this section, some research is over a decade old, with one source close to two decades old. I recognize the limitations in this outdated research. However, I do believe there is value to the prior research, despite how long ago it was written, to determine whether or not things have changed today—
and if so, how? If they have changed, it is important to report that as I add to the research, and if they haven’t, it is important to wonder why and guide future research.

The research that I found describes certain things administrators can do to help department chairs navigate the aforementioned challenges (Feeney, 2009; Peacock, 2014; Remijan, 2014). When administrators build and support leadership capacity for department chairs, create a sense of collegiality, and provide professional development opportunities, they provide support for the role of department chair (Feeney, 2009; Peacock, 2014; Remijan, 2014).

An administration’s assumptions and beliefs about leadership provide the foundation for teachers who are involved in the development of the role of department chair (Feeney, 2009; Peacock, 2014; Remijan, 2014).

Additionally, because department chairs have the greatest potential to motivate teachers as their direct manager, when administrators clearly define tasks that are expected and create an alignment between the departmental and school priorities, the role of department chair becomes most effective (Peacock, 2014). This is also true on the university level; providing academic chairs with an overview of roles and responsibilities was listed by academic chairs as helpful support (Brinkley-Etzkorn & Lane, 2019). Department chairs should be invited to participate in school decision making, as they have the greatest influence when leadership is distributed and they are provided specific leadership opportunities (Peacock, 2014). Defining the priorities of department chairs can improve chairs’ effectiveness as formal authority is delegated while maintaining a sense of freedom and independence (Peacock, 2014). It is important for administrators to provide consistent feedback as department chairs frame effective solutions to departmental and organization problems, thus building a department chair’s leadership capacity through support, appreciation, and good communication (Bowman, 2002; Feeney, 2009;
Remijan, 2014). The success of department chairs often comes from a shift away from a managerial orientation into one of leadership (Feeney, 2009; Peacock, 2014; Remijan, 2014). It is therefore important to identify how if at all, and to what extent, the nine department chairs in my study might describe and understand their own roles as teacher leaders. Learning Forward (Killion & Harrison, 2017) lists ten roles that frame the knowledge and skills that make up the content of professional learning to best serve as coaches or teacher leaders. I used these ten roles as a framework to interpret how if at all, and to what extent, the department chairs in my study described and understood their roles as teacher leaders. In the next section, I briefly describe Learning Forward’s Standard for Leadership.

**Learning Forward Standard for Leadership**

Learning Forward’s most current book of standards and their website describe Learning Forward as a professional learning association whose general purpose is to enumerate the conditions, processes, and content of professional learning to support continuous improvement in leadership, teaching, and student learning (Learning Forward, 2011; Learning Forward, 2022). The association aims to show educators how to “plan, implement and measure high quality professional learning” so educators can achieve success within their school (Learning Forward, 2022). Learning Forward is devoted to those who work in educator professional development to help build the “capacity of leaders to establish and sustain highly effective professional learning” (Learning Forward, 2022). Learning Forward advocates for professional learning because they believe educators have an obligation to improve their practice (Learning Forward, 2022). Moreover, Learning Forward believes that “more students achieve when educators assume collective responsibility for student learning, and successful leaders create and sustain a culture of learning” (Learning Forward, 2022). More recently, Learning Forward added an equity
position statement to create a “vision for equity in schools” which they define “as the outcome of educator practices that respect and nurture all aspects of student identity” (Learning Forward, 2022).

Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning outline the characteristics of professional learning that lead to environments in which educators and students have equitable access to powerful learning (Learning Forward, 2022). Learning Forward recently revised their standards to include eleven standards that outline a system for professional learning (2022). Of these eleven standards Learning Forward includes four Standards for Conditions for Success: Resources, Leadership, Culture of Collaborative Inquiry, and Equity Foundation. Learning Forward describes as the “Conditions for Success” where, through leadership, educators “establish a compelling and inclusive vision for professional learning, sustain coherent support to build educator capacity, and advocate for professional learning by sharing the importance and evidence of impact and professional learning” (2022). In my study, I focused on Learning Forward’s Standard for Leadership. I used this information as a lens to determine what, if any, leadership roles I identified in the role of department chairs. It is my hope that this information helps administrators learn how the role of department chair might be viewed as a leadership role within a high school.

In this section, I provide an overview of the Learning Forward Standard for Leadership. I used the leadership standard to determine to what degree and how the role of department chair, a quasi-administrative role, may be viewed as a leadership role within a school. The leadership standard and the ten roles for teacher leaders (Killion & Harrison, 2017) informed some of the questions I asked the nine department chairs during the two interviews, as well as some of the questions on the survey I administered to all department chairs in the three schools within my
study. Learning Forward provides key leadership roles and descriptions. This helped me understand how the nine participants’ descriptions and understanding of their roles and responsibilities connect to the Learning Forward Leadership Standard, and in particular, their 10 roles for teacher leadership. In Chapter II, I describe Learning Forward’s Leadership Standard in more detail, the ten roles, and why I selected it for my study. I also provide more information about what a standard is, and when and how they came into existence.

**Learning Forward’s Leadership Standard**

Learning Forward defines their Leadership Standard as “professional learning” that can come from educators serving in a range of positions with varying levels of seniority and authority” (Learning Forward, 2022). On its website, Learning Forward presents the new main constructs of the Leadership standard to include educators that establish a compelling and inclusive vision for professional learning, educators who sustain coherent support to build educator capacity, and educators who advocate for professional learning with impact (Learning Forward, 2022). Leaders should hold learning as a top priority for themselves, their staff, and students, and recognize that to achieve universal high expectations for all students, there must be improvements in curriculum, instruction, leadership practices, and support systems (Learning Forward, 2011, 2022). In addition, there should be a deep understanding of cultural responsiveness to the community they serve (Learning Forward, 2011, 2022). Leaders use data to monitor and measure professional learning effects on educator and student performance, develop expertise in others, and cultivate a culture based on the norms of high expectations, shared responsibility, mutual respect, and relational trust (Learning Forward, 2011, 2022). They work collaboratively with others to create a vision for academic success by setting clear goals for student achievement based on learning data (Learning Forward, 2011, 2022). Leaders’ own
actions should model attitudes and behavior they expect of all educators, and they should make their own career-long learning visible to others (Learning Forward, 2011, 2022).

It is important to note that in the new Learning Forward materials on the Leadership Standard, the role of department chair could be included as someone in the school who is a “teacher” and/or “instructional coach, and content expert” (Learning Forward, 2022). When reading about the various standards of leadership, it is clear that there are many links between Learning Forward’s definition of leadership and the roles and responsibilities of a high school department chair based on the literature. In addition, there are some studies that specifically describe the role of the high school department chair as a potential leadership opportunity (Brent et al., 2014; Melville et al., 2016). I used this information in my study to determine how, if at all, and to what degree, the leadership standards linked to the ways in which the nine Modern Orthodox high school department chairs in my study described and understood their roles.

In Learning Forward’s *Taking the Lead: New Roles for Teachers and School-Based Coaches* (2017), authors Joellen Killion and Cindy Harrison describe in depth the various leadership roles within a school for school-based coaches and teacher leaders. In this study, I analyzed how, if at all, and to what extent, the department chairs in my research described themselves as coaches, and/or as teacher leaders. I also analyzed whether, and to what extent, the nine department chairs described and understood their roles using similar language to Learning Forward’s Leadership Standard during their interviews. I used the Leadership standard (Learning Forward, 2022) and the ten roles for teacher leaders (Killion & Harrison, 2017) to inform some of the questions on the survey administered to all department chairs in the three schools within my study, as I hoped to learn how they might perceive their roles as teacher leaders. Killion &
Harrison (2017) list ten roles that frame the knowledge and skills that make up the content of professional learning to best serve as coaches or teacher leaders. The roles are:

1. Resource provider
2. Data coach
3. Instructional specialist
4. Curriculum specialist
5. Classroom supporter
6. Learning facilitator
7. Mentor
8. School leader
9. Catalyst for change
10. Learner

In my next chapter, I go into greater depth within the roles and responsibilities of each role. Using Learning Forward’s standards for leadership were a helpful lens to determine leadership within the role of the nine department chairs in my study. I used these standards and roles to identify whether, and to what extent, through interviews and an observation the nine department chairs in my study saw themselves as teacher leaders and/or coaches. I also used these standards and roles to inform my survey questions as I learned how all the department chairs in the three schools might perceive their roles to include teacher leadership. It was interesting to see how, and to what extent, these department chairs viewed themselves as teacher leaders, despite the role of department chair not being mentioned specifically, but implied, in the Learning Forward Leadership Standards.
Pillar Practices to Support Growth

In addition to seeking to understand how the department chairs in my study described and understood their roles and responsibilities, and how they saw themselves as coaches and/or teacher leaders, I also analyzed how if at all, and to what degree, these nine department chairs supported adult growth in their practice as department chairs through Drago-Severson’s pillar practices (2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016, 2018, 2020). In this section, I provide an overview of the pillar practices (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016, 2018, 2020). I provide a more in-depth description of this theory in Chapter II. I used this theory to determine in what way and to what degree the nine department chairs supported adult learning within their roles through teaming, providing leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and/or mentoring. I also used this theory to inform my survey questions as I learned how all the department chairs in the three schools described the ways they employ the pillar practices with the teachers within their departments.

The pillar practices are a learning-oriented model to support adult growth that initially emerged from Drago-Severson’s (2004) research exploring how 25 principals from diverse U.S. schools shaped positive school climates and employed practices to support teacher growth. The pillar practices (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016, 2018, 2020) have since been further researched with superintendents, principals, assistant principals, teacher leaders, and teachers (Benis Scheier-Dolberg, 2014; Codd, 2015; Joswick-O’Connor, 2020; Kanarek, 2020; Sprott, 2019). Each practice of the four pillar practices- teaming, providing leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring- support adults by centering on adult collaboration and by creating opportunities for adults to engage in reflective practice as a tool for professional and personal growth (Drago-Severson, 2008). Drago-Severson defines growth as “increases in our
cognitive, affective (emotional), interpersonal and intrapersonal capacities that enable us to manage better the complex demands of teaching, learning, leadership, and life” (Drago-Severson, 2004). These pillar practices emerged based on research within the field of principal leadership, and since have been studied with superintendents, principals, assistant principals, teacher leaders, and teachers (Benis Scheier-Dolberg, 2014; Codd, 2015; Joswick-O’Connor, 2020; Kanarek, 2020; Sprott, 2019). I hoped to further this research by examining the pillar practices within the context of department chairs. It is important to understand how the department chairs in my study support growth within their departments given the rising complex demands of teaching and leading, especially given the context of the increasing complexities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Drago-Severson, 2008; Drago-Severson, et al., 2020).

In Chapter II, I provide greater depth about the four pillar practices. I also describe in greater detail how they connect specifically to the literature on department chairs. I used this lens to better understand how, if at all, and to what degree, the nine department chairs in my study employed any one of the four pillar practices as department chairs.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

In this section, I provide an overview of the main bodies of literature that informed my study. My study focused on a group of 9 high school department chairs in various Modern Orthodox yeshivas across New York City. I sought to understand how these department chairs described and understood the role of department chair, how, if at all, their descriptions of their role connected to Learning Forward’s 10 roles of teacher leaders, what challenges, if any, they faced in their roles, how, if at all, they managed these challenges, and how, if at all, and to what degree, any of these department chairs employed any one of the four pillar practices in their practice as department chairs. I also surveyed all the department chairs in the setting to learn
more about their perceptions on the roles and responsibilities, challenges, collaboration, leadership practice, and employment of the pillar practices (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016, 2018, 2020) with teachers in their department. To carry out this study, I drew upon literature within the realm of Modern Orthodoxy, Learning Forward’s Leadership Standards for Professional Learning, and Drago-Severson’s pillar practices to interpret the way the nine department chairs describe and understand their experiences as I explored my four research questions. In Figure 1, the Conceptual Framework below, I illustrated how I began to think about the major elements of my study and what initially guided me during this study. I developed a new model after conducting the research, which I present in Chapter VIII.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework*
In Figure 1, I provide a visual representation of the theoretical concepts guide this study. The high school department chair is set within the context of the Modern Orthodox yeshiva. That is set within the larger context of the current COVID-19 pandemic. Below the high school department chair, there are four circles that represent what I sought to understand by conducting this study: roles and responsibilities, how, if at all, department chairs describe and understand leadership in their role, what they describe as challenges and how, if at all, department chairs manage those challenges, and how department chairs might support growth. The position of high school department chair within the Modern Orthodox yeshiva context will also be considered with the lens of Learning Forward’s Leadership Standards and Drago-Severson’s pillar practices (2004, 2009, 2012, 2016), which are represented by the green circles. The arrows connecting the leadership standards and pillar practices with the four areas of focus within the role of department chair are meant to represent how, if at all, these standards and the pillar practices are aligned with the department chairs’ practices, and how the department chair work in a Modern Orthodox yeshiva might inform the Learning Forward standards and pillar practices. In the next section, I provide an overview of methodology. I anticipated that my conceptual framework would change once I had my data and learned more about how the department chairs in my study describe and understand their perceptions of their roles. In Chapter VIII, I present a new model that is grounded in the research of this study to represent what I learned from the nine department chairs in this study.

1.7 Methodological Overview

In this section, I provide an overview of the methodology I employed for my research. Please see Chapter III for further description of my study’s methodology and full rationale for each design decision. My primary focus was to learn from nine NYC high school department
chairs from three different Modern Orthodox yeshivas. I also surveyed all the department chairs in the setting to learn more about their perceptions on the roles and responsibilities, challenges, collaboration, leadership practice, and possible employment of the pillar practices (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016, 2018, 2020) with teachers in their department. Given that I wanted to understand how the department chairs describe and understand their own roles and responsibilities as a department chair, what, if any, challenges they might face and how they manage those challenges, how, if at all, they might see themselves as coaches and/or teacher leaders, and how if at all, and to what degree, these nine department chairs support adult growth in their practice as department chairs, I begin with my rationale for selecting a qualitative approach. I then discuss the criteria that guide the selection of sites and participants, as well as my approach to data collection and analysis. I conclude this summary by previewing the ways I attended to validity threats, including researcher bias, reactivity, and descriptive, interpretive, and theoretical validity. In Figure 2, I present a framework to represent an overview of my data collection and rationale.
Rationale for Qualitative Design

I used a qualitative design because I was interested in learning more about how nine NYC high school department chairs from three different Modern Orthodox yeshivas describe and understand their own roles and responsibilities as a department chair, what, if any, challenges they might face and how they manage those challenges, how, if at all, they might see themselves
as coaches and/or teacher leaders, and how if at all, and to what degree, these nine department chairs support adult growth in their practice as department chairs. I also surveyed all the department chairs in the setting to learn more about their perceptions on the roles and responsibilities, challenges, collaboration, leadership practice, and possible employment of the pillar practices (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016, 2018, 2020) with teachers in their department. Therefore, I interviewed the nine participants, observed one department meeting for each participant, collected materials such as agendas or other documents shared by the department chairs with the teachers within their departments, and surveyed all department chairs within the three Modern Orthodox yeshivas in my study.

While I recognize that observing only one meeting for each department chair is not representative of all the department chairs’ meetings, which could differ throughout the year depending on what the most pressing issues of each cycle might be, I used this material and the notes from my observations to provide a little more information on the roles and responsibilities of these department chairs and to inform my second interview questions. While I cannot make assessments on the observations alone, I was able to use my notes from the meetings to ask department chairs in their second interviews in what ways the meetings were typical of their usual department meetings and in what ways they were not. It was also important for me to consider the contextual data of the meeting, for example, the time of year and the challenges of the pandemics. The language the department chairs used during meetings and on the documents, shed light on how, if at all, these department chairs might have been demonstrating coaching and/or leadership roles. This information helped me answer my first two research questions: how do nine department chairs describe and understand their role and responsibilities, and how, if at all, do their descriptions of their role of department chair connect to Learning Forward’s ten
For example, if I observed a participant’s physical or verbal behavior during a department meeting, I asked about the department chair’s rationale for that behavior in the second interview. I also acknowledge that there are many ways department chairs can interact with faculty, and I asked about that in the second interview.

**Rationale for Exploratory Case Study**

I selected an exploratory case study method for this qualitative research approach because case study research “involves the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting” (Creswell, 2014). I developed an in-depth description and analysis of multiple cases of department chairs, with an in-depth understanding of these cases (Creswell, 2014). This included the interviews with nine department chairs from different departments from three different Modern Orthodox schools, in addition to a collection of documents and observations. I also administered a survey to all department chairs in the three schools, which I briefly explain in the next section. Afterwards, I describe the selection criteria I used for the participants and sites, my data collection methods, my methods for analyzing data, and the precautions I took to address particular validity threats.

**Survey**

I administered a survey to all the department chairs in the three schools to get their perspectives on their roles and responsibilities, challenges, collaboration, leadership practice, and possible employment of the pillar practices (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016, 2018, 2020) with teachers in their department. I administered the survey after the second interview to further inform what I learned from the nine department chairs. As there is no existing validated survey for department chairs, of which I am aware, I also piloted this survey as a potential tool to learn more about department chairs’ perspectives on their role and
responsibilities. However, the survey alone did not provide sufficient context for understanding the experiences of the participants in my study, since I hoped to learn how the department chairs describe and understand their own experiences. Chapter III provides a full description of my study and intentionality behind the design decisions.

Selection of Site

In this section, I provide an overview of my criteria for site selection. The selection was practically driven as I sought to study department chairs within Modern Orthodox yeshivas. My first selection criterion was to select high schools that met the description of a Modern Orthodox Jewish day school yeshiva based on the definition provided by the Avi Chai Foundation (2020). The Avi Chai Foundation (2020) reported that between a 20-year census period, Modern Orthodox day school enrollment has increased 21.5% in the New York City region. Therefore, a second selection criterion was that the schools chosen for my study will also be located within the five boroughs of New York City. In the 2018-2019 census, the Avi Chai Foundation (2020) reported 290 Jewish day schools in New York City: 4 in the Bronx, 226 in Brooklyn, 18 in Manhattan, 35 in Queens, and 7 in Staten Island. Of these 290 schools, the foundation identified 15 as Modern Orthodox, with 9,685 students enrolled (Avi Chai, 2020). Of these 15 Modern Orthodox Schools in New York City, 7 are located in Brooklyn. In Chapter III, I provide more information on the process for inviting schools.

Selection of Participants

In terms of selection criteria for participants, the first selection criterion was to secure permission from the Heads of School in each school to gain access. I then asked the Heads of School to identify educators who are department chairs and have held that position for at least two years. This is because I wanted the participants to have at least two years’ worth of
experiences in the role to discuss during interviews, so they can be familiar with their job expectations, challenges they may have faced, and supports they might have encountered. Another requirement was a minimum of three years teaching experience, because the literature illustrates that majority of department chairs have been teachers first for a few years (Brent et al., 2014).

The fourth selection criterion was for the department chairs to manage a team of at least two other teachers within their departments. This is because I wanted the department chairs to be in a leadership role with the responsibility to manage more than one educator within their departments. I also included three department chairs from each of three different disciplines, math, English, and science, to determine whether or not patterns exist among these specific disciplines in my study, or if my findings might be attributed to the role of department chair as a whole, regardless of discipline. Therefore, discipline was also part of the criteria selection. I administered the survey to all department chairs in the three schools, without any selection criteria other than the Head of School identifying that individual as a department chair. This is because I was looking for a larger sample (n=24) to learn more about department chairs’ perceptions and to pilot this survey as a potential tool for future researchers. In Chapter III, I provide more detail on the rationale for my participant selection process as well as the process of inviting the department chairs to participate in my study.

**Data Collection**

I conducted in-depth qualitative interviews as the primary data source for this study (2 ninety-minute interviews with each of the nine participants). In addition, one 45-60-minute-long observation of a department meeting between interviews (9 combined hours), survey and document analysis provided additional data. I answered my five research questions through
semi-structured interviews and the survey to explore a deep understanding of the department chairs’ experiences in the role. I also observed one department meeting in between the first and second interviews and collected documents that were distributed during these meetings from department chairs to teachers, or from principals to department chairs. I gave the department chairs the authority to choose the meeting I observe and asked them why they chose that meeting. The only criterion for the meeting was that the participants include the department chair and the teachers within his/her department. I used my notes from the observation and the documents I collected to provide more information on the roles and responsibilities of department chairs. I considered the language the department chairs used, and how, if at all, department chairs might have demonstrated coaching and/or leadership roles, without using the meeting to make any judgments or assessments on how the department chairs run their meetings. The purpose of the observation was to get a sense of how the department chairs interact on one occasion, to learn if it is a typical meeting, and to ask about the observation in the second interview. For these reasons, there was no research question around the observation because it was only a small piece of how department chairs interact with their departments. A second purpose for the observation was to help me gain information about different aspects of the phenomena I am studying; I used the observation to describe some small insight into the settings, behavior, and events, while the interviews were used to understand the perspectives and goals of the department chairs (Maxwell, 2013).

After the interviews and the observation in between, I administered a survey to all the department chairs in the three schools to learn more about the department chairs who participated in the interviews and all the department chairs in the three schools. I used the survey to learn how they interpret their roles and responsibilities, challenges, if any, and supports, if at all. I also
included questions on the pillar practices (Drago-Severson 2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016, 2018, 2020) to learn how, if at all, the department chairs might support adult learning with teachers in their departments. There is currently no existing survey for department chairs as far as I know, and so another purpose was to pilot the survey as a tool that might help other researchers learn more about department chairs in other contexts. The survey was also meant to triangulate my data, which involves using different methods as a check on one another, seeing if methods with different strengths and limitations all support a single conclusion to reduce the risk that my conclusions will reflect only the biases of a specific method, to allow me to gain a more secure understanding of the issues I investigated (Maxwell, 2013). Please see Appendix A for the timeline of my data collection.

**Interviews**

My first step in the data collection process was to administer one 90-minute semi-structured interview to the nine department chairs chosen for the study. The first set of interview questions (Appendix B) were meant to address the first two research questions as I learned more about how each department chair describes his/her role and responsibilities as department chair, and how, if at all, they describe and understand their leadership in the role. As I mentioned earlier, after the first interview I conducted an observation of a department meeting. I conducted the observations on the availability of the department chairs and when they scheduled the meeting with their departments. Soon after, no longer than one month after the observation, I conducted a second interview. I kept the second interview within one month of the observation because in the second interview I asked the department chairs to recall moments from their department meeting. Therefore, the meeting and the second interview were close together so the department chairs could recall the events of the meeting easily. In the second set of interview
questions (Appendix C), I addressed the second set of research questions: what, if any, challenges they faced, and how, if at all, they manage those challenges. I also asked about the observations during the second interview to learn more about why the department chairs said what they did, whether they felt the meeting was typical or not, and why. I conducted all the interviews either in-person or through Zoom, depending on the situation at the time regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. I sent the transcripts within a few weeks after each of the interviews.

**Observations**

As I mentioned earlier, I conducted an observation in between the two interviews. Therefore, my second step in the data collection process was to observe one department meeting for each of the nine department chairs in my study in between the first and second interviews. I observed eight of the department chairs, because one chair shared that she did not believe the teachers in her department would feel comfortable with an observation. The department chairs chose which meeting I observed. The only criterion I had was for the meeting to include the department chairs and the teachers within his/her department. I observed one meeting for eight of the participants, for whatever length of time the meeting was typical for that department, usually between 45-60 minutes. I used an observation guide (Appendix D) to record what I saw and heard during the department meetings. I asked about why the department chairs chose that meeting, what I saw and the rationale for the department chairs’ actions, and whether or not the meeting was typical, during the second interview.

**Survey**

For the third step in the data collection process, I administered a survey (Appendix E) to all the department chairs in each of the schools. The topics included demographics on each of the department chairs, their roles and responsibilities, collaboration within the role, potential
challenges within the role, and potential supports within the role. I also included questions on the pillar practices (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016, 2018, 2020) to learn how, if at all, the department chairs might support adult learning within their departments. The primary purpose of this survey was to better understand how the other department chairs experience the role in the same context. I used the survey to triangulate the data (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013) as I learned more about the role of department chair. I also used the survey as a pilot for a department chair survey that can be used by other researchers in other contexts.

**Data Analysis**

In this section, I describe the methods I employed for data analysis to manage, organize, and make sense of all the separate pieces of accumulated information (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). In Chapter III, I describe the details involved in the key steps of my data analysis, which I approached as a systematic, iterative process (Creswell, 2007). I used the following approaches in this order:

1. I wrote write analytic notes and memos after interviews and observations to capture my initial reactions, connections, and reflections (Maxwell, 2013).
2. I transcribed the interviews verbatim, and I added any aspects of non-verbal communication, such as pauses, laughter, or interruptions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). I read each transcript against the audio recording to check the accuracy of the transcript to attend to descriptive validity (Maxwell, 2013);
3. I used descriptive codes to highlight the participants’ voices and potentially bring forth ideas or explanations that are contrary to my assumptions or the current literature (Maxwell, 2013);
4. I used theoretical codes (Maxwell, 2013) from the literature;
5. I categorized data by codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and then larger themes as well as connecting data (Maxwell & Miller, 1998);

6. I summarized the qualitative material I collected, such as observation notes and documents distributed during meetings, to illustrate patterns (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008);

7. I analyzed the survey results to identify simple descriptive statistics, such as measures of central tendency, measures of variability, and raw scores converted to percentages and represented graphically to depict patterns in the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008);

8. I wrote narrative profiles of the department chairs (Seidman, 2006) and descriptions of the three sites; and

9. I used data displays, tables, and concept maps to draw out themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

1.8 Validity

In this section, I preview how I attended to my biases and other potential validity threats that may have occurred in this study. I first describe my researcher bias and reactivity related to study design. Then, I describe how I addressed descriptive, interpretive, and theoretical validity related to interpreting data. A more complete description is provided in Chapter III where each of these is explained in greater detail.

**Researcher Bias**

Creswell (2014) describes the importance of self-reflection and its contribution to the validity of the work: “the researcher, as a sociohistorical interpreter, interacts with the subject matter to co-create the interpretations derived” (248). Maxwell (2013) describes researcher bias
as the selection of data that fit the researcher’s existing theory, goals, or preconceptions, and the selection of data that stand out to the researcher. It was impossible to eliminate my own theories and beliefs as a researcher; however, instead I sought to understand how my own experiences as teacher and department chair might have impacted my interpretations and understanding of the research (Maxwell, 2013). Having been a department chair myself and being a member of the Modern Orthodox school community could have potentially biased my study. Therefore, I took great precautions to ensure that I was constantly aware of my own biases, assumptions, and judgements. These precautions included writing analytic memos, seeking discrepant data, and cross checking my findings with fellow doctoral students in a research class at Teachers College (Maxwell, 2013).

**Reactivity**

Reactivity is the influence of the researcher on the participants of the study (Maxwell, 2013). It was critical for me to understand the influence my identity and position might have on the study (Maxwell, 2013). I am a member of the Modern Orthodox Jewish community, and I recognize that this might have influenced the level of comfort that participants had when sharing their experiences during the interview process. I selected participants outside of any schools that I have worked in or have a relationship with to limit my reactivity. I also avoided leading questions in my interviews (Maxwell, 2013). I did my best to understand and ask the participants how I am influencing what my participants say and how this might affect the validity of any inferences I drew from the interviews (Maxwell, 2013).

**Descriptive Validity**

It is important for a researcher to accurately record and transcribe what is being observed to accurately represent what happened (Maxwell, 2013). For this reason, I digitally recorded and
transcribed all interviews verbatim (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). I then checked the transcripts against the interview recordings to make sure the transcriptions were accurate (Maxwell, 2013). I also gave all participants the opportunity to review their transcripts to check for accuracy (Maxwell, 2013).

**Interpretive Validity**

I continued to reflect throughout the process to ensure that my experiences did not present issues related to researcher bias. I was constantly aware of my own biases, assumptions, and judgments. Therefore, I cross-checked my findings with fellow doctoral students in research courses at Teachers College and continued to revisit this issue with my sponsor at Teachers College (Maxwell, 2013).

**Theoretical Validity**

To address theoretical validity, I asked questions of the data toward the end of the analysis by using a claim analysis matrix to both look for confirming and disconfirming evidence of trends emerging from my analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In Chapter III, I go more in-depth about how tested the validity of my conclusions and the existence of potential threats.

**1.9 Overview of Findings**

In this section, I summarize the findings from Chapter V, the survey, and from the analytical chapters, Chapters VI-VII, to answer my research questions. In Chapter IX, I provide a more detailed discussion of my findings as I synthesize the findings from the survey and across my analytical chapters to make broader connections.

**Survey Findings**

I administered the survey to all department chairs in the three Modern Orthodox schools, of which 24 participants completed the full survey (Appendix E). The chairs self-identified their
characteristics, and what they identified to be the responsibilities, roles, challenges, supports of department chairs, and how the chairs might support their teachers through the pillar practices.

The main responsibility the 24 chairs who responded to the survey identified was meeting with teachers in their departments. Additionally, department chairs (n=24) reported believing that chairs should mentor teachers, provide feedback, and model strong teaching. These are all ways that department chairs in the survey reported they can support the instructional practice of teachers in their departments. The survey results also showed that these department chairs (n=24) believe responsibilities of chairs should include supporting teachers with parent and/or student issues and creating a sense of camaraderie within the department, two responsibilities I interpreted as a way chairs can create a holding environment for the teachers in their departments.

In addition, I found that the chairs who responded to the survey (n=24) did report supporting and stretching their teachers which is known as creating a holding environment for the teachers in their departments through the pillar practices teaming and collegial inquiry to further support the teachers’ practices within their departments. The most common way the 24 department chairs who responded to the survey reported supporting their teachers with the pillar practices is having teachers in their departments share ideas, sharing decision making with their teachers, reflecting with teachers on their practice, and engaging in meaningful conversations with their teachers about teaching and learning. These actions connect with the department chairs’ beliefs that the primary role of chair is central to improving the instruction (teaching and learning) in their departments.
Findings on the Department Chairs’ Role and Responsibilities

In this section, I provide an overview of the findings from the two interviews and one observation of a department meeting with each of the nine department chairs on their role and responsibilities that I discuss in detail in Chapter VI to answer my first research question. First, I found that all nine department chairs had difficulty differentiating between the terms “role” and “responsibilities” which I interpreted because of the ambiguity within the role. Second, I found that while all nine chairs described administrative responsibilities in their roles, these responsibilities varied by discipline and by years of experience. Third, I found that while all the department chairs described being responsible for setting the curriculum, the three English chairs (Alex, Ruby, Sam) seemed to unify the teachers in their departments through their curricular responsibilities by holding meetings and having discussions on curriculum together with their teachers.

Findings on the Department Chairs’ Challenges and Supports

Here, I provide an overview of the findings on the nine department chairs’ challenges and supports that I discuss in detail in Chapter VII to answer my third research question. First, I found that the nine department chairs all faced challenges when they first took on their roles as chair, and I highlighted four of the chairs (Sam, the English chair at Varod; Pat, the math chair at Varod; Andy, the science chair at Catom; and Ricky, the science chair at Zahov) who shared feeling ill-prepared and two of the chairs (as Alex, the English chair at Zahov, and Jackie, the math chair at Zahov) who shared facing conflicts with teachers in their departments. Second, I found that five of the nine department chairs (Alex, the English chair at Zahov; Jackie, the math chair at Zahov; Pat, the math chair at Varod; Ricky, the science chair at Zahov; and Sam, the English chair at Varod) shared challenges with teaching a full course load as chair with large
departments. Four of the nine chairs (Andy, the science chair at Catom; Charlie, the science chair at Varod; Jamie, the math chair at Catom; and Ruby, the English chair at Catom) shared their challenges with chairing during the month of November, “the crazy season,” as a challenge, also the time I conducted the second interviews. In terms of supports, I found that the chairs turned to various supports when facing challenges during their early years as chair, such as support from an individual on the school’s leadership team, other department chairs, the teachers in their departments, outside mentoring programs, or their partners.

**Connecting Chairs’ Leadership Practice to Learning Forward Roles**

While in Chapters VI, VII, and VIII I provide a more detailed description of my findings, in this section, I provide an overview on what I found to be the connections between what the nine department chairs shared about their roles to Learning Forward’s 10 roles for teacher leadership. I describe these connections throughout Chapters VI, VII, and VIII to answer my second research question. First, I found that all nine of the department chairs shared responsibilities related to those of what Learning Forward describes as Resource Provider, Curriculum Specialist, and/or Instructional Specialist, when they meet with their teachers during department meetings and discuss curriculum for each grade level. Second, I found all the department chairs shared responsibilities related to those of what Learning Forward describes as Learner, Learning Facilitator, Classroom Supporter, and/or Data Coach, when they carry out responsibilities such as observing their teachers and meeting with their teachers to facilitate professional development or discuss student data. Third, all nine of the department chairs shared responsibilities related to those of what Learning Forward describes as Mentor, Catalyst for Change, and/or School Leader as they enact leadership among the teachers in their departments and the school to improve student learning.
Findings on Chairs’ Supports with the Pillar Practices

While in Chapters VI, VII, and VIII I discuss this in more detail, here I provide an overview on what I found to be the ways in which the nine department chairs perceived about their roles and responsibilities, challenges, collaboration, and leadership practice to the pillar practices to answer my fourth research question. I identified three big findings. First, the department chairs who described feeling supported by the pillar practices when they took on the role (Alex, the English chair at Zahov; Andy, the science chair at Catom; Jamie, the math chair at Catom; Pat, the math chair at Varod; Ricky, the science chair at Zahov) used these supports in their own practice with teachers in their departments. Second, all nine chairs described viewing their departments as a team and described ways they engage in collegial inquiry with their team as a means of support for the teachers in their departments. Third, I highlighted the ways two of the department chairs (Alex, the English chair at Zahov; Charlie, the science chair at Varod) described providing leadership roles to teachers in their departments and/or mentor the teachers in their departments as ways to support their growth as educators.

1.10 Limitations

A limitation of this qualitative study is that it was specific to the research site of the three Modern Orthodox Jewish day schools, and it relied on a small sample size of department chairs. Therefore, the findings are only internally generalizable to participants in my research (Maxwell, 2013). Another limitation might be that the participants are in varying moments within their careers as department chairs, and therefore there might have varying interpretations of the role and responsibilities of department chairs depending on past experiences. In a future study, I might interview participants from other schools, including public schools, with a more diverse
population. That would give me greater selection so I could potentially seek out participants with similar years of experience.

1.11 Implications and Recommendations

Implications and Recommendations for School Leadership

In this section, I preview the implications and recommendations of my research for school leaders, which I explore in more detail in Chapter IX. First, I recommend school leaders intentionally provide support for department chairs when they first take on the role by employing the pillar practices. Second, I recommend school leaders continue to support department chairs with ongoing opportunities to develop their instructional leadership practices such as mentoring, observing, and providing feedback to teachers in their departments. Third, I recommend school leaders consider ways to support chairs’ dual roles of teacher and department chair by minimizing the number of classes a chair teaches and/or the number of teachers in a department. I discuss each of these in the sections that follow.

Implications and Recommendations for Education Leadership Preparation Programs

While in Chapter IX I explore the implications and recommendations in more detail, in this section, I preview the implications of my research to make recommendations for education leadership preparation programs. First, I recommend education leadership preparation programs include a department or program specifically for department chairs or aspiring department chairs to better prepare them for the role. Second, I recommend education leadership preparation programs require department chairs to learn adult development leadership theories within their program that attend to developmental diversity so department chairs can support the growth of the teachers they lead in their departments with developmental intentionality. I discuss each of these in the sections that follow.
Implications and Recommendations for Education Leadership Theory and Research

While I explore these in detail in Chapter IX, here I preview the implications of my research and make recommendations for education leadership theory and research. First, I recommend education leadership theorists and researchers consider paying more attention to the important role of department chair and include department chairs within the definition of school leadership. Second, I recommend education leadership theorists build upon the four pillar practices by expanding our understanding of these supports for leaders and teachers within schools. I discuss each of these in the sections that follow.

1.12 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented the research design for this qualitative study with a case study approach. I introduced the problem statement and my research questions that guided this study. I then provided an overview of the literature that served as the foundation for this study. Last, I previewed the findings, implications, and recommendations of my study. In the next two chapters, I provide a more detailed review of the literature and a detailed description of the methodology. Chapter II fully describes the literature and theories upon which this study is built.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I explain the literature that informed the conceptual framework for my dissertation study that explored the way nine high school department chairs in Modern Orthodox yeshivas in New York City described and understood their experiences with the role and their responsibilities. First, I describe the background of the role of high school department chair—how and why the position formed in the American high school, the responsibilities within the role, and the challenges and supports within the role. I then introduce Learning Forward’s Leadership Standards to explain the organization’s definition of leadership, as well as their 10 roles that best serve as leadership within a school to explain how the department chairs’ descriptions of their role connected to Learning Forward’s 10 roles for teacher leadership. Next, I describe Robert Kegan’s Constructive-Development Theory (CDT) because it is a foundation to Drago-Severson’s work on Ways of Knowing (WOK), which inform her pillar practices. I used the pillar practices to explain how these high school department chairs employed any of the pillar practices. Finally, I review the Jewish day school system— in particular, the Modern Orthodox yeshiva model in New York City and educational leadership within that model. I also discuss the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic brought to the educational system in NYC and beyond.

The purpose of my study was to explore with a group of nine NYC high school department chairs from three different Modern Orthodox yeshivas, their perceptions of their role and responsibilities and how, if at all, they described leading within the system, the challenges and supports they described experiencing in their leadership role, and how they described employing any of the pillar practices with the teachers within their departments. To complete this study, I focused on five research questions:
1. How do nine department chairs from NYC yeshiva high schools describe and understand their own role and responsibilities as a department chair?

2. How, if at all, do their descriptions and understandings of their role as a department chair connect to Learning Forward’s 10 roles for teacher leadership?

3. What challenges, if any, do department chairs face in their roles as department chairs and how do they manage them?

4. How, if at all, to what degree, and why, do these nine department chairs employ any one of the four pillar practices (teaming, providing leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring) in their practice with teachers in their department as department chairs?

5. How, if at all, do all department chairs from these yeshiva high schools perceive their roles and responsibilities, challenges, collaboration, leadership practice, and possible employment of the pillar practices with teachers in their departments?

Next, I describe the research and theory that informed my study including: (1) department chair research, both on the high school and higher education levels, and within and outside the United States; (2) Learning Forward’s Leadership Standard and their 10 roles for teacher leadership; (3) Drago-Severson’s (2004, 2008, 2009, 2012, 2016) learning-oriented model for leadership development (4) an overview of the Modern Orthodox yeshiva model; and (5) the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in my study. I then synthesize these bodies of literature and highlight how they can be interwoven to better understand the high school department chair within the Modern Orthodox yeshiva model.

2.1 Approach to the Literature

To conduct my literature review, I began with readings from my coursework, including books and journals that related to my study’s purpose and research questions. I then used search
engines from the Teachers College, Columbia University library and Google Scholar to conduct searches of the literature. I used key words (e.g., “high school department chair,” “academic chair,” “middle leadership,” “Israeli schools” and “yeshiva day school”) to conduct a comprehensive search of relevant publications to inform my study. I found very limited current research (within the last five years) on high school department chairs. Therefore, I included research on studies published prior to 2016 and I drew upon research on the role of department chairs within higher level education. I did not find any research on department chairs within the Modern Orthodox yeshiva system; therefore, I drew upon research within the American public high school system and outside the United States to learn more about the role. Specifically, I drew on research on department chairs in Israel because of the similarities between Israel’s state-religious schools and Modern Orthodox schools in America. I also include research on the Modern Orthodox school system and leadership and challenges within that model.

Conceptual Framework

I present Figure 1 again below because it depicts the synthesis and the relationship among and between the bodies of literature. In the figure, I place COVID-19 as the surrounding context in which all leading, learning, teaching, and living is situated because the challenges brought by the pandemics are so great. Within that context, I explored the setting of the Modern Orthodox yeshiva, and the role of the high school department chair within that setting. I sought to understand how these department chairs described the role of department chair, how, if at all, their descriptions of their role connect to Learning Forward’s 10 roles for teacher leaders, what challenges they described experiencing in their roles, how they described managing these challenges, and how, and to what degree, any of these department chairs described employing any one of the four pillar practices in their practice as department chairs. I also sought to learn
how all the department chairs in the yeshiva schools perceived their roles and responsibilities, 
challenges, collaboration, and employment of the pillar practices with teachers in their 
department. I anticipated that after gathering my data, I would rework the conceptual framework 
to more clearly reflect the research I found. I present a new Model of Department Chairs’ Work: 
Responsibilities, Practices, and Capacity Building that is grounded in this research on the nine 
department chairs in Chapter VIII. To carry out this study, I drew upon literature within the 
realm of Modern Orthodoxy, Learning Forward’s Leadership Standards for Professional 
Learning, and Drago-Severson’s pillar practices to interpret the ways the nine department chairs 
described and understood their experiences as I explored my five research questions.

Figure 1

Original Conceptual Framework
2.2 The High School Department Chair

Overview

In my study, I addressed a dearth of research on high school department chairs by looking at the way nine department chairs described and understood their roles and responsibilities, challenges, and supports, how they described their leadership in the role, and how they described supporting the learning for the teachers within their departments by employing one or more of the pillar practices. In the sections that follow, I describe the literature that informed the first and third research questions in my study: How do nine department chairs describe and understand their own role and responsibilities, and what challenges, if any, do they experience, and how do they manage those challenges? I first provide an in-depth description of the past and current literature on the definition and characteristics of the high school department chair. I then review the history of the department chair, and how the position came to be in the American high school. After that, I describe the department chairs’ most common roles and responsibilities, and how these responsibilities have evolved over the past century both within the United States and internationally. Next, I review the most prevalent challenges that department chairs experience. Last, I review the supports the literature describes that department chairs find helpful when managing the challenges in the role.

Introduction

with new challenges (Brent et al., 2014; Kelley & Salisbury, 2013). However, while many schools place formal distributed leadership positions in the American high school, they are often underutilized for instructional leadership purposes (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013). Wettersten (1992) defines instructional leadership as the coordination, supervision, and evaluation of curriculum and instruction within an academic discipline. The high school department chair is one such position; department chairs can help principals as content experts and instructional leaders within schools (Donitsa-Schmidt & Zuzovsky, 2020; Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021; Peacock & Melville, 2019). Additionally, as policy makers create new reforms and policies, effective department level leadership is critical to the improvement and implementation of these reforms (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013). In fact, there is a proven direct link to the department and larger reform efforts at the school and national level (Peacock & Melville, 2019).

Yet, despite their tremendous influence, researchers repeatedly refer to high school department chairs as the most underutilized leadership position over the past twenty years (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013; Klar, 2012; Peacock & Melville, 2019; Weiler, 2001). While the role is ubiquitous, and department chairs as instructional leaders have great promise, principals rarely position chairs to influence instruction and student learning (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013). There is so much potential that lies in department chairs’ instructional leadership capacity (Peacock & Melville, 2019). This is because department chairs have a formal and unique position within the department structure situated between school administrators and teachers (Bassett, 2016; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; DeAngelis, 2013; Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021). Department chairs can be seen as change agents; they are situated within the classroom and school policy contexts – an ideal position to make change within a high school (Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021; Kelley & Salisbury, 2013; Peacock & Melville, 2019). In this unique position, they can convert the
aspirations embedded within a school’s mission, vision, and values into the reality of every classroom practice to improve the school (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013; Peacock & Melville, 2019). They act as the middle person between teachers and administrators, actually enacting the schools’ mission (Bassett, 2016; Harris & Jones, 2017; Kelley & Salisbury, 2013; Peacock & Melville, 2019). When department chairs act as leaders, they can also foster a collaborative structure as they model in their own behavior (Wong and Dillon, 2020). This is especially important today, given the increasing demands and challenges that educational leaders face as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Drago-Severson et al., 2020).

Research over the last two decades demonstrate that there is much potential to expand the role of department chair to take on the role of instructional leader as an opportunity to influence curriculum and instruction within their own departments as well as to promote ideas for school-wide improvement (Feeney, 2009; Klar, 2013; Peacock & Melville, 2019; Wettersten, 1992). Not only does building a department chair’s leadership capacity influence the school, but department chairs express a stronger sense of investment in the improvement of teaching and learning in the school, and strong feelings of teacher empowerment when department chairs are considered leaders (Peacock & Melville, 2019). It is also a pivotal role in shaping professional learning opportunities within their department, as department chairs represent a critical resource for instructional leadership and teacher support (Peacock 2014; Peacock & Melville, 2019).

Close to a century of literature teaches us that the department chair’s primary role should be instructional leadership (Peacock & Melville, 2019). In 1960, King and Moon wrote that chairs could play an important role in instructional improvement. In 1971, Verchota, the first author to invoke role theory on department chairs, described that chairs exert greater influence over teachers than school administration; decades later, in 1992, Wettersten describes chairs as
being in a position to influence curriculum and instruction within their academic areas. In 2001, Weiler suggested that chairs are in an ideal position to facilitate instructional improvement because of their daily contact with teachers and their own instructional expertise.

Yet, despite the clear and consistent literature that chairs can be incredibly influential within the high school when acting as instructional leaders, there is very little attention placed on department chairs as instructional leaders or an empirical answer to the question of how chairs can effectively act as instructional leaders within their schools (Klar, 2012; Klar, 2013; Peacock, 2014; Turner, 2019). Although the role of department chair is cited as a potential leadership position within schools, there is little known about it; in fact, the role is not even explicitly defined (DeAngelis, 2013; Peacock & Melville, 2019). Department chairs represent an important resource for instructional leadership, but chair leadership is under-researched and under-used in schools (Peacock & Melville, 2019). Research shows that principals place important leadership responsibilities on department chairs as a result of the growing complexities in the school environment, and yet there is little scholarly attention placed on department chairs, demonstrating the need for more attention from scholars and policy makers (Brent et al., 2014). Therefore, it is especially important to consider the essential role of the department chair in today’s increasingly complex school environment, and to learn how the responsibilities the department chairs in this study described may have changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Definition and Characteristics of the High School Department Chair**

Department chairs emerged with the growth of the American high school (Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007). Kelley and Salisbury (2013) define the role of department chair, also called department head, department leader, or academic chair, as subject matter experts distributed
throughout a high school. Internationally, researchers often refer to the role as middle leader (Bassett, 2016; Donitsa-Schmidt & Zuzovsky, 2020; Gurr, 2013; Harris & Jones, 2017; Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021). I use the terms department chair, department head, department leader, middle leader, and academic chair interchangeably in my study to represent the position described above.

There is little agreement and research on who is usually hired to take on the role of department chair (Peacock & Melville, 2019). In the first empirical study of department chairs, Koch (1930) surveyed superintendents, principals, and department chairs, and revealed that qualifications varied widely— as well as selection procedures and compensation for the role. This ambiguity continued decades later; in the 1980s, researchers determined that most schools do not have a formal process for selecting a chair, but include seniority, termed rotations, and permanent appointments (Brent et al., 2014). In one of the few studies on characteristics of department chairs, DeAngelis (2013) found that principals usually determine who will serve as department chair either on their own or with teachers. This is also true internationally— in Israel, for example, principals usually assign the job to teachers (Donitsa-Schmidt & Zuzovsky, 2020; Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021). However, the evidence on why a teacher is chosen to serve as department chair is less clear, with some suggesting it is based on seniority or a type of rotation (DeAngelis, 2013). Using the NCES Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) from 2007-2008, when 75%-80% of secondary schools in the United States utilized department chairs, DeAngelis (2013) found consistent characteristics with prior research from the 1990s. In this study, majority of the department chairs were female, white, middle aged, had over eleven years of teaching experience, and slightly more than half had a master’s degree or higher (DeAngelis, 2013). The three most important characteristics of department chairs in the DeAngelis (2013)
study were seniority, subject expertise, and graduate training. I wondered if this had changed at all as I learned more about this in my study. More recently, an article pointed out that most chairs earn the role from a combination of their content expertise and their accumulated social capital and credibility within their department (Volonino & Matthews, 2019). Similar to the research on high school department chairs, more current research on university-level academic chairs reveals that chairs are commonly sourced from within the department (Prentice & Guillaume, 2021; Wald & Golding, 2020).

Despite a variety of common characteristics and a lack of any clear selection process, there are certain skills that have consistently been cited as necessary to the role of department chair. These include interpersonal relationship skills, command of the subject matter, communication skills, knowledge of leadership, ability to work with teams, flexibility, and diplomacy (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013). More recent literature expands on these skills to include capacity to advocate, extent of content knowledge, capacity to build a collegial learning environment, and ability to negotiate specific context of their work (Peacock & Melville, 2019). I hoped to learn more about this as I explored how the nine department chairs in my study described their role as department chairs, and learned about who they are, how they became department chairs, how long they have been in the role, and their demographics (see Appendix A and Appendix C). I also wondered if any of this changed because of the challenges brought forth by COVID-19 pandemic.

**History of the High School Department Chair**

To understand the inception of the department chair position as well as how the position developed over time, I draw heavily on the Peacock (2014) and Peacock and Melville (2019) synthesizes of historical literature on high school department chairs dating from 1910.
High schools formed school subject departments in the mid-nineteenth century with a strong desire to emulate the cultural and intellectual ideals of colleges and universities (Peacock, 2014). For that reason, Henry Pritchett, President of the Carnegie Foundation, divided high schools into new pedagogies and subjects that could only be taught by content specialists who would be able to meet the requirements of university exams (Peacock & Melville, 2019; Turner, 2019). American educator Kilpatrick is the first on record to coin the word ‘department’ in association with high schools (Peacock & Melville, 2019). The role of the chair at its inception was administrative; chairs almost exclusively focused on meeting disciplinary standards (Peacock & Melville, 2019). However, by the beginning of the twentieth century, there were major demographic changes in the United States and rapid increases in high school enrollment (Peacock & Melville, 2019). As a result, the increasing complexities and demands suddenly forced department chairs to move beyond the administrative tasks of the earlier century and instead take on responsibility overseeing pedagogy, supervision, and administration (Peacock & Melville, 2019). This led to a newfound puzzlement to the chairs’ function; in the earliest research on the subject, Meriwether (1910) describes the ambiguities and inconsistencies of the role of department chair (Peacock & Melville, 2019).

From then on, the literature on department chairs from the twentieth century until today consistently describes the role of department chair as one of ambiguity (Peacock and Melville, 2019). In a 1921 article about the main responsibilities of a department chair, Heinmiller described a wide range of tasks expected of chairs included within the three main duties of pedagogy, administration, and supervision. In 1930, in the first empirical study on department chairs, Koch surveyed superintendents, department heads, and principals from 171 high schools from 114 cities across the United States. The department chairs’ responses to the survey
described their confusion over their roles and responsibilities (Koch, 1930). Twenty years later, researcher Novak (1950) wrote that there was no specialized training for the role, and one researcher (Axley, 1947) went so far as to compare the role of department chair to a racehorse burdened with the duties of a plow horse (Peacock & Melville, 2019). In other words, during the early to mid-twentieth century, the research described chairs as expected to lead instructional improvement while also juggling clerical, administrative, managerial, and curricular tasks, leading to a sense of ambiguity and multiplicity in the role (Peacock & Melville, 2019). Therefore, with a lack of formal leadership training or skills, a lack of time, and a lack of authority, there was limited ability for the department chairs to provide instructional leadership in their roles (Peacock & Melville, 2019).

Department chairs continued to express their struggles with ambiguity well into the twentieth century (Peacock & Melville, 2019). In 1960, King and Moon surveyed 114 department chairs from 208 cities across the United State to learn more about their roles and responsibilities. In their study, chairs saw themselves as central to improving instruction with departments, but they struggled with ambiguities of the role (Peacock & Melville, 2019). In other research from the 1960s and 1970s, department chairs expressed a lack of formal job description, a lack of release time, and poorly defined authority as impediments to their effectiveness as instructional leaders (Peacock & Melville, 2019). The literature continues to describe these wide-ranging responsibilities and challenges within the role of department chair in the twenty-first century, which I describe in detail in the section that follows. In my study, I hoped to learn more about how the history of department chair informed the roles and responsibilities and challenges today. I also wondered how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted and perhaps increased the complexity of the challenges that the department chairs in my study described facing today.
**Role and Responsibilities**

Globally, the high school department chair is in a position uniquely placed between administrators and teachers- a middle-management role- and as a result they are seen as a nexus between teachers and administrators (Bassett, 2016; Harris & Jones, 2017; Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021; Klar, 2012; Peacock & Melville, 2019). This is true on the university level as well; the literature describes academic chairs as leading from the middle (Urtel & Cecil, 2019). As I described in the previous section, the roles and responsibilities of the high school department chair became ambiguous at the start of the twentieth century and remain ambiguous in the most current research (Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021; Peacock & Melville, 2019). I use Brent and colleagues’ (2014) definition for role to refer to the expected behaviors of persons who hold positions within an organization. While some schools see the role of department chair as purely administrative, others see the role as more of a link between senior administrators and teachers; this perception of the role varies across schools (Bassett, 2016; DeAngelis, 2013; Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021; Kelley & Salisbury, 2013; Peacock & Melville, 2019). Interestingly, on the university-level, the literature on academic chairs consistently describes the role of academic chair as both manager and leader (Ackerman, Fenton, & Raymond, 2020; Brinkley-Etzkorn & Lane, 2019; Freeman, et al., 2020). I learned more about how the nine department chairs in my study described the role, and how it may have changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 1921, Heinmiller described the multi-faceted nature of the role and responsibilities of the job to include a mixture of pedagogy, supervision, and administration. At first, in the 1930s, the responsibilities of the department chair included mainly the ability to observe and provide a correction to struggling teachers by providing authentic supervision of instruction given their
familiarity with the subject matter as content experts (Turner, 2019). Remember that the role first
developed as a response to universities, with subjects that could only be taught by content
specialists who would be able to meet the requirements of university exams (Turner, 2019). For
this reason, in the 1930s, the key role was to close the gap between the classroom and the
principals’ office (Koch, 1930; Peacock, 2014). Twenty years later, the responsibilities grew
tremendously; department chairs were expected to maintain a simultaneous focus on supporting
students and teachers, link the academic, professional, and school communities, and also perform
clerical duties (Peacock, 2014; Rinker, 1950). The role of the department chair became one of a
visionary- department chairs were expected to be advocates of change rather than protectors of
the status quo (Peacock, 2014; Rinker, 1950). In other words, within those twenty years,
department chair research on the roles and responsibilities of chairs jumped from being content
experts expected to help principals by monitoring the instruction of content among their
departments to a multifaceted role with an emphasis on vision and school-wide improvement. In
this study, I learned more about how the nine department chairs described and understood the
increase of complexity in their roles and responsibilities, and how they described the ways in
which these roles and responsibilities changed given the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2014, Peacock drew on a historical review of the literature on high school department
chairs to present a conceptual model of science instructional leadership for high school
department chairs. In the historical review, Peacock (2014) listed a mere total of 30 studies on
department chairs’ roles and responsibilities from 1980 to 2012. The methods in those studies
vary from surveys of hundreds of educators to self-studies of single department chairs (Peacock,
2014). Of the five themes that Peacock describes as emerging from that research, two relate
specifically to roles and responsibility: first, chairs are expected to carry out a variety of
administrative, managerial, supervisory, curricular, and instructional responsibilities (2014). Second, chairs, administrators, and teachers agree that chairs should increase their focus on instructional improvement (Peacock, 2014). The other three themes include unclear expectations and lack of time and other resources lead to role ambiguity, chairs experience role conflict as a result of their positioning between teacher and administrator, and that schools can improve chairs’ effectiveness by providing release time and remuneration, delegating more formal authority, and providing targeted professional learning for chairs (Peacock, 2014). This demonstrates that while the multifaceted nature of the role continued well into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, a new emphasis on instructional improvement emerged as well. In the limited research I was able to find on the roles and responsibilities of the high school department chair after Peacock’s 2014 historical review, this emphasis on instructional improvement morphed into instructional leadership (Brent et. al, 2014; Melville, et al., 2016; Volonnino & Matthews, 2019; Peacock & Melville, 2019; Wong & Dillon, 2020).

While there are still no formal standards for department chairs in the United States, no preparation requirements for the position, and the role has never explicitly been defined, most of the current research describes the most common roles and responsibilities department chairs have across schools and advocate for department chairs taking on more of a leadership role (Melville, et al., 2016; Peacock & Melville, 2019; Volonnino & Matthews, 2019; Wong & Dillon, 2020). In 2014, Brent and colleagues identified the expectations of the roles New York high school principals had for their department chairs. With an emphasis on leadership as a potential role, the researchers used data from the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Educators’ (NCATE) Standards for Advanced Programs in Educational Leadership- School Building Leadership to examine the relative importance that principals assign to various chair roles and
thereby to assess their indirect expectations regarding department chair leadership. NCATE adopted these standards as a means to guide and govern educational leadership programs. They include six standards: visioning, instructional support, management, community engagement, act ethically, and policy context. Brent and colleagues (2014) surveyed 373 principals in 60 public junior and senior high schools in New York State, with the exception of New York City, because New York State delegated its entire accreditation process to NCATE which ensured that all leadership programs in the state complied with the standards.

The survey consisted of two sections (Brent et al., 2014). The first section solicited general information about structural issues associated with the position of department chair, and the second section asked principals whether the standards for building leaders identify expected chair roles (Brent et al., 2014). The results of the study indicate that the principals surveyed placed great importance on chairs’ need to act ethically, and a high level of importance on chairs’ visioning ability—consistent with very early research on the subject (Rinker, 1950). Interestingly, principals viewed the department chairs’ role as managers much less important than visioning and meaningfully less important than instructional support. This demonstrates the growing notion that department chairs’ roles extend well beyond management to include leadership responsibilities aimed at improving teaching and learning (Brent et al., 2014).

To further the conversation on department chairs as leaders, in “Leading Learning: Science Departments and the Chair,” authors Melville and colleagues consider the chairs’ role in leading learning within their departments as they intentionally impact the conceptual, pedagogical, cultural, and political aspects of teachers’ work within their departments (2016). The authors of this study describe the expectation for department chairs to lead learning within their departments, using the definition for leadership to be a moral undertaking through which a
leader harnesses, liberates, empowers, and aligns a community toward a common purpose (Melville et al., 2016). In this study, Melville and colleagues developed a longitudinal narrative study of a chair leading his science department over a period of fifteen years, beginning in the year 2000. They employed this research method because a longitudinal narrative study made it possible to investigate the direction in which the chair may have led learning, and the processes by which learning developed (Melville et al., 2016). The data from this study mainly related to four white, middle-class teachers, including the chair, who had worked with the science department for 16 years prior to this study (Melville et al., 2016). The researchers built this narrative from a variety of data sources, including semi-structured interviews from 2007-2014 with the chair, teachers, and school administrators, teacher storylines, publications produced in collaboration with the chair and the teachers, and a range of teacher artifacts such as field notes, timetables, and lesson plans (Melville et al., 2016).

The results of this study show that Melville and colleagues (2016) found there are benefits to department chair leadership; as the chair moved from transactional to transitional to transformational leadership, he afforded opportunities for teacher empowerment. As a result, the authors advocate for chairs to be more than content specialists (Melville et al., 2016). The authors write that department chairs need to be able to link the content with the world they live in, they need to engage in pedagogical developments within their content, and they need to lead in the development of departments that share responsibility for continuous improvements in student achievement (Melville et al., 2016). While this study specifically focuses on science education, the theme of a department chair’s roles and responsibilities as more than content specialist, more than manager, more than supervisor, but potential as leader continues to emerge.
throughout the current research (Brinkley-Etzkorn & Lane, 2019; Gardner & Ward, 2018; Urtel & Cecil, 2019; Vanblaere & Devos, 2018; Volonnino & Matthews, 2019).

I could not find further studies on the roles and responsibilities of department chairs in the United States between the above-mentioned study in 2016 and 2019. There is a State News Service article titled “Unlocking the Department Chair to Drive Instructional Improvement,” in which authors Volonnino and Matthews (2019) describe the department chairs as the most underutilized resource in high schools. Specifically, they describe the tedious and mundane duties often given to department chairs, such as distributing and ordering textbooks, assisting in course placement, ordering supplies, and checking grade submissions (Volonnino & Matthews, 2019). However, the authors argue that department chairs are in a key role to provide mentorship to a new teacher, support struggling teachers, and to become change agents within the school, improving the academic program of the school (Volonnino & Matthews, 2019).

Also in 2019, Peacock and Melville published the article “The Evolving Role of the Science Department Chair,” where the authors work from a historical perspective to describe the evolution of the department chair from an administrative role to a greater emphasis on the role of a chair as an instructional leader. In their article, the authors acknowledge the range of responsibilities department chairs are expected to undertake and the ambiguity as to the purpose of the role. However, the authors note that despite this ambiguity, teachers, chairs, and administrators all believe that the chair’s focus should be instructional improvement and instructional leadership.

**International Studies of the Department Chair**

International studies add a more complete picture to the roles and responsibilities of department chairs. In 2016, Martin Bassett examined the role of department chairs in New
Zealand in his study, “The Role of Middle Leaders in New Zealand Secondary Schools: Expectations and Challenges.” In his study, Bassett (2016) identified three main functions of department chairs in New Zealand by seeking the perspectives of eight board of trustees, 15 senior leaders (such as principals), and 37 department chairs in 30 secondary schools through online qualitative questionnaires. Basset (2016) designed the questionnaires into four sections (Basset, 2016). In the first section, respondents identified demographic information such as their role in the school, their leadership experience within an educational context, and their gender (Basset, 2016). In section two, the respondents identified the areas they were currently being offered leadership development, areas they had previously received leadership development, and areas they perceived leadership development would be beneficial from a list of eight areas of leadership development: instructional leadership; budgeting skills; interpersonal skills; administrative skills; strategic planning; monitoring and evaluation of staff performance; developing staff; and developing a mission (Basset, 2016). The third section contained continua with three statements on leadership development for department chairs which respondents were asked to rate on a Likert scale to gain the respondents’ current perspectives of leadership development of department chairs (Basset, 2016). Basset found that first, the use of instructional leadership as a means of influencing teaching and learning is integral to the role (2016). Second, the degree to which department chairs develop staff, and third, the importance of administrative tasks to support educational goals, are also important functions (2016). Those interviewed described curriculum leadership as the main expectation (Bassett, 2016).

In 2018, Vanblaere and Devos published “The Role of Departmental Leadership for Professional Learning Communities,” a quantitative study that took place in Belgium. The researchers put forward the question, “How do departmental leadership roles (i.e., group- and
development-oriental leadership) relate to each of the interpersonal Professional Learning Communities (PLC) characteristics in departments, taking departments’ structural characteristics and teachers’ demographic characteristics into account?” They collected survey data from 248 math and French teachers in 62 departments in secondary schools in Flanders, Belgium (Vanblaere & Devos, 2018). The authors concluded that their findings confirmed the multidimensionality of department heads’ roles present in the prior research on the subject (Vanblaere & Devos, 2018).

The department chairs in their study often displayed multiple forms of leadership, such as group-oriented leadership and development-oriented leadership (Vanblaere & Devos, 2018). The authors describe group-oriented leadership as the department chair’s role in generating, shaping, and managing collaborative departmental cultures by empowering others and encouraging collaboration. In their research, this happened when department heads supported teachers in exchanging ideas, developing material, and discussing practices (Vanblaere & Devos, 2018). The authors (2018) define development-oriented leadership as when department heads focus on students and the educational core by monitoring students’ work, the attainment of local standards, and leading teachers’ learning by taking on a mentoring and coaching role, and supporting the development of teachers in their department. The study found that when department heads enacted group-oriented leadership, they increased teachers’ perceptions regarding the presence of collective responsibility in the department and the frequency of reflective dialogue, therefore encouraging greater collaboration and shaping collaborative departmental cultures (Vanblaere & Devos, 2018). Furthermore, the department chairs that followed up on the development of teachers and students had teachers in their department that engaged in more reflective dialogue than their colleagues (Vanblaere & Devos, 2018). The
results of this study demonstrate the importance of this emphasis on leadership as a responsibility of department chairs; the findings support that when in a leadership position, department heads can greatly contribute to school improvement (Vanblaere & Devos, 2018).

In another recent study, “Crossing the Boundaries: Collaborations Between Mathematics and Science Departments in English Secondary Schools,” Wong and Dillon explored how mathematics and science departments work together in high schools in England (2020). Wong and Dillion (2020) asked how and why collaborations get started, and what some of the affordances and challenges are in both initiating and sustaining collaborative practice. The design of the study involved semi-structured interviews with 15 teachers most closely involved in collaborating within six schools (Wong & Dillon, 2020). The authors acknowledged the importance of collaboration and prior research that identified collaboration as an important aspect in the role of departmental leadership (Wong & Dillon, 2020). The authors further explained that the department chairs in their study are often responsible for communication with other departments, more than other teachers within their own departments (Wong & Dillon, 2020). In fact, they found in their study that in order for the departments to be able to work together, it was important that the relationship between department chairs of each department was good in the first place, or collaboration might not have happened (Wong & Dillon, 2020). The authors place a lot of importance on the responsibility of collaboration on the role of department chair, adding another element to the ever-growing job description (Wong & Dillon, 2020).

**Israeli Literature on Department Chairs**

The literature in Israel is both the most current and perhaps the most similar of the international studies to the context of my study, which will take place in Modern Orthodox
schools in New York City. This is because Israel is home to several collective subcultures, including the Orthodox sector, which is the population that I intend to study (Barth & Benoliel, 2019). The Jewish-Israeli educational system is divided into three segments: state-religious, state-secular, and Ultra-Orthodox, which is independently run (Barth & Benoliel, 2019). The state-religious segment is most aligned with the Modern Orthodox setting; it is part of a formal educational system, and curricula, staff, and pupils are chosen based on religious behavior (Barth & Benoliel, 2019). In addition, these schools adhere to a religious-Zionist approach, they apply both the general and religious curriculum, and students learn in mixed or gender-separated classes, just like the Modern Orthodox setting in the United States (Barth & Benoliel, 2019). Two recent studies on department chairs found that similar to the United States, in Israel there are no clearly defined roles other than administrative aspects of the job (Donitsa-Schmidt & Zuzovsky, 2020; Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021). In a qualitative analysis with thirty department chairs from different Israeli high schools, Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky (2021) found that department chairs hold significant responsibility for specific areas within a school alongside their reaching role, but often see their teaching role as a top priority, followed by their managerial role.

University-Level Literature on Department Chairs

Other recent literature on the subject exists on the university-level. On this level, researchers of a recent study interviewed 15 chairs who are members of the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) to explore the managerial approaches of chairs in the United States who were serving in departments in the field of educational leadership to learn how they balance their various responsibilities (Freeman et al., 2020). The researchers describe the chairs in this study as occupying the front lines of leadership with most of the constituents in
higher education, such as students, faculty, outside communities, other departments, and central administrations (Freeman et al., 2020). An article in the same year that discusses the many issues related to the department chair’s role in mathematics service courses argues that the department chair’s main role is seen as the liaison between senior administration and faculty, overseeing day-to-day operations while also providing vision and strategic leadership within the department (Ackerman et al., 2020). Another article published that year shares the personal stories of two university faculty members that were asked to serve as interim heads (Hanna & Williams, 2020). In their article, Hanna and Williams (2020) include a list of chair responsibilities deans describe as most helpful. The most important expectations on that list include cultivating faculty, placing high expectations on student success, developing a vision beyond the department, creating a climate that is collegial, collaborative, and respectful, and submitting required paperwork accurately and on time (Hanna & Williams, 2020). These duties are both managerial (i.e., the paperwork), and leadership responsibilities (i.e., cultivating faculty) (Hanna & Williams, 2020). The expectations of leadership are not limited to the deans’ perspective. A recent study administered a survey to 466 academic program leaders in community colleges who held titles similar to a department chair (Miller & Smith, 2021). The faculty in this study describe wanting the academic chair to be a champion and their need for a leader more than a technical manager (Miller & Smith, 2021).

Summary of Literature on Department Chairs’ Roles and Responsibilities

In sum, over the course of more than a century, the roles and responsibilities of department chairs have shifted from that of content expert manager to a role with a high potential for leadership and collaboration. The role grew to become multi-faceted from the start of the twentieth century, including responsibilities such as budgeting, scheduling, coordination, policy
enforcement, information dissemination, motivation, curriculum development, curriculum instruction, grant and report writing, visioning, supervision, evaluation, and employment of teachers (DeAngelis, 2013; Kelley & Salisbury, 2013; Peacock & Melville, 2019; Wettersten, 1992). The more recent research describes a greater emphasis on the potential for leadership within the position, while continuing to acknowledge the ambiguity within the poorly defined role (Peacock & Melville, 2019). Additionally, on the university-level, this role is seen as a combination of both managerial and leadership responsibilities. I hoped to learn more about the perceived role and responsibilities of the nine department chairs in my study, and how, if at all, the role and responsibilities they describe aligned with or differed from the literature (see interviews in Appendices B and C, and survey in Appendix E). I also wondered how, if at all, the role and responsibilities described in the previous literature might have changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The consistent expression of ambiguity contributes to one of the greatest challenges in the role (Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021; Kelley & Salisbury, 2013; Peacock, 2014; Peacock & Melville, 2019), among other challenges, which I go into greater detail about in the next section.

**Challenges in the Role**

**Section Overview**

Challenges in the role of department chair have been the dominant theme in the literature largely due to the aforementioned role ambiguities and range of multi-faceted responsibilities (Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021; Kelley & Salisbury, 2013; Peacock, 2014; Peacock & Melville, 2019). In this section, I provide a detailed description of the literature on the challenges that department chairs may experience in their roles. This connects directly to my third research
question: what challenges, if any, do department chairs experience in their roles and how do they manage them?

**A Historical Review of Common Challenges Within the Role**

In a case study on the efforts of three urban United States high schools to revision the role of department chair as instructional leader, researchers Kelley and Salisbury (2013) describe the role of department chair as one of the most stressful positions in high schools. Interestingly, the literature over the past century has consistently listed the same challenges: need for leadership skills, lack of time, ambiguity in the role, and confused lines of authority (Melville et al., 2016). Beginning in 1930, Koch described the role as limited severely by time available for department chairs to visit the classrooms of other teachers. In 1947, Axley administered a survey in more than fifty public high schools, public junior high schools, and private schools across the United States and found department chairs were too busy dealing with petty details to focus on instructional supervision. He compared department heads to a championship swimmer who cannot win a race with cannonballs chained to his feet, because department heads are weighed down by overloaded schedules and extraneous duties (Axley, 1947). In 1950, Novak wrote there was a lack of specialized training- few department chairs, if any, felt equal to all of the requirements. In the 1980s, the research consistently expressed that department chairs had too much to do with too little time, and too few resources (Peacock & Melville, 2019). By 1990, Adducci and colleagues listed role ambiguity, equivocal job descriptions, conflicting functions, vague goals, ineffective PD opportunities, and inadequate resources as the main challenges in the role.

In more recent research using American high school case studies and in a historical review of the literature, department chairs describe the concepts of supervision and instructional
support as conflict-filled and ambiguous, causing department chairs to be hesitant about leadership in the role— they mistakenly believe it belongs solely to the administration (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013; Klar, 2013; Klar, 2012; Peacock, 2014). Additionally, as the school environment becomes more complex, so do the demands placed on department chairs (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013). Department chairs are tasked with increasing leadership and management without the time or support to fulfill the obligations (Peacock & Melville, 2019). In addition to time, department chairs also express lack of other resources as one of the challenges in the position (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013). Many department chairs understand the importance of focusing on instructional leadership, and yet as a result of lack of time and other resources, teachers reported instructional leadership as the largest need not met by department chairs (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013).

Additionally, because the role is not clearly defined and does not require a specific degree, department chairs often receive little formal training (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013). In one study, department chairs expressed their hesitancy to take on leadership roles because they felt ill prepared (DeAngelis, 2013). The literature also illuminates another key challenge of maintaining the balance as middle managers between the administrators above and the teachers below; department chairs feel the tension of sharing their loyalties between both groups (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013; Peacock & Melville, 2019). In this study, I learned more about the challenges the nine department chairs described, and how what they described connected with this previous literature. I also learned how the department chairs described the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has added to the challenges they described experiencing.
International Studies on Challenges Within the Role

These challenges are not unique to American schools; the recent international studies of department chairs share similar findings (Bassett, 2016; Donitsa-Schmidt & Zuzovsky, 2020; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; Harris & Jones, 2017; Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021). For example, in the qualitative questionnaire administered to boards of trustees, senior leaders, and middle leaders in five large urban secondary schools in New Zealand, Bassett (2016) identified the workload of department chairs in New Zealand as more complex, intensive, and challenging. He lists the three greatest challenges of department chairs in his study as being ill-equipped to develop interpersonal relationships, tensions between collegiality and accountability, and a lack of allocated time (Bassett, 2016). Moreover, the department chairs in his study expressed having difficulty with the seemingly contradictory expectations to build a trusting relationship with the educators in their department yet also manage and appraise these same teachers (Bassett, 2016). They described themselves as overburdened with compliance tasks and left with little time or energy to do an excellent job as both a leader and a classroom teacher (Bassett, 2016). In a more recent study from New Zealand, Meyer & Hanna (2022) interviewed eight department chairs and identified five constraints across the department chairs’ theories-of-action: protecting relationships, internal/external accountability, lack of pedagogical knowledge, own leadership approach, and time constraints.

In England, Harris & Jones (2017) describe in an editorial for School Leadership and Management the great pressure from the top and bottom that department chairs feel, and the conflicting expectations to the whole school versus the loyalty to their departments. In a paper that brings together three studies of department chairs in Australia, the principals, senior leaders, department chairs, and teachers that were interviewed described hybrid responsibilities and
complex and ambiguous roles as challenges as well (Gurr & Drysdale, 2013). These three studies also found that there are no credentials or mandatory preparation programs required for department chairs in Australia (Gurr & Drysdale, 2013).

**Israeli Studies on Challenges Within the Role**

An Israeli study describes the challenges of limited professional development training, lack of time, role conflict, and role ambiguity as the greatest challenges facing department chairs. In this study, the authors examined simulations involving role-played ethical (Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021) scenarios and group debriefings among 30 department chairs from different Israeli high schools and districts (Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021). In their study, the authors found that while the department chairs in Israel are skilled and experienced teachers, they are ill-equipped for the different skill sets needed to lead a department (Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021). Additionally, lack of time does not only impair their ability to perform the range of responsibilities, but it might even impair their role as classroom teacher (Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021). They also describe the tension due to the need to focus on the development of teaching and learning versus the necessity to engage in administrative roles (Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021). Additionally, they list the hierarchical position in the school between senior management and staff as a major challenge; there is an obligation to hold supervisory and monitoring roles but at the same time they are expected to lead their teams cooperatively (Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021).

**Challenges in the Role on the University Level**

Studies on the university-level describe very similar challenges in the role of academic chair, with the most prevalent challenge listed as a lack of leadership training (Brinkley-Etzkorn & Lane, 2019; Freeman et al., 2020; Hanna & Williams, 2020; Prentice & Guillaume, 2021;
A second challenge is the duality of the role (Brinkley-Etzkorn & Lane, 2019). In an essay based on her experiences as interim department chair, Phelps (2008), goes so far as to describe the role as a Janus job, named after the Roman god Janus with two faces— one facing forward and one backwards (as cited in Prentice & Guillaume, 2021). Phelps (2008) uses this metaphor to depict the duality of being both a faculty member and administrator. Just like high school department chairs have shared loyalties, academic chairs are required to shuttle between managerial roles and faculty roles while also meeting expectations of a faculty member themselves (Freeman et al., 2020). In other words, they identify as both a faculty member and chair (Freeman et al., 2020).

In this study, I learned more about how the nine department chairs described and understood the challenges they shared, and how those challenges aligned with or differed from the challenges that have been described in the research over the past century. I also learned how these challenges were similar to the challenges faced in higher education. It is my hope that my study provides more attention on the challenges high school department chairs face, which might be helpful information for principals, teachers, and department chairs in other settings. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic increased the complexity and ambiguity within the field of education (Drago-Severson, et al., 2020; Militello & Argent, 2021) and so I learned how the department chairs described these increased complexities as challenges within the position.

**Supports in the Role**

While the challenges are extensive, there is a lot that principals can do to support department chairs in their role and minimize the aforementioned challenges (Brent et al., 2014; Kelley & Salisbury, 2013; Klar 2012; Klar 2013; Peacock 2014). Some of the most common supports include improving chairs’ effectiveness by providing release time and remuneration,
delegating more formal authority and providing targeted professional learning for chairs, creating a sense of collegiality to reduce uncertainty and stress, align department and school priorities in a school wide vision, and involve chairs in decision making (Brent et al., 2014; Kelley & Salisbury, 2013; Klar 2012; Klar 2013; Peacock 2014). There are two studies in particular that focus on how principals can best support their department chairs to become instructional leaders in their practice and minimize the challenges listed above. Both studies are close to a decade old, but I include them in the literature review because they are the most comprehensive studies, that I know of, that focus on the role of the principal in their support of these middle-formal leaders, high school department chairs.

In 2012, researcher Hans Klar presented findings on a two-year, multisite case study of three urban high schools where principals endeavored to foster the capabilities of their department chairs to enhance school-wide instructional capacity and increase student achievement. The Wallace Foundation presented the schools with a two-year Leadership for Learning grant. Klar’s (2012) research question for this study was: In what ways do urban high school principals develop department chair leadership capacity to support the improvement of instructional practices within their departments? The big findings of the study illustrate how critical a role principals play in their support of department chairs to create authentic instructional leadership. Based on data from over 40 interviews with principals, department chairs, and school-based grant coordinators, and observations of leadership team meetings and retreats, Klar identified the following supports by principals in his research: clarity of leadership tasks; familiarity and trust to foster department chair commitment; numerous opportunities for chairs to develop instructional leadership capacities; empowering department chairs as leaders and key decision makers; asking for authentic input for key decisions; structures and resources to
meet with their departments (i.e., regular meetings, days away, collaboration time); monitoring chairs needs; providing necessary levels of support and long-term commitment to the initiative (Klar, 2012). In other words, Klar (2012) found in his research with these principals, department chairs, and school-based grant coordinators that there were specific ways that principals can support department chairs so they are able to fulfill their roles as instructional leaders and not just managers.

In 2013, researchers Kelley and Salisbury provided an in-depth look at the efforts of three urban high schools to develop the role of department chair as instructional leader. Recognizing the complexities of intensified leadership demands on principals, and the often-underutilized role of the department chair, the authors also studied three urban high schools that were granted a two-year leadership for learning initiative through the Wallace Foundation. In this multiple case study design, Kelley and Salisbury conducted forty interviews with principals, department chairs, and grant coordinators, collected documents such as agendas, presentation materials, and meeting minutes, took field notes, and conducted participation observation with the aim to identify what the role of department chair as instructional leader looks like in these three comprehensive high schools. The researchers also wondered about the process that these schools took to strengthen the instructional role of the department chairs.

What Kelley and Salisbury found in their study is that when there was a clear schoolwide vision, department chairs were able to break down barriers that may exist between different departments and advance a schoolwide vision for student learning. Perhaps most importantly, when department chairs in their research were deeply involved in the process of definition and role expectations, principals were able to minimize tension and role confusion, increase commitment, and improve engagement. This demonstrates how critical it was in their study for
the role of department chair to be clearly defined—especially when principals are turning to the role as a means of distributing leadership. Furthermore, the researchers found that when principals placed an expectation on leadership, they explicitly either took away or lessened managerial and bureaucratic tasks so the department chairs could focus on instructional leadership. In other words, by codifying department chairs’ expectations and responsibilities as leaders and not managers, principals also created space for department chairs to complete leadership work.

These two studies build upon prior research from 1992 in which Wettersten described factors that contribute to department chairs’ fulfillment of their role in her study: the amount of responsibility and support given to the chair by the building principal and other members of the administrative team is crucial. In this study, Wettersten (1992) explored the specific instructional leadership practices of four suburban high school department chairs in the Midwest to determine to what extent the position of department chair is perceived by chairs, principals, and other school administrators and staff to be that of an instructional leader. This research was based on data that was gathered by shadowing and interviewing these four department chairs, and by interviewing teachers, administrators, and other chairs in the high school building (Wettersten, 1992). Wettersten (1992) wrote that based on her findings, it was up to the principal to put department chairs in a position that demonstrates their credibility as chair as a capable and trustworthy leader in the eyes of teachers in the chairs’ department. Additionally, Wettersten (1992) acknowledged the importance of a shared vision and goals between the principal, administrative teams, and department chairs.

I extend this research in my study as I learned how the nine department chairs described and understood the supports they receive, who they went to for support, and other ways they
might described managing the challenges. I also learned what supports the department chairs
described turning to in the face of the increasing challenges they described the COVID-19
pandemic brought forth.

2.3 Learning Forward’s Leadership Standards

Section Overview

Learning Forward is an international association of learning educators focused on
increasing student achievement through more effective professional learning (Learning Forward,
2011, 2022). With the contribution of 40 professional associations and education organizations,
Learning Forward developed the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011,
2022). These standards provide those who facilitate, support, and advocate for effective
professional development with the required foundation of knowledge to put into place the type of
structures and processes that will allow for successful professional development (Mizell, 2012).
Several large urban districts across the nation, such as Chicago, Dallas, and Memphis, use these
standards to design the professional development models in their schools (Mosakowski, 2015).
Researchers such as Mosakowski (2015) and more recently, Gravina (2022) use Learning
Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning as a framework in their studies on professional
development in American high schools.

In this section, I provide a detailed description of Learning Forward and their Standards
for Professional Learning. In particular, I describe their Leadership Standard with their ten roles
for teacher leaders, and how they connect to my research on nine department chairs in Modern
Orthodox yeshiva day schools in New York City. The literature in this section informs my
second research question: how, if at all, do department chairs’ descriptions of their role connect
to Learning Forward’s 10 roles for teacher leadership? In my study, I used Learning Forward’s
Leadership Standard as a way to identify whether, how, and to what degree, if any, the nine department chairs in my study describe and understand their own roles to include leadership of the teachers in their respective departments, a responsibility established by the prior literature I described in the previous section.

**Learning Forward’s Leadership Standard for Professional Learning**

In the revised standards, Learning Forward defines leadership as professional learning that results in equitable and excellent outcomes for all students when educators establish a compelling and inclusive vision for professional learning, sustain coherent support to build educator capacity, and advocate for professional learning by sharing the importance and evidence of impact of professional learning (Learning Forward, 2022). In their earlier standard, Learning Forward described three key aspects of skillful leadership: the ability to develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning (2011; Louis, Hord, & Von Frank, 2017). In the newer standard, Learning Forward revised the three constructs of the Leadership standard to include: establishing a compelling and inclusive vision for professional learning, sustaining coherent support to build educator capacity, and advocating for professional learning by sharing the importance and evidence of impact of professional learning (Learning Forward, 2022).

Learning Forward believes that as leaders develop capacity within a school for learning and leading, they need to hold learning among their top priorities for students, staff, and themselves, and recognize that universal high expectations for all students requires ambitious improvements in curriculum, instruction, leadership practices, and support systems (Learning Forward, 2011, 2022). In addition, they must embed professional learning into the organization’s vision by communicating learning as a core function for improvement (Learning Forward, 2011,
Leaders must align professional learning with the school’s goals for student and educator learning, then use data to monitor and measure its effects on educator and student performance (Learning Forward, 2011, 2022).

In *Reach the Highest Standard in Professional Learning: Leadership*, authors Louis, Hord, and Von Frank (2017) elaborate further on Learning Forward’s Leadership Standards for building capacity for learning and leading, advocating for professional learning, and creating support systems and structures. Leaders who build a capacity for learning and leading are committed to continuous professional learning (Louis et al., 2017). They develop their own and others’ capacity for leadership of professional learning, understand and use Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning in making decisions about professional learning, and they serve as leaders of professional themselves (Louis et al., 2017). They also coach and supervise school-based facilitators of professional learning (Louis et al., 2017). Leaders who advocate for professional learning articulate the link between student learning and professional learning, and advocate high-quality professional learning (Louis et al., 2017). Lastly, when leaders create support systems and structures, they establish systems and structures for effective professional learning, prepare and support staff for skillful collaboration, cultivate and maintain a collaborative culture, and create expectations for collaborative professional learning within the school day (Louis, et al., 2017). In my study, I hoped to identify whether, how, and to what degree, if any, the nine department chairs might describe and understand their own roles to include these leadership practices of building capacity for learning and leading, advocating for professional learning, and creating support systems and structures with the teachers in their respective departments.
In her opening essay, “Leadership for Professional Learning: Creating the Learning Organization,” Louis emphasizes the importance of creating a school culture in which all adults see themselves as part of the larger enterprise of continuous learning. She writes that to create a culture of learning, effective leaders are involved in helping all members of a school community make sense of new ideas in the context of what they are currently doing. They should develop talent and increase teachers’ self-efficacy through feedback (Louis et al., 2017). There should also be a balance of transformation leadership, which is a focus on tasks and developing vision to drive a group towards a new future, and transactional leadership, a focus on the nature of relationships and interactions between leaders and others in the school (Louis et al., 2017). Effective leadership for creating a culture of learning must focus on emotional intelligence: collective goal development, appreciation of work, generating enthusiasm, flexibility, and passion (Louis et al., 2017). It is through a leader’s actions and behaviors that teachers assess a leader’s effectiveness; therefore, leaders should model learning themselves or they might be seen as counterfeit and inauthentic (Louis et al., 2017).

The underlying culture is so important for a leader to establish as a place that values change as a means to increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning (Louis et al., 2017). The school needs to be a place where teachers seek new ideas, practices, and processes, and collaboratively work to include promising changes in the school (Louis et al., 2017). In other words, everyone within the school should be a change seeker to contribute to continuous improvement (Louis et al., 2017). A leader can create this culture by managing schedules and structures for everyone to be able to come together to share ideas for improvement (Louis et al., 2017). They can also develop policies to increase staff capacity, model behaviors they hope the staff will adopt, serve as teachers and coaches for staff, engage in conflict resolution to resolve
disputes and build unity, and use selection and termination processes to ensure the staff commits to the schools’ goals (Louis et al., 2017).

Caring leadership is another quality that is important for leaders to exhibit, which is done by providing authentic knowledge and understanding, demonstrating attentiveness, and driven by the aspirations for the success and personal well-being of their teachers (Louis et al., 2017). Research shows that when leaders are caring, there is an impact on an organization’s learning; there are higher levels of collaboration with colleagues and teachers are more likely to visit classrooms and/or discuss instruction (Louis et al., 2017). Additionally, leaders are responsible for assessment because groups pay most attention to any aspect of their work that is reviewed (Louis et al., 2017). Leaders must lead with trust through honesty, openness, reliability, competence, and benevolence (Louis et al., 2017). They should provide ongoing assistance, such as feedback on teachers’ use of the innovation, ongoing, on-time coaching, personalized technical assistance, and celebrations of successes (Louis et al., 2017). These traits and characteristics that Louis (2017) identifies as integral for leadership practice informed the questions I asked the nine department chairs in my study, and the questions on my survey for all department chairs in the three schools within my study.

Another key aspect of leadership within a school is engagement with all stakeholders to establish partnerships to promote the success of all students (Learning Forward, 2011). Skillful leaders should develop resources and distribute these resources as a way to accomplish individual, team, school, and school system goals (Learning Forward, 2011). Learning Forward explains that leaders of professional learning are found at the classroom, school, and system levels (2011). In fact, Louis et al., define change leaders as anyone in any role who is responsible for change and improvement occurring successfully in the organization (2017). Specifically, the
authors mention department chairs in middle school and high school as potential change leaders in a school (Louis et al., 2017). Some leaders of professional learning might facilitate the learning themselves, or supervise others who facilitate it; they can have formal roles or informal roles; they can be in the role for a long period of time or short-term (Learning Forward, 2011, 2022). No matter the formality or duration of the role, it is important that leaders make their own career-long learning visible to others (Learning Forward, 2011, 2022). Learning themselves helps leaders clarify their values and beliefs, influence on others, and the achievement of organizational goals (Learning Forward, 2011, 2022). Their own actions should model the attitudes and behavior they expect of others (Learning Forward, 2011, 2022). In this study, I learned how the nine department chairs described and understood their responsibilities to include any that might fall within this leadership standard, and how they described the added complexities of the current pandemic influencing their responsibilities to include leadership roles. Therefore, I used these leadership characteristics and qualities to inform the interview questions I asked the nine department chairs in my study and the survey questions.

**Coaching as Leadership**

Learning Forward explains that coaching is an important aspect of leadership; coaching has significant value when they engage with the learners in a school to help support principals and teachers (Louis et al., 2017). Authors Joellen Killion and Cindy Harrison in the second edition of *Taking the Lead: New Roles for Teachers and School Based Coaches* (2017) describe and understand the role of coaching as a leadership position in a school that enhances, refines, strengthens, and expands professional practice. The more this role is available to professionals, the more it is likely to produce positive results in educator performance and student learning (Killion & Harrison, 2017). The authors define the role of coach as a teacher leader who has full-
or part-time responsibilities for advancing student success through teaching quality (Killion & Harrison, 2017). Although coaching cannot be standardized into a set of common, inflexible practices, the authors believe that leadership and coaching can be guided by a set of standards—specifically, Learning Forward’s Leadership Standards for Professional Learning (Killion & Harrison, 2017). Killion and Harrison’s (2017) definition of coaching and their set of standards that are guided by Learning Forward’s Leadership Standards for Professional Learning connect with prior literature on department chairs that supports department chairs as an important role in the school by helping principals as content experts and instructional leaders in school (Donitsa-Schmidt & Zuzovsky, 2020; Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021; Peacock & Melville, 2019). For that reason, I used this body of literature to see how, if at all, it connected to my work.

Coaching is a strategy for strengthening teaching and student learning for building a culture of collaboration and transparency within a school that has a variety of positive effects for teachers and students (Killion & Harrison, 2017). Research supports that teachers who experience high-quality coaching are more likely to enact new teaching practices and apply them more effectively than teachers who engage in workshops, conferences, or other traditional methods of professional learning (Killion & Harrison, 2017). In this study, I wondered how, if at all, department chairs might have described stepping into their role as coach with the teachers in their departments as a form of instructional leadership, as supported by decades of prior research (Feeney, 2009; Klar, 2013; Peacock & Melville, 2019; Wettersten, 1992). When leadership work is focused on the classroom level of practice through the concept of teacher leadership and coaching, there is an improvement in teacher quality and therefore student success (Killion & Harrison, 2017). The authors acknowledge that coaching can be an ambiguous term, and it is often insufficiently defined within schools (Killion & Harrison, 2017). Interestingly, coaching
and the role of department chairs are both marked by this ambiguity (Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021; Killion & Harrison, 2017; Peacock & Melville, 2019). I wondered if this was because department chairs’ roles have similarities to Killion and Harrison’s (2017) descriptions for the role of coaching as a leadership position. I hoped to learn more about this and the potential connections between the practice of the nine department chairs in my study and how, if at all, their descriptions of their role connect with Learning Forward’s ten roles for teacher leadership.

Similar to the literature on department chairs that emphasizes the importance of defining the role of the department chair within a school (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013), Killion & Harrison (2017) write that it is important to craft a specific definition of coaching within schools so educators can align assumptions and definitions directly with the conditions and context in which they work. When done correctly, coaching makes a positive contribution to increasing teacher efficacy, practice, student achievement, and school performance (Killion & Harrison, 2017). In fact, schools and school systems improve when coaches share leadership within the school, focus professional learning on the school’s goals, and increase collaboration among teachers (Killion & Harrison, 2017). The same can be said for the role of department chairs (Peacock & Melville, 2019). In order for coaching to be successful, a key piece is a clearly defined purpose and goal with clear roles for coaches to guide their daily work, just as with the role of department chairs (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013; Killion & Harrison, 2017). They can be used to improve a whole school or department, personalize professional learning for staff, promote self-directed professional learning, create a learning-centered mode of professional dialogue, and build capacity for leadership (Killion & Harrison, 2017). Coaches open doors, build bridges, and create lines of communication for collaboration, innovation, and problem solving (Killion &
Harrison, 2017). The similarities between the prior research on the potential for department chairs as instructional leaders (Feeney, 2009; Klar, 2013; Peacock & Melville, 2019) and Killion and Harrison’s (2017) descriptions of coaches as a leadership role within a school building lead me to wonder how, if at all the nine department chairs in my study might be working as coaches and teacher leaders when they describe their role and responsibilities. For that reason, I used Killion and Harrison’s (2017) descriptions for coaches as teacher leaders to inform my interview questions (see Appendices B and C) as I learned more about the way the nine department chairs in my study described their practice. I also used these descriptions to inform the survey questions I used for all department chairs in the three schools.

**Ten Roles for Teacher Leaders**

As a result of the positive effects that leadership can have in schools, with Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) even describing leadership as second only to classroom instruction among school-related factors that contribute to student learning, teacher leadership has garnered much attention as an important aspect of school leadership (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Yet, the concept of teacher leaders tends to be an “umbrella term” with researchers using many different titles to refer to this idea (Neumerski, 2012 p. 320 as cited by Wenner & Campbell, 2017). For example, teacher leader could encompass anything from department chair, to reading specialists, to agents of school change in and out of the classroom (Pan, Wiens, & Moyal, 2023). Within the literature on teacher leadership, teacher leaders have been called coordinator, coach, specialist, lead teacher, department chair, and mentor teacher (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Therefore, in their review of the theoretical and empirical literature on teacher leaders, Wenner and Campbell (2017) provide a clear definition of teacher leaders as “teachers who maintain K-12 classroom-based teaching responsibilities, while also taking on leadership
responsibilities outside of the classroom” (p.140). This definition intentionally limits the role of teacher leader to describe an individual who teaches and also leads teachers (Wenner and Campbell, 2017). In other words, Wenner and Campbell’s (2017) definition of teacher leader includes the types of leadership that honor both the teacher and the leader. This definition narrows down previous conceptualizations of teacher leaders, such as other definitions of teacher leaders to include those who “lead within and beyond the classroom” (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009, p.6) and engage in responsibilities like coaching and mentoring colleagues, facilitating professional learning opportunities, developing curriculum, advocating for broader school change, and more (Jacobs, Beck, & Crowell, 2014 as cited in Bagley, 2016). While Wenner and Campbell’s (2017) definition might not include literacy or math coaches without teaching duties as a teacher leader, their definition would include high school department chairs who teach and lead the teachers within their departments. For this reason, Learning Forward’s descriptions for coaches as teacher leaders informed my interview questions as I learned more about the way the nine department chairs in my study described their practice and how, if at all, their descriptions of their role connected with Learning Forward’s ten roles for teacher leadership. These descriptions also informed the questions I used on the survey (see Appendix E) administered to all department chairs in the three schools of my study.

Killion & Harrison (2017) identify ten specific coaching roles for teacher leaders in a school that build upon Learning Forward’s Professional Learning Standards for Leadership. Killion and Harrison (2017) define coaches as “teacher leaders who have full- or part-time responsibilities for advancing student success through teaching quality” (p.xi). Although this definition varies from Wenner and Campbell’s (2017) aforementioned definition for teacher leader, Killion and Harrison’s (2017) definition can also include the role of department chair. In
my study, I used Killion and Harrison’s (2017) definition for coach to include teacher leaders, and Wenner and Campbell’s (2017) definition for teacher leaders to exclude a coach without teaching responsibilities. In other words, a coach could be an individual in a school whose responsibilities are meant to improve teaching quality, but a teacher leader should be a coach with teaching responsibilities. I consider department chairs to be both coaches and teacher leaders under these definitions as a result of their responsibilities to include teaching and leading their departments.

Clearly, coaching can be interpreted in a variety of ways; it might even vary from district to district and school to school within the same district (Killion & Harrison, 2017). Although some variation is useful because the coaches can respond to each school’s unique needs, it is important for schools to have a clear set of standards for their coaches to effectively lead (Killion & Harrison, 2017). For this reason, Killion and Harrison use Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning in Leadership to provide ten specific coaching roles with their functions (Killion & Harrison, 2017). These roles include: resource provider; data coach; instructional specialist; curriculum specialist; classroom supporter; learning facilitator; mentor; school leader; catalyst for change; and learner (Killion & Harrison, 2017). Killion & Harrison (2017) consider each of these roles as coaching roles, and therefore as types of teacher leaders according to their definition, whether or not their title of role includes the word ‘coach’ or ‘leader.’ Please see Table 1 for a detailed description of the ten roles, the definitions for each of these roles, their roles and responsibilities, why they are needed in a school, and the evidence that supports each role.

It is important to note that coaches typically fill multiple roles simultaneously (Killion & Harrison, 2017). While this can be challenging for a coach to juggle multiple roles and
responsibilities, they must be flexible and consistent (Killion & Harrison, 2017). It is a coach’s
daily work, emerging from their specific roles, that determines the success of a coaching
program (Killion & Harrison, 2017). The authors suggest that when schools and principals
specify the roles of a coach as teacher leader, coaches can better understand their roles and
account for their time to describe how they are improving teaching quality and student success
within their schools (Killion & Harrison, 2017). In addition, it is important to identify a coach’s
role because otherwise a coach might feel the need or pressure to be everywhere, doing
everything, all the time (Killion & Harrison, 2017). I wondered how, if at all, the nine department
chairs in my study describe and understand their own leadership within the role, and whether or
not what they describe aligns with any of these ten roles. In today’s complex environment, it
could be useful for principals and other school leaders to utilize the position of department chair
in a way that includes any of Learning Forward’s 10 coaching roles. For this reason, I sought to
learn more about how the department chairs in my study described enacting these roles. In Table
1, I include a list of the ten roles, the definitions for each of these roles, their roles and
responsibilities, why they are needed in a school, and the research Killion & Harrison (2017) use
as support for the role. For example, the authors define the first role of Resource Provider as a
teacher leader that helps teachers access and use resource for planning, instruction, and
assessment (Killion & Harrison, 2017). Within this role, a Resource Provider will typically
distribute and recommend resources to teachers that relate to what the teachers might need or
might be discussing (Killion & Harrison, 2017). I include that information under the column
“Definition & Role” in Table 1. I then list the specific responsibilities of a Resource Provider in
the next column, “Responsibilities,” which might include being a human resource to their
colleagues, helping teachers learn how to access, use, and evaluate research, to fulfill their role
successfully (Killion & Harrison, 2017). In the fourth column in Table 1, “Importance,” I list the authors’ reasons why the role is important in the school building. So, for example, the Resource Provider could stimulate teacher thinking and motivation, and within this role they might develop credibility with teachers as a first step into entering teachers’ classrooms (Killion & Harrison, 2017). Killion and Harrison (2017) cite Schmidt (2002) to support their interpretation of Resource Provider, and so I list Schmidt (2002) in the “Research” column. I used the information in Table 1 as I interviewed the nine department chairs in my study to learn how, if at all, their descriptions of their role connected with any of Learning Forward’s ten roles for teacher leadership.

Table 1

Learning Forward’s Ten Leadership Coaching Roles in a School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Definition &amp; Role</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Resource Provider     | • Helps teachers access and use resources for planning, instruction, and assessment.  
                        | • Distributes and recommends resources to teachers that relate to the topics the coach and teacher are discussing, emerging trends, and best practices within the school staff. | • Human resource to colleagues, providing materials and technology resources.  
                        | • Helps teachers know how to access, select, use, and evaluate resources that are of high quality and aligned with the curriculum and learning needs of their students.  
                        | • Apply research findings by providing                                           | • Helps the coach develop trust and credibility with teachers, and might be the first step into entering teachers’ classrooms.  
                        |                                                                                   | • Stimulates teacher thinking and motivation.                                     | • Teachers can concentrate on their learning process and alternatives to their current practice without the burden of locating appropriate services. | Schmidt, 2002. |
## School Updates on Current Research

- Helping teachers interpret and understand the implications of the research.
- Works with teachers to effectively integrate resources into instruction to improve student learning, discussing what they observe when teachers apply the resources.

### Data Coach

- Supports teachers in analyzing, interpreting, and using a variety of data to improve decision making, performance, and results at the classroom and school level.
- Data is used to increase educator effectiveness and results for all students to plan, assess, and evaluate.

- Helps teachers identify, analyze, and interpret data.
- Supports teachers in using data to inform their decision-making about their students.
- Assists teachers in knowing when and how to seek and integrate sources of data, determining which data to use for what types of decisions, analyzing and

- Data provides evidence for teachers to assess student achievement and their own professional growth.
- Helps monitor progress toward the goals of the schoolwide professional learning plan.
- Increases teachers’ openness to considering multiple sources and types of data.
- Empowers teachers by giving them a

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Neuman, 2016.
Sweeney, 2010.
Wellman & Lipton, 2017.
| Instructional Specialist | • Aligns instruction with curriculum to meet the needs of all students.  
  • Affects the planning and implementation of classroom instruction to increase student learning. | • Supports teachers in providing high-quality teaching to meet student learning needs.  
  • Ensures all students experience high-quality, effective instruction that is equitable across all classrooms.  
  • Uses an instructional framework or set of learning principles for consistency, or helps the | • Provides much-needed support that increases the likelihood of implementation of newly learned practices.  
  • Minimizes the steep learning curve for teachers.  
  • Instruction is more effective when coaches support deliberate and thoughtful decision making on the front end of instruction. | • Killion, 2015.  
  • Love, Whitacre, & Smith, 2016.  
  • Sweeney, 2010. |
| Curriculum Specialist | • Ensures understanding and high-level implementation of adopted curriculum.  
• Meant for coaches serving in content-specific roles like science, math, or literacy. | • Helps teachers become sophisticated users of available curriculum and developers of their own classroom curriculum.  
• Aligns the written, taught, and tested curriculum.  
• Dissects standards to identify the | • Creates a shift from teachers as consumers of curriculum guides to developers of them.  
• Supports teachers when content standards evolve to become more rigorous.  
• Builds teacher capacity to critique available curricular | • Hall & Hord, 2015.  
• Remillard, 2016.  
<table>
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<th>essential knowledge and skills students need to achieve the standards.</th>
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<td>Develops units and lessons to achieve learning outcomes.</td>
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<td>Writes benchmarks to measure progress towards the standards.</td>
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<td>Analyzes curricular materials to determine what supports student achievement of the standards.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supports teachers in making decisions about the content of their lessons.</td>
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<td>Guides teachers in sequencing learning so individual lessons complement and contribute to deeper learning of the key concepts.</td>
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<td>Identifies what to assess, and writes formative assessments.</td>
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<td>resources for their alignment with the curriculum, level of complexity, accuracy, bias, and accessibility to ensure student learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning Facilitator</td>
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- Engages in conversations and reflections as soon as possible after the lesson.
- Acts as an expert or consultant to help the teacher improve his/her practice.
- Serves as trainer, facilitator, presenter of professional learning for individuals, teams, or whole faculty.
- Supports teachers to develop their capacity to become learning facilitators.
- Exciting and motivating, this role is a coach’s next step to future work with teachers. Implementation support is essential to help teachers transfer learning to practice.

- Plans and implements a wide range of learning opportunities for teachers in either structured and planned or naturally occurring learning designs to develop teachers’ capacity for effecting learning.
- Includes action research, classroom walks, conference presentations, construction portfolios, examining student work samples, face-to-face courses, lesson studies, online courses, seminars,
<table>
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<th>Mentor</th>
<th>Coaches provide the moral, emotional, and psychological support new professionals need so that they gain confidence and efficacy and a sense of belonging within a professional community. This role is meant to contribute to the development of other professionals.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensures new teachers and those new to the school or district are acclimated and acculturated into their new workplace. Checks in frequently with mentees. Makes sure new teachers have the tools and equipment to do their work and know the procedures and policies that guide teacher expectations. Build a trusting relationship to support a sense of belonging and acculturation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student success is dependent on teacher quality, and mentors are in a position to improve teacher quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Leader</td>
<td>Works as a thought partner with teachers and building-level administrators to advance school change initiatives that focus on educator and student results. Can be a formal or informal leadership role, or both.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Looks at patterns in the implementation of specific initiatives throughout a school and supports and assists administrators and teacher leaders in designing and implementing innovations.
- Gives the principal another set of eyes, offers the teacher’s perspective, considers how initiatives relate or clash, and maintains a focus on student learning.
- Applies tools for facilitating meetings, making decisions, resolving conflict, and reaching consensus.
- Sets norms with teams that meet regularly for a productive, comfortable, and safe climate.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Catalyst for Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- The coach seeks to influence improvement not only by disturbing the status quo and introducing new ideas, but also by shifting interpretations and assumptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- This role is about seeking opportunity to leverage talents, resources, and tasks to reach new levels.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| - Uses decision making tools and conflict resolution skills. |
| - Raises possibilities about how leaders and other educators could be more effective, move beyond the current state, and challenge mental models that limit new possibilities, including coaches’ own and those held by others. |
| - Speaks the unspoken to initiate conversation about alternative ways of thinking and acting. |
| - Engages teachers in evaluation think: individuals and teams looking critically and analytically to discover what is working and what is not in order to redefine their work and |

| - The culture of a school influences how people behave; if a school functions as a learning organization, the openness and practice of continuous improvement is routine. |

| - Christensten, Raynor, & McDonald, 2015. |
| - Dweck, 2006. |
| - Garmston & Wellman, 2016. |
| - Killion, 2002. |
| - Pascale, Sternin, & Sternin, 2010. |
| - Petrides & Nodine, 2005. |
| - Pink, 2009. |
| - Scharmer, 2016. |
| - Schon, 1983. |
| - Senge, 2006. |
| - Tencer & Cardoso, 2014. |
| Learner | • Models continuous learning while keeping current as a thought leader in the school. | • Clearly and publicly identifies what they want to learn.  
• Takes charge of their own learning.  
• Uses reflection as a process to support their own learning.  
• Engages in dialogue about new ideas with their colleagues to help clarify their own understanding of the ideas and to gain new perspectives. | • Learning and modeling continuous improvement can influence others through their actions.  
• When coaches model learning behaviors, it has the potential to impact teacher attitudes and behaviors. | • Ericsson, Prietula, & Cokely, 2007).  
• Fullan, 1994.  
• Gladwell, 2008.  
• Killion, 2015.  
• Killion & Todnem, 1991.  
• Schon, 1983.  
• Senge, 1990.  
• Sternberg, 1999. |
2.4 Learning-Oriented Model for Leadership Development

Section Overview

In today’s complex environment, especially the new demands placed on leadership as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a pressing need to support adult growth (Drago-Severson et al., 2020; Militello & Argent, 2021). Drago-Severson’s (2004, 2008, 2009, 2012, 2016) model for learning-oriented leadership increases the cognitive, emotional, intrapersonal, and interpersonal capacities that enable us to better manage the complexities of leading, learning, teaching, and living (Drago-Severson, 2012). Leaders who support this kind of growth in themselves are then better able to support this growth in other adults (Drago-Severson, 2012). In other words, a leader’s internal capacities influence how they can support others (Drago-Severson, 2012). This growth is crucial to better leading and managing the complex and ever-changing demands within today’s schools (Drago-Severson, 2012; Drago-Severson, et al., 2020). The pillar practices, which are informed by Constructive-Developmental Theory (CDT), help us understand that we can support our own and each other’s growth by employing these practices with developmental intentionality (Drago-Severson, 2009). Doing so will help educators and leaders to meet the multiple, complex, demands of today (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2016).

Supporting authentic adult learning has been proven to increase student achievement and improve schools so they can be true learning centers where all can grow (Guskey, 1999, 2000). In my study, I hoped to learn how, if at all, and to what degree, the nine department chairs described employing any one of the four pillar practices in their practice as department chairs with teachers in their department.

Researchers have applied Drago-Severson’s model to principals, assistant principals, superintendents, and teachers (Benis Scheier-Dolberg, 2014; Codd, 2015; Joswick-O’Connor,
I hoped to further this work by exploring how, if at all, the department chairs in my research described employing any of these pillar practices and why. Drago-Severson’s model is intended for all adults in school systems; school leaders who are working to support individual growth, and also the growth of a larger group of adults (Drago-Severson, 2009; Drago-Severson, 2012). This is because the need for sharing leadership among all educators in a school is even more palpable as our work becomes increasingly challenging (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2016). The literature on department chairs shows the potential for high school department chairs to be in a position of leadership (Brent et al., 2016; Donitsa-Schmidt & Zuzovsky, 2020; Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021; Peacock & Melville, 2019). For this reason, it is important to understand how, if at all, and to what degree, the department chairs in my study might be supporting teacher learning within their departments. Helping adults in schools grow is directly tied to improving teaching and fostering children’s development and achievement (Drago-Severson, 2009). Supporting learning in teachers is also described as an important function of department chairs that is critical to the effectiveness of the whole school (Bassett, 2016). The literature in this section informed the fourth research question in my study: how, if at all, and to what degree, do these nine department chairs employ any one of the four pillar practices (teaming, providing leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring) in their practice as department chairs? In addition, I used the pillar practices to inform the questions I asked the nine department chairs in my study during the interviews, as well as the survey questions I used for all department chairs in my study.

As I mentioned previously, Drago-Severson’s learning-oriented model for leadership development draws from adult development theory- in particular, Robert Kegan’s (1982, 1994, 2000) Constructive-Development Theory (CDT). In this section, I explain Kegan’s CDT, the
concept of a holding environment, and Drago-Severson’s Ways of Knowing (WOK), which are all the foundations for Drago-Severson’s four pillar practices - teaming, providing leadership roles, engaging in collegial inquiry, and mentoring - that can support the growth of adults’ internal capacities in many contexts. While exploring, and identifying, the nine department chairs’ WOK is outside the scope of my study, I explain Drago-Severson’s WOK in detail because they are crucial aspects of the theory behind the pillar practices.

**Constructive-Development Theory (CDT)**

Robert Kegan’s (1982, 1994, 2000) CDT is the theoretical underpinning of Drago-Severson’s model for leadership development, and the primary lens that informs thinking about how to shape learning environments that support internal capacity building (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2008, 2009, 2012). Because it directly informs the learning-oriented model of school leadership – the four pillar practices that will be used as a lens in this study – I provide an overview of the theory and how it informs the pillar practices.

**Overview of CDT**

CDT rests on three primary ideas: constructivism, developmentalism, and subject-object balance. Constructivism is the idea that we actively construct and make meaning of our experiences and create our own realities with respect to cognitive, emotional, intrapersonal, and interpersonal pathways of development (Drago-Severson, 2009). Developmentalism is the way in which we make meaning and construct reality (Drago-Severson, 2009). The ways in which we make meaning can develop over time, and throughout the life span, provided that we benefit from developmentally appropriate supports and challenges (Drago-Severson, 2009). Lastly, the subject-object balance describes the relationship between what we can take a perspective on, or hold as the object, and what we are embedded in and cannot see or be responsible for, or what
we are subject to (Drago-Severson, 2009). As we grow from one way of knowing to another, the self is able to reflect on what it was earlier subject to and hold it as object (Drago-Severson, 2009). It is important to note that development is not equal to intelligence; in other words, it is how a person knows and not what a person knows and is used as a way to help us understand ourselves and others (Drago-Severson, 2012).

**CDT in Drago-Severson’s Theory**

Drago-Severson’s theory is based on three big ideas informed by CDT. First, as adults, we make meaning in different ways (Drago-Severson, 2012). Second, we need both support and challenges to grow, and third, when working to support growth we need to calibrate the nature of our leadership to the developmental orientation of those with whom we are working (Drago-Severson, 2012). CDT supports the notion of developmental diversity—adults have different ways of understanding and experiencing the world (Drago-Severson, 2012). In other words, differences in our behaviors, feelings, and thinking are often related to differences in how we construct or make meaning of our experiences (Drago-Severson, 2009). Within this theory, a person is an active meaning-maker with respect to cognitive, affective, interpersonal, and intrapersonal experiences and how they intersect (Drago-Severson, 2012). This theory helps to explain why we have different capacities and different needs for growth and helps us understand that growth is possible (Drago-Severson, 2009). It also helps us understand the developmental underpinnings of the pillar practices, which is a theory that was explored in my study, by showing that teachers need different supports and challenges to grow from engaging in these practices (Drago-Severson, 2009).
The Holding Environment

Another key component of Drago-Severson’s learning-oriented leadership model is the concept of a holding environment. The term holding environment was first described in the 1960s by D.W. Winnicott, a pediatrician, to describe the different types of holding infants need to achieve healthy physical and psychological growth (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012). Kegan (1982) used the term to include the kinds of environments that would provide opportunities and holding adults need, as well, throughout our lives- guidance, support, nourishment, care, and developmentally appropriate challenges (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012). There are three important functions within the holding environment. First, it is important to recognize and confirm who a person is, and to meet that person where he/she is without an urgent push for change (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012). Next, when a person is ready, it is important to let go, or to challenge or stretch the person by encouraging him/her to grow beyond the way he/she makes meaning (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012). Lastly, it is important to remain in place as the person grows (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012).

Drago-Severson’s pillar practices can serve as holding environments (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012). Two key factors within the holding environment are offering a healthy balance of both high supports and high challenges, and also a goodness of fit, or match, between the holding environment and an adult’s WOK (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012). I explain more about WOK and how the pillar practices attend to these key factors in next section.

Ways of Knowing (WOK)

Ways of Knowing (WOK) are the ways we interpret and respond to the world around us, or the lens through which all experience is filtered (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012, 2016). In general, people tend to engage with the same WOK within different roles and across different
contexts (Drago-Severson, 2012). Also, just like CDT, although they are hierarchical in nature, one isn’t necessarily better than the other unless the demands of the environment call for higher-level capacities than we have (Drago-Severson, 2012). For that reason, adults in leadership do require the ability to demonstrate more complex developmental capacities—self-authoring capacities--as a result of the more complex demands placed on the role (Drago-Severson, 2012, 2016; Kegan & Lahey, 2016). Therefore, while I did not assess the WOK of the nine department chairs in my study because it was beyond the scope of my study, it is important to consider how the nine department chairs described using the pillar practices, which can serve as holding environments to develop one’s WOK, so the educators within their departments can develop more capacities to meet the demands in today’s highly complex environment—especially with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this section, I describe the four primary WOK of adults. In the next section, I explain how these WOK inform the pillar practices, and how I used the pillar practices as a lens in my study.

**The Instrumental Knower**

The first WOK is instrumental. People with an instrumental WOK are bound by rules and doing things in the ‘right’ way (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). They are run by their own concrete needs and desires, and while they understand that other people have wishes and feelings, they cannot fully integrate others’ perspectives into their own (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Instead, they look at other people as though they are either helpers or obstacles to getting their own concrete needs met (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Because their thinking is dualistic (there are right or wrong answers), they demonstrate capacities in concrete ways and feel most comfortable when authorities offer explicit support, or step-by-step directions (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012).
The Socializing Knower

The second WOK is socializing. A person with a socializing WOK has a greater internal capacity for reflection than an instrumental knower, and therefore he/she can think about his/her thinking and other people’s behavior (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). They can also make generalizations from one context to another (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). However, they cannot hold relationships as object; instead, they are run by them (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). For that reason, they need and seek others’ approval because the expectations of others run the socializing knower (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Just as they hold others responsible for their feelings, they feel responsible for other people’s feelings as well (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012).

The Self-Authoring Knower

The third WOK is self-authoring, when one has developed the internal capacity to have a perspective on their relationships and society’s expectations (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). No longer relying on others’ approval, self-authoring knowers can decide what they do and what they believe for themselves (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). They are guided by their own internally generated values and standards (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). The self-authoring knower’s ultimate concern is with demonstrating his/her own competence and preforming up to their own internal standards and values (Drago-Severson, 2012). As leaders, these knowers view conflict as a natural part of life, work, and leadership, and as a way to enhance their own and others’ perspectives to achieve larger organizational goals (Drago-Severson, 2012). They have a firm vision and do not yet have the internal capacity to take perspective on their self-system because it is embedded in their ideals and principles (Drago-Severson, 2012). This could be seen as a leadership strength, but it also might prevent a self-
authoring leader from hearing feedback because he or she is so entrenched in his or her own understanding (Drago-Severson, 2012).

**The Self-Transforming Knower**

The fourth and last WOK is self-transforming. Adults who are self-transforming have the capacity to examine issues from multiple perspectives and to critique their own internal self-systems (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). In other words, their own beliefs have become object, and their perspectives are now incomplete without others. In fact, they seek out others’ ideas as they become less invested in their own identity and more open to other points of view (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Contradictions are no longer threatening to their self-system because they actually deeply want to be changed by others (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). They are able to manage and understand tremendous amounts of complexity (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012).

**Connection to My Study**

As I mentioned earlier, one way of knowing is not necessarily better than another (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). However, it might be necessary for an adult to have a more complex WOK if the demands of the environment call for higher-level capacities than one is capable of (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). The four pillar practices, of which I go into greater detail in the next section, can serve as a way to develop one’s capacities to grow into a more complex WOK (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Again, while my study did not assess the participants’ WOK, I explored how, if at all, and to what degree, the nine department chairs described employing the pillar practices, and why. This is important because the environment in today’s schools are extremely demanding and complex (Drago-Severson et al., 2020), which
calls for leaders and educators who can navigate these demands through more sophisticated ways of knowing.

**Pillar Practices**

Drago-Severson’s uses the term ‘pillar’ for her pillar practices (2004, 2008, 2009, 2012) because they are first, a foundation or structure for supporting adult growth and second, important practices for designing and infusing professional learning environments with developmental intentionality. Each of the four pillar practices creates opportunities for adults to collaborate and engage in dialogue and reflection, important tools for professional learning growth (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). While there are four distinct pillars, they are mutually reinforcing initiatives and should be used together to support and challenge adults at different development levels (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). In this section, I describe each of the four pillar practices, and how they can be used within each of the ways of knowing. I also explain how and why I used this model in my study as I sought to understand how, if at all, and to what degree, the nine department chairs described employing any of the pillar practices, and why.

**Teaming**

Teaming, the first of the four pillar practices, is the most frequently employed practice for supporting adult learning because it is a powerful way to enable adult growth through collaborative decision making and reflecting on curricula, school missions, and teaching philosophies (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Some of the most common ways schools use teaming are team teaching, strategy development and shared decision making, inquiry, critical friends, and professional learning and development (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Teaming is used as a way to promote personal and organizational learning through collaboration,
enabling teachers to take a broader perspective on themselves and their work (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Adults who experience teaming build collaborative structures to share and exchange ideas and decision-making responsibilities (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Benefits to teaming include opportunities for group and individual reflection, innovation, building capacity, and a decrease of isolation (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). There are some important aspects that need to be considered when thinking about successful teaming. 

Drago-Severson (2004, 2009, 2012) writes that first, leaders need to allocate time, clarify the purpose and product of collaboration, invite team members to discuss how they will work together (including procedures on how the team will operate, defining consensus, developing an assessment for team effectiveness, and discussing how they will resolve conflicts), and create SMART goals (strategic & specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, and time-bound).

It is also important to take developmentally diverse WOK into account when thinking about teaming. For example, those with an instrumental WOK will need to be challenged to think differently about their own and other team members’ perspectives on teaching practice, reform initiatives, the school, and other ideas that might be discussed in these meetings (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). For socializing knowers, teaming serves as a safe context for learning about other colleagues’ experiences, practices, ideas, and perspectives (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). While conflict and disagreement are threatening to socializing knowers, teaming creates a safe space for differences of opinion (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Teaming can provide those who are self-authoring a context in which they can learn from other people’s perspectives and opinions about teaching, practice, reform initiatives, and school improvement (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). They understand conflict as a natural occurrence, and they will likely use the learning and ideas offered by other team members to
help themselves in their own self-understanding and improvement (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Lastly, as self-transforming knowers have a deep respect for other people’s opinions as well as their own, teaming can provide opportunities for collegial exchange, cooperation, and consensus building (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). They might also focus on the socioemotional dimensions of team building as a result of their capacity to harmonize different points of view (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012).

**Providing Leadership Roles**

The second pillar practice, providing leadership roles, is another developmental practice that can support the growth of adults with diverse ways of knowing (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Drago-Severson makes a point to distinguish providing leadership roles from the notion of distributed leadership, because providing leadership roles is not about simply distributing tasks or responsibilities. Instead, it also requires providing supports and challenges so the adults can grow from their leadership roles (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Providing leadership roles can benefit school improvement, teacher growth, increased retention, and higher morale as adults within a school assume different types of leadership roles as they develop a shared vision, engage in inquiry to guide decisions and practice, and reflect on what does and does not work within the school (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012).

When employing this pillar practice, it is necessary to consider how individuals with diverse ways of knowing might enact their leadership roles. Instrumental knowers might think about the role in terms of what they need to accomplish to get the job done in the ‘right way’ (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). They tend to be task-oriented and might expect to be rewarded concretely for a job well done (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Socializing knowers, on the other hand, need to feel safe and comfortable asking questions and requesting
the help and guidance of authorities and/or valued others when they are unsure about what to do (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Because the approval of others is extremely important to them, and they rely on an absence of conflict, they want and need authorities to be available as sources of knowledge and to confirm and accept their leadership actions (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Leadership roles can provide self-authoring knowers a context in which to learn from other people’s perspectives (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). They have the internal capacity to internally evaluate other people’s suggestions, ideas, and perspective to wonder how they might integrate them with their own because they understand that varying perspectives inform decision making and the self (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Lastly, self-transforming knowers might appreciate the value of leadership roles because it gives them the opportunity to bring people together in a community, and bring in a spirit of collaboration, collegiality, and mutual respect (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). They have the capacity to lead and think strategically, and they can be agile and adaptive in the midst of a conflict (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). In addition, while they enjoy working collaboratively and engaging with different perspectives, they are also gifted with decision making and delegation (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012).

**Collegial Inquiry**

Collegial inquiry is the third pillar practice and can be considered a form of collaborative reflective practice (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Reflective practice is thought to improve teaching, build leadership, and enhance student achievement as educators are given the opportunity to learn from diverse perspectives and build relationships (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). It is the process of working intentionally to understand thinking, behaviors, and events from a variety of perspectives rather than reflecting on practice, which can be done alone
Collegial inquiry might look like teaching walks, informal conversations, study groups, or retreats (Drago-Severson, 2009). It is important for leaders who employ collegial inquiry to prioritize spaces for these meaningful conversations as educators explore their own, and one another’s, firmly held convictions, assumptions, and beliefs about teaching, leading, and life (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012).

The way in which educators engage in collegial inquiry varies depending on the different ways of knowing. Instrumental knowers might need step-by-step rules and guidelines about how to participate in collegial inquiry, and they might share concrete details of their practice and wonder whether it is right or wrong (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Socializing knowers may need to feel safe in the environment so they feel comfortable taking risks when sharing their perspectives—especially if the perspective is different than an esteemed colleague’s (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Self-authoring knowers might focus on evaluating and enhancing their own practices and decisions by looking internally to determine whether or now they are meeting their own standards for instruction and leadership practice (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Self-transforming knowers might value the open structure for engaging in dialogue and will experience collegial inquiry as an opportunity to deepen their interpersonal relationships with the other team members (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012).

**Mentoring**

The fourth and final pillar practice is mentoring, which Drago-Severson defines as a developmental relationship that is embedded within a career context (Drago-Severson, 2009). As a result of the increasingly demanded expectations placed on leaders, and the increased stress and isolation of their roles, a critical need for mentoring emerged among principals, superintendents, and those aspiring to the principalship (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012).
This is because mentoring when employed with developmental intentionality can create a context that enables adults to examine, learn from, and broaden their own and other people’s perspectives (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012).

It is important for mentors to offer a delicate balance of supports and challenges that are aligned with a person’s way of knowing to support growth (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). If one has a mentee who is an instrumental knower, he/she might need specific advice, concrete skills, and information about instructional and/or leadership practice (Drago-Severson, 2009). A socializing mentee sees mentoring as an arena for receiving positive feedback and validation (Drago-Severson, 2009). They might often ask what should be done, and they should be encouraged to look inside themselves as they think about next steps (Drago-Severson, 2009). Those who are self-authoring can view the relationship with their mentor as one in which they are collaborating to improve their capacities and to grow (Drago-Severson, 2009). The relationship is reciprocal to them; they might internally assess a mentor’s feedback (Drago-Severson, 2009). While they are comfortable with conflict and accept that it is natural in any relationship, they should be challenged to question their ideologies (Drago-Severson, 2009). Lastly, self-transforming knowers may find mentoring most satisfying when the relationship is a partnership that aims to be mutually beneficial (Drago-Severson, 2009). This is because they might see mentoring relationships as a way for both partners to deepen their interpersonal relationship with one another (Drago-Severson, 2009). They value dialogue that enables them to develop a richer understanding of their own and their mentor’s assumptions, ideologies, commitments, intentions, and strengths and limitations (Drago-Severson, 2009).
**Connection to My Study**

As potential and acting leaders, department chairs are in a position to employ these pillar practices as a way to increase the developmental capacities of the educators within their departments. In today’s increasingly complex environment, principals can use the help of department chairs to foster the developmental growth and internal capacities of the educators within the school in order to better the school by improving teaching and fostering children’s development and achievement (Drago-Severson, 2009). This could be done within the department chairs’ respective departments as they support the learning within the teachers of their own departments, who in turn could foster their students’ development and achievement. While researchers have studied the pillar practices within the context of superintendents, principals, assistant principals, teacher leaders, and teachers, in my study, I sought to learn how, if at all, and to what degree, the nine department chairs might use any of the pillar practices and why. Through my survey, I also sought to learn if and how all the department chairs in the three schools might use the pillar practices. It is important to note that whether or not the department chairs in my study are using the pillar practices with developmental intentionality is beyond the scope of my study.

**2.5 Modern Orthodox Jewish Day School**

It is important to understand the context of the setting in my study, Modern Orthodox Jewish day schools in New York City. When it comes to educational research and literature, it can be difficult to apply the findings of public school studies because of the unique characteristics of Jewish day schools (Menachem, 2017). To my knowledge, while there is some research on Jewish day schools, the research largely pertains to principals and teachers. I have not encountered any research whatsoever on the role of the department chair in the Jewish day
school setting. I searched Google Scholar and other databases through the Teachers College Library, using key words such as Modern Orthodox Jewish day school, department chair Jewish day school, department chair yeshiva, etc. In general, I have found that Jewish education is a sector of the educational system to which scant attention has been paid; research on Jewish day schools has remained a relatively undeveloped area, with only a handful of studies that deal with instructional leadership (Menachem, 2017; Sassoon, 2016; Tamir, et al., 2017). I hoped to further this field by using the setting of a Modern Orthodox Jewish day school in my study.

**Definition of Modern Orthodox Jewish Day Schools**

The Avi Chai Foundation, a private foundation committed to the perpetuation of the Jewish people, Judaism, and the centrality of the state of Israel to the Jewish people, defines a Jewish day school as an educational institution with a dual curriculum, religious and academic (Avi Chai, 2020). The foundation defines the denomination of Modern Orthodox schools as distinguishable by a number of characteristics: first, these schools are co-educational; second, there is a strong emphasis on both the Judaic and general studies programs; third, Hebrew language is stressed and is often the language of instruction in Judaic courses; lastly, there is a strong identification with Israel and Zionism is essential to these institutions (Avi Chai, 2020). While Modern Orthodox schools do belong to the larger group of Orthodox Jewish day schools, they are ideologically distinct in terms of their emphasis on the integration of modernity into the curriculum and culture of the school (Menachem, 2017). In other words, Modern Orthodox Jewish day schools synthesize Jewish values and observance of the Jewish law with the secular, modern world (Menachem, 2017). This translates to a synthesis between a strong secular curriculum as well a strong Judaic studies curriculum (Menachem, 2017). In the Jewish world, independent Jewish day schools are considered the jewels within the Jewish educational system.
(Knafo, 2012). They are parochial schools, religiously sponsored just like thousands of Catholic and other denominational schools; in fact, their secular curriculum is similar to what is offered by public schools (Knafo, 2012). However, Jewish day schools are not religiously nor educationally centralized, and so the boards of and principals of each school are in charge of creating the mission and policies (Sassoon, 2016). By educational standards, Jewish day schools are small, a circumstance that has financial and curricular implications (Avi Chai, 2020).

**Characteristics of Modern Orthodox Jewish Day Schools**

A large percentage of teachers in Modern Orthodox Jewish day schools are women, and there has been a slow increase of women in administration (Sassoon, 2016). In a recent census from the 2018-2019 school year, the Avi Chai foundation reported that a total of 292,172 students were enrolled in Jewish elementary and secondary schools in the United States, a 14.7% increase in the 5-year period from their last census, and a 58.5% increase from their first census in 1998 (Avi Chai, 2020). That growth is mainly attributable to New York and New Jersey. Specifically, between 1998 and 2018, enrollment in day schools in New York grew by a 64.1% increase (Avi Chai, 2020). In particular, Modern Orthodox day school enrollment increased by 21.5% in New York City and the suburban New York City region.

Because the boards and principals of each school are in charge of creating the mission and policies principals are not accountable for student achievement, school improvement, and professional development in the way public schools are (Sassoon, 2016). Unsurprisingly, as a result, the literature on Jewish day schools points to insufficient instructional leadership; teachers of Jewish day schools describe an environment with little-to-no instructional oversight (Sassoon, 2016). Educational leaders are seen as administrative or organizational managers, and those in
leadership roles in Jewish education are not always taking responsibility for the professional development of teachers (Sassoon, 2016).

In addition to the lack of instructional leadership, literature on Modern Orthodox Jewish day schools describes financial challenges as one of the greatest challenges that currently exists in this educational setting (Avi Chai, 2020; Sassoon, 2016). Jewish day schools are privately funded by tuition and donors (Sassoon, 2016). Additionally, while public school principals get support for initiatives, Modern Orthodox schools do not- they are free from federal, state, and district mandates, and so do not receive the supports that would come with them (Sassoon, 2016). This could potentially explain principals’ limitations in instructional leadership; these financial factors might be constraining leadership in Jewish day schools (Sassoon, 2016).

Before COVID-19, these financial factors and a tuition crisis dominated the literature on challenges within the Jewish day school system. The tuition crisis is the increasing inability of parents to pay the increasing tuitions for their growing families to attend Jewish day schools (Sassoon, 2016). The Avi Chai Foundation describes these challenges as enormous because without these funds, Jewish day schools cannot be sustained (Avi Chai, 2020). At the same time, the challenge is made even greater by the necessity to create additional facilities to accommodate the remarkable growth of the Jewish day school setting (Avi Chai, 2020). Another challenge that might impede instructional leadership is time (Sassoon, 2016). With a dual curriculum, time is a challenge because schools need to fit both secular and Judaic courses into the school day. Additionally, there is a shorter workweek- Fridays are a half-day of school because of the preparations for Sabbath that begins on Fridays at sundown.
Challenges During the COVID-19 and Racial Inequality Pandemics

As one could expect, the COVID-19 pandemic and explosion of racial justice protests added to the aforementioned challenges (Avi Chai, 2020; Shanes, 2020). It is important to consider the challenges that exist within the Modern Orthodox school in the face of the pandemics, because the nine department chairs in my study described the ways they experience and encounter these challenges in their roles, and how they manage these specific challenges in addition to the challenges the literature attributes to the role of department chair.

Like all schools, Modern Orthodox Jewish day schools required a fast transition to online learning (Avi Chai, 2020). When the seriousness of the pandemic grew apparent in Mid-March of 2020, the response of the Modern Orthodox community was immediate; there was a strong respect for the science and civic duty orders to stay at home, and Jewish day schools quickly accepted the directives that in-person instruction must immediately stop (Shanes, 2020). Leading Modern Orthodox organizations issued clear directives on this matter, emphasizing that in addition to schools shutting down, synagogue services, celebrations, funerals, and other mass gatherings must immediately stop (Shanes, 2020).

However, during this time, the ultra-Orthodox community in New York City garnered a lot of attention for their reticence to forego celebrations, funerals, and in-person instruction (Shanes, 2020). Many leaders in this community openly called for schools to remain open, which they did keep open for weeks during the pandemic (Shanes, 2020). Many news reports, as well as New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, and New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, exposed flagrant violations of this community’s disregard of stay-at-home orders, prohibitions on large gatherings, and schools’ continuing to meet in semi-secrecy with photos of the Orthodox Jewish community gathering en masse (Shanes, 2020). Although this was not happening within the
Modern Orthodox sector, it resulted in a sharp increase of antisemitism across the United States; Jews spreading disease is an ancient antisemitic trope that found new ground during the pandemic (Greenblatt, 2021).

Antisemitic conspiracy theories quickly became a growing concern amid the coronavirus pandemic (Comerford & Gerster, 2021). In 2020, the number of antisemitic incidents was the third highest ever on record, even as COVID-19 kept millions at home (Breslow, 2021; Greenblatt, 2021). Specifically, ‘Zoombombing’, a term that describes disrupting Zoom meetings with antisemitism, targeted Jewish institutions- including schools (Greenblatt, 2021). Statements such as, “Burn like a Jew” and “Kill all the Jews, Gas them All” flooded school Zoom sessions (Greenblatt, 2021). On Twitter, there were 17,000 tweets using the hashtag, “Hitler was Right” (Breslow, 2021). The New York City Police Department (NYPD) reported that in New York City, home to the largest Jewish population, antisemitic hate crimes were up by 51% in 2020 (Graham & Stack, 2021). In Midtown Manhattan, for example, a group of people attacked a Jewish man wearing a skullcap in broad daylight (Breslow, 2021). Mayor de Blasio issued a statement condemning the increase of antisemitism in New York City and acknowledged that the attacks were not in isolation and were not simply a few incidents (Breslow, 2021). The NYPD reported that the assaults mainly targeted Orthodox Jews in Brooklyn (Graham & Stack, 2021).

The protests for racial justice added greater complexity to the Modern Orthodox school system. While racial justice and equality are crucial tenants of Modern Orthodoxy, the issue became complex when the Modern Orthodox community felt the state of Israel and the police were under attack (Shanes, 2020). In response to the murder of George Floyd, a few Rabbis in the Modern Orthodox community openly endorsed the Black Lives Matter movement by name, despite the widespread belief in the Modern Orthodox Community that the Black Lives Matter
movement is steeped in Anti-Israel and antisemitic bias (Shanes, 2020). Other Modern Orthodox leaders issued statements about systemic racism and hedged support for racial justice without acknowledging the involvement of the police or specifically naming the Black Lives Matter movement in their statements (Shanes, 2020). Especially during a time where antisemitism hate crimes were up, the Modern Orthodox community felt an appreciation for the police department, whom they traditionally rely on for protection (Shanes, 2020).

Antisemitism was further amplified when tension in the Israel-Palestinian conflict increased during the spring of 2021. There were 305 incidents in May of 2021 recorded by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), a 115% increase from the same period last year; already at a 5-year high (McEvoy, 2021). Of these incidents, 190 were reported as harassment, 50 were cases of vandalism, and 11 were assaults (McEvoy, 2021). While there are no news reports that covered what it was like in the Modern Orthodox Jewish day schools during this time, I relay my experiences as both a teacher and mother of young children who attend a Modern Orthodox Jewish day school in Brooklyn, New York. We experienced an increase in security, as well as an increase in lockdown and shelter in place drills to prepare for real threats that targeted our schools and our area. At one point, our school switched to remote learning because there was a threat in the area and the school did not feel it was safe to operate in-person. The threat of antisemitic attacks is very prevalent in the Modern Orthodox community and Modern Orthodox school system, further demonstrating the need for strong leadership within these schools. In this study, I learned more about these challenges, and how the department chairs described these complex challenges.
2.6 Chapter Summary

To carry out my study of how nine high school department chairs in Modern Orthodox day schools describe and understand their role and responsibilities, their leadership in the role, the challenges they face, if any, and how they learn to manage those challenges, if at all, I identified four related bodies of literature to review: department chair literature (Brent et al., 2014; DeAngelis, 2013; Feeney, 2009; Klar, 2012; Klar, 2013; Kelley & Salisbury, 2013; Melville et al., 2016; Peacock, 2014; Peacock & Melville, 2019; Turner, 2019; Volonnino & Matthews, 2019; Wettersten, 1992) for its power in identifying aspects of the participants’ experience that are common to their position, Learning Forward’s Leadership Standard (Killion & Harrison, 2017; Learning Forward, 2011; Louis et al., 2017), which identifies aspects of leadership and how department chairs might be enacting leadership or coaching in their roles, the pillar practices (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2008, 2009, 2012), which inform how the department chairs may support adult growth and development, and Modern Orthodox Jewish day schools (Avi Chai, 2020; Breslow, 2021; Greenblatt, 202; Knafo, 2012; Menachem, 2017; Sassoon, 2016; Shanes, 2020; Tamir et al., 2017) to better understand the context of the study. Next, I describe and justify the methodological approach for my study in Chapter III.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The primary purpose of my study was to explore with a group of nine NYC high school department chairs from three different Modern Orthodox yeshivas, their perceptions of their role and responsibilities, their perceptions on how they manage any challenges they might experience, and how, if at all, they support professional growth through any of the four pillar practices (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016, 2018, 2020). I also hoped to learn how, if at all, their descriptions of their role as department chair connect to Learning Forward’s 10 roles for teacher leadership (2017). I developed a survey as well to administer to all the department chairs within the three schools in my study to learn even more about the role within this context. This, to the best of my knowledge, is an unexplored area in the literature. In this chapter, I explain in detail the methodology I used. I provide background on the Modern Orthodox Jewish day school and why I selected this particular site in which the participating department chairs will take part. While I mentioned the descriptive characteristics of the site in Chapter II, here I focus primarily on the criteria I employed for site selection.

In this chapter, I first present my research questions which guided my decisions about my methodology for data collection. Then, I discuss my rationale for the selection of a qualitative research approach, and specifically my rationale for using a case study approach. Next, I describe the criteria for the selection of the site and participants, followed by the methodology I chose for data collection and analysis and the way in which I attended to various validity threats. Finally, I describe the limitations to my study and then close with a summary of the chapter.

3.1 Research Questions

As I shared in Chapter 1, the following research questions guided my study.
1. How do nine department chairs from NYC yeshiva high schools describe and understand their own role and responsibilities as a department chair?

2. How, if at all, do their descriptions and understandings of their role as a department chair connect to Learning Forward’s 10 roles for teacher leadership?

3. What challenges, if any, do department chairs face in their roles as department chairs and how do they manage them?

4. How, if at all, to what degree, and why, do these nine department chairs employ any one of the four pillar practices (teaming, providing leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring) in their practice with teachers in their department as department chairs?

5. How, if at all, do all department chairs from these yeshiva high schools perceive their roles and responsibilities, challenges, collaboration, leadership practice, and possible employment of the pillar practices with teachers in their departments?

3.2 Rationale for a Qualitative Research Design

I chose a qualitative research approach because I was interested in learning more about how nine department chairs describe and understand their role, responsibilities, and experiences as department chairs in a Modern Orthodox Jewish day school. The goal of qualitative research is to understand the meaning, context, and process of participants’ experiences (Maxwell, 2013). Therefore, a qualitative approach is appropriate because I sought to understand more about the way the department chairs describe their experiences and challenges in the role, and how they manage any challenges they might have encountered. The study centers on learning from the participants’ own experiences and their own understanding. A quantitative approach would not be able to provide this information, because I sought to learn how the department chairs experience their roles. However, I included a quantitative element by asking all the department

3.3 Rationale for a Case Study

I selected a case study methodology for this qualitative research because my purpose was to bring out the various viewpoints and perspectives of participants using multiple sources of data (Yin, 2014). I selected an exploratory case study method for this qualitative research approach because case study research “involves the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting” (Creswell, 2014, p. 97). I developed an in-depth description and analysis of multiple cases of department chairs, with an in-depth understanding of these cases (Creswell, 2014). This included the interviews with nine department chairs from different departments from three different Modern Orthodox schools, in addition to a collection of documents and observations. After interviewing and observing the nine department chairs, I also administered a survey to all the department chairs in the three schools.

3.4 Site Selection

In this section, I explain my criteria for site selection. The selection was practically driven as I sought to study department chairs within Modern Orthodox yeshivas. My first selection criterion was to select high schools that met the description of a Modern Orthodox Jewish day school yeshiva based on the definition provided by the Avi Chai foundation (2020). As I discussed in Chapters I and II, the Avi Chai Foundation (2020) reported that between a 20-year census period, Modern Orthodox day school enrollment has increased 21.5% in the New York City region. Therefore, in addition to feasibility, a second selection criterion was that the
schools chosen for my study would also be located within the five boroughs of New York City. In the 2018-2019 census, the Avi Chai Foundation (2020) reported 290 Jewish day schools in New York City: 4 in the Bronx, 226 in Brooklyn, 18 in Manhattan, 35 in Queens, and 7 in Staten Island. Of these 290 schools, the foundation identified 15 as Modern Orthodox, with 9,685 students enrolled (Avi Chai, 2020). I sent a letter of invitation to the Heads of School at 14 of the 15 schools that the Avi Chai Foundation (2020) identified as Modern Orthodox. This is because I recently held the position of department chair at one of the schools, and I did not want that to influence the study in any way.

3.5 Participant Selection

In this section, I describe my selection criteria for participants, and then provide detailed justification for each criterion. As I described in Chapter I, I purposefully selected the nine department chairs from three schools to ensure that they all met the following selection criteria, numbered for ease of reference below: (1) the heads of school in each Modern Orthodox school identifies the position of the participant as a department chair (2) the department chairs held the position for a minimum of two years (3) the department chairs had a minimum of three years’ teaching experience (4) the department chairs managed a team of at least two other teachers within their departments (5) there were three department chairs each from three disciplines. In addition, I administered the survey to all department chairs in the three schools, with only one selection criteria: The Head of School needed to identify that individual as a department chair. This is because I was looking for a larger sample (n=30) to learn more about department chairs’ perceptions and to pilot this survey as a potential tool for future researchers.
Participant Selection Criteria

Regarding the first criterion, I chose to study department chairs, and so it was important that the participants formally held the role of department chair as identified by the Head of School. Regarding the second criterion, rather than being new to the role, I wanted the department chairs to have a minimum of two years of experience in the role so they could bring their experiences to the interviews as they discussed their role and responsibilities, challenges they faced, supports they encountered, how they might lead, and how they might support adult learning with the teachers in their departments. I chose criterion three because the research illustrates that majority of department chairs have been teachers first for a few years (Brent et al., 2014). I decided on criterion four so the department chairs would be in a leadership role with the responsibility to manage more than one educator in their departments. Although the research does not specify the number of teachers typical in a department, the research does often refer to the plural ‘teachers’ or ‘members’ in a high school chair’s department (Brent et al., 2014; Kelley & Salisbury, 2013; Klar 2013; Peacock & Melville, 2019; Turner, 2019). This is also something I experienced within my own role as department chair. Regarding the last criterion, I wanted to include three department chairs from each of three different disciplines, such as English, science, and math, to determine whether or not patterns exist among these specific disciplines in my study, or if my findings might be attributed to the role of department chair as a whole, regardless of discipline.

Process of Selection

I began the selection by asking the Heads of School from three Modern Orthodox yeshivas to identify the department chairs in their schools who met the aforementioned criteria to conduct the interviews and allow me to conduct an observation. I asked the Heads of School
because they are familiar with the roles of the members in their organizations. It was also important for the department chairs to formally hold this title within their schools for the purpose of my study. Once the Heads of School identified the individuals who met the criteria, I asked the Heads of School to invite the department chairs to voluntarily participate in my study, and I provided them with the goals and processes of the study and consent forms, per Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol. I then asked the department chairs chosen for this study who accept the invitation to also complete the informed consent form and statement of participants’ rights (Appendix F).

**Survey Process of Selection**

I also asked the Heads of School to share the survey with all department chairs in the three schools. I also provided them with the goals and processes of the study and consent forms.

**Sample Size**

I chose to interview and observe nine department chairs because the literature on department chairs from their perspective is very limited, and so I believed it would be useful to have a thick and rich description. I also planned to add to my understanding of my research questions by surveying all department chairs in the three schools (n=24). I hoped to learn more about department chairs’ perceptions from this slightly larger sample.

**3.6 Data Collection**

**Section Overview**

I conducted in-depth qualitative interviews as the primary data source for this study (2 ninety-minute interviews with each of the nine participants). In addition, one 45-60-minute long observation of a department meeting between the first and second interviews with each of the participants (approximately 9 combined hours), and survey and document analysis provided
additional data. I answered my five research questions through semi-structured interviews and the survey to explore a deep understanding of the department chairs’ experiences in the role. I also observed one department meeting in between the first and second interviews, and collected documents (i.e., meeting agenda when available) that were distributed during or before these meetings from department chairs to teachers, or from principals to department chairs. I gave the department chairs the authority to choose the meeting I observed, and asked them why they chose that meeting during the second interview. The only criteria for the meeting was that the participants included the department chair and the teachers within his/her department. I used my notes from the observation and the documents I collected to provide more information on the roles and responsibilities of department chairs. I considered the language the department chairs used, and how, if at all, department chairs might have been demonstrating coaching and/or leadership roles, without using the meeting to make any judgments or assessments on how the department chairs ran their meetings.

The purpose of the observation was to get a sense of how the department chairs interacted on one occasion, to learn if it was a typical meeting, and to ask about the observation in the second interview. For these reasons, there was no research question around the observation because I recognize that it is only a small piece of how department chairs interact with their departments. A second purpose for the observation was to help me gain information about different aspects of the phenomena I am studying; I used the observation to describe some small insight into the settings, behavior, and events, while the interviewing was used to understand the perspectives and goals of the department chairs (Maxwell, 2013).

After the interviews and the observation in between, I administered a survey to all the department chairs in the three schools to learn more about the department chairs who participated
in the interviews and all of the department chairs in the three schools. I used the information I
 gained from administering the survey to learn how the department chairs in all three schools
described interpreting their roles and responsibilities, challenges, if any, and supports. I also
2020) to learn how the department chairs described supporting adult learning with teachers in
their departments, if at all.

There is currently no existing survey for department chairs as far as I know, and so another purpose of administering the survey I designed was to pilot it as a tool that might help other researchers learn more about department chairs in other contexts. The survey was also meant to triangulate my data, which involves using different methods as a check on one another, seeing if methods with different strengths and limitations all support a single conclusion to reduce the risk that my conclusions will reflect only the biases of a specific method, to allow me to gain a more secure understanding of the issues I investigated (Maxwell, 2013). Please see Appendix A for the timeline of my data collection.

**Document Review**

Before visiting the schools in my study, I reviewed widely available information about the schools by reviewing the schools’ websites, mission statements, and/or promotional materials for the schools. These documents were useful to help me learn more about the context of each school. I also asked the participants in my study if they would like to voluntarily share any documents or materials with me (i.e., the school’s job description for their positions, samples of agendas from department meetings, etc.) between the first and second interviews.
Department Chair Interviews

My first step in the data collection process was to administer one 90-minute semi-structured interview to the nine department chairs chosen for the study. I conducted eight of the nine first interviews in person, and one over Zoom. I recorded all the interviews with permission of the participants. I also first piloted the interviews with the chairs in the middle school where I currently teach, and I took the interview myself, following the protocols I outlined.

Interview 1

The first set of interview questions (Appendix B) were meant to address the first two research questions as I learned more about how each department chair describes his/her role and responsibilities as department chair, and how, if at all, they describe and understand their leadership in the role. I also established a rapport with the nine department chairs during the first interview.

After the first interview, as mentioned earlier, I conducted an observation of a department meeting. The meetings typically took place within one or two weeks after the first meeting, and no more than one month after. Soon after, I conducted a second interview.

Interview 2

I scheduled the second interview within a month of the observation because in the second interview I asked the department chairs to recall moments from their department meeting. Therefore, the meeting and the second interview were close together so the department chairs could recall the events of the meeting easily. In the second set of interview questions (Appendix C), I addressed the third research question: *what challenges, if any, do department chairs face in their roles and how do they manage them?* I also asked about the observations during the second interview to learn more about why the department chairs said what they did, whether they felt the
meeting was typical or not, and why. I also reviewed participants’ responses from the first interview before conducting the second interview in order to inform the follow-up questions (Seidman, 2006). I conducted all the interviews either in-person or through Zoom, depending on the participants’ availabilities. I sent the transcripts to each participant within a month after each of the interviews.

**Observations**

As I mentioned earlier, I conducted an observation in between the two interviews. Therefore, my second step in the data collection process was to observe one department meeting for each of the nine department chairs in my study in between the first and second interviews. The department chairs chose which meeting I observed. The only criterion I had was for the meeting to include the department chairs and the teachers within his/her department. I observed one meeting for each participant, for whatever length of time the meeting was typical for that department. When I observed, I used an observation guide (Appendix D) to record what I saw and heard during the department meetings. I asked about why the department chairs chose that meeting, what I saw and the rationale for the department chairs’ actions, and whether or not the meeting was typical, during the second interview.

**Survey**

For the third step in the data collection process, I administered a survey (Appendix E) to all of the department chairs in each of the schools. The topics included demographics on each of the department chairs, their roles and responsibilities, collaboration within the role, potential challenges within the role, and potential supports within the role. I also included questions on the pillar practices (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016, 2018, 2020) to learn how, if at all, the department chairs might support adult learning within their departments. The primary
The purpose of this survey was to better understand how the other department chairs experience the role in the same context. I also used the survey as a pilot for a department chair survey that can be used by other researchers in other contexts. Because no other survey for department chairs exists to the best of my knowledge, I developed a new survey. I validated this instrument through application of the process model (Chatterji, 2003). Dr. Chatterji recently reviewed the content validation survey and results for this survey and provided feedback to strengthen the validity of the survey. I also tested the reliability of the survey with Cronbach’s alpha, given the limited reliability measures I could use with a small sample size (n=24).

**Assessment Context Specifications: Phase I**

**Table 2**

**Process Model**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What?</th>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Department chairs’ perceptions on their role, responsibilities, challenges, collaboration, leadership practice, and possible employment of the pillar practices.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whom?</td>
<td>Population</td>
<td>Department chairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Population Units</td>
<td>High school department chairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why?</td>
<td>Assessment Purpose</td>
<td>Research and evaluation in educational leadership with a specific focus on department chairs’ role perceptions against theory on four practice pillars. To learn high school department chairs’ characteristics and the ways high school department chairs perceive their role, responsibilities, challenges, collaboration, leadership practice, and possible employment of the pillar practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inferences/Interpretations</td>
<td>The survey-based scale scores will denote positive versus negative perceptions and beliefs of the department chairs in each domain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intended Uses</td>
<td>Research and evaluation in educational leadership. To learn more about high school department chairs’ characteristics and their perceptions of their role, responsibilities, challenges, collaboration, leadership practice, and possible employment of the pillar practices, to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
add to dearth of research and literature on department chairs. This information might also be used by researchers, principals, educators, and policy makers as they make decisions related to the role and responsibilities of department chairs.

After the first phase of the process model, I created construct domain-specifications for the non-cognitive, social-demographic and psychological constructs my survey aims to measure (Appendix G). The results of my content-validation plan demonstrated that the content of my survey, with the exception of a few questions, does indeed measure what it intends to measure. Based on this information, I reworked the questions that had an item clarity CVI below 1.00, to enhance my survey for greater clarity.

3.7 Data Analysis

In this section, I describe the methods that I used for data analysis, which I approached as systematic process with specific steps (Maxwell, 2013). My methods included writing analytic memos, transcribing interviews, coding to fragment and reduce the data, categorizing data by codes and larger themes, reconnecting data via narrative profiles of participants, and then using analytic memos and data displays, tables, and concept maps to draw out themes. I describe each of these steps in more detail below.

Analytic Memos

After I visited each site, and after each interview, I wrote an analytic memo as a way of understanding and reflecting on the experience (Maxwell, 2013). I reviewed my interview notes and journaled about the big themes that each department chair shared with me. I thought about and journaled about how these themes connect among participants, links to the larger research, and I considered potential questions for follow-up (Maxwell, 2013). By journaling, I also had the
opportunity to think about my own feelings and impressions as a former department chair and current teacher, to track my own assumptions and biases throughout the research process.

Transcription of Interviews

Each interview I conducted I transcribed myself, verbatim. I also checked over the transcriptions against the audio recordings of the interviews to make sure there were no errors, attending to descriptive validity (Maxwell, 2013). I used consistent pseudonyms to protect the identities of my participants. I stored the device with the audio recordings in a locked drawer in my home office to ensure the safety of my participants. I shared the transcripts after both interviews with the interview participants who I invited to correct anything they felt might mispresent them and/or remove any words they no longer wished to be included in the study.

Coding to Fragment and Reduce the Data

The next step in the data analysis process was to analyze using open, or descriptive, coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Through coding, I fragmented the data to highlight the participants’ voices. I began coding by carefully reading interview transcripts to identify participants’ experiences about their roles and responsibilities as department chairs, what challenges and/or supports, if any, they might face in the role, and how, if at all, they lead and/or support adult learning with the other teachers in their departments. This was meant to address my first four research questions. After identifying open codes by reviewing the transcripts, I then reread the transcripts using theoretical codes from the literature, e.g. “collegial inquiry” or “holding environment” (Maxwell, 2013). I categorized these codes according to research question (e.g. “Challenges within the role” or “role and responsibilities”).
Thematic Analysis

After coding, I reconnected the data through narrative summaries of each department chair so I could better understand each participant’s responses and the connections and contrasts among participants (Seidman, 2006). I used analytical memos (Maxwell, 2013), and other constructs such as data displays and tables to draw out themes from the prior steps. I tracked differences and similarities across cases and within each case.

Cross-Case Analysis

Once I developed an understanding of the ways the nine department chairs described and understood their roles and responsibilities, how, if at all, their descriptions of their role connected to Learning Forward’s 10 roles for teacher leaders, what challenges, if any, they described experiencing in their roles, how, if at all, they described managing these challenges, and how, if at all, and to what degree, any of these department chairs described employing any one of the four pillar practices in their practice as department chairs, I began cross-case analysis. Cross-case analysis is a thematic analysis across the cases (Creswell, 2014). Based on my conceptual framework, which contains the dominant themes of my study and the relationships between them, I sought patterns and themes by constructing cross-case displays and matrices (Maxwell, 2013). I looked for plausible explanations and metaphors as the variables were related, split, and factored (Miles and Huberman, 1984 as cited in Maxwell, 2013). I built a logical chain of evidence to construct a theoretically and conceptually coherent explanation across cases by also checking for rival explanations and looking for negative evidence (Maxwell, 2013).

Survey Analysis

My analysis of survey data was designed to inform my fifth research question, How, if at all, do all department chairs from these yeshiva high schools perceive their roles and
responsibilities, challenges, collaboration, leadership practice, and possible employment of the pillar practices with teachers in their departments? I analyzed responses on a numerical scale and noted the total number of responses and percentages of each of the Likert questions. I used descriptive statistics to identify the means, standard deviations, and ranges, and created tables and graphs to display this information (Mertler & Vannatta, 2017). Through a t-test, I determined the statistical significance of the differences between what the department chairs perceived their responsibilities should be and how regularly they perform those responsibilities.

3.8 Validity

Maxwell (2013) defines validity in a qualitative study as something that cannot be proven or taken for granted. I addressed validity threats such as researcher bias, reactivity, descriptive validity, interpretive validity, and theoretical validity. I explain how I addressed each of these below.

Researcher Bias

It was important for me to consider how my experiences as a member of the Modern Orthodox school community and my prior experiences as department chair within that context could have potentially biased my study. While it is impossible to completely eliminate my own theories and beliefs as a researcher, I instead spent time understanding how my experiences as a teacher and department chair might have impacted my interpretations of the research (Maxwell, 2013). Through journaling and writing analytic memos, I tracked my thinking along the way. I also cross-checked my findings with fellow doctoral students in a research class at Teachers College, Columbia University.
Reactivity

Reactivity is the influence of the researcher on the participants of the study (Maxwell, 2013). It was critical for me to understand the influence my identity and position might have on the study (Maxwell, 2013). I am a member of the Modern Orthodox Jewish community, and I recognize that this might have influenced the level of comfort that participants had when sharing their experiences during the interview process. I selected participants outside of any high schools that I have worked in or have a relationship with to limit my reactivity. I also avoided leading or loaded questions in my interviews (Maxwell, 2013). I did my best to understand and ask the participants how—if at all—I was influencing what they say and how this might affect the validity of any inferences I drew from the interviews (Maxwell, 2013).

Descriptive Validity

It is important for a researcher to accurately record and transcribe verbatim what is being observed to accurately represent what happened (Maxwell, 2013). For this reason, I digitally recorded and transcribed all interviews verbatim (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). I then checked the transcripts against the interview recordings to make sure the transcriptions were accurate (Maxwell, 2013). I also gave all participants the opportunity to review their transcripts to check for accuracy (Maxwell, 2013).

Interpretive validity represents the accuracy of my interpretations of participants’ meaning-making (Maxwell, 2013). I continued to reflect throughout the process to ensure that my experiences did not present issues related to researcher bias. It was important that I was constantly aware of my own biases, assumptions, and judgments so that I did not interpret the participants’ meaning-making to fill my preconceived ideas based on my own prior experiences as department chair. Therefore, I cross-checked my findings with fellow doctoral students in
research courses at Teachers College, and continued to revisit this issue with my sponsor at Teachers College (Maxwell, 2013). This helped me see and learn any assumptions I might have been holding that I was unaware of, to assure that there were no blind spots when I interpreted the participants’ responses.

**Theoretical Validity**

Theoretical validity concerns the possibility that I will allow my own theoretical ideas to influence my efforts to build a theory of practice about how department chairs describe and understand their own roles and responsibilities, and to what extent they might lead and/or support adult learning within their departments. To address theoretical validity, I asked questions of the data toward the end of the analysis by using a claim analysis matrix to both look for confirming and disconfirming evidence of trends emerging from my analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

**Survey Validity**

Survey validity refers to the accuracy of the inferences and interpretations I made from the results or scores of my survey tool (Chatterji, 2003). I validated my survey through logical and empirical evidence of validity. Additionally, through the course Instrument Design and Validation with Dr. Madhabi Chatterji, I created and analyzed a content validation survey. Table 3 shows the validation plan I created for this survey through Dr. Chatterji’s course.

**Table 3**

*Validation Plan*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Validation Question</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Evidence Sought</th>
<th>Design/Analytic Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do the items on the checklists tap roles and responsibilities of department chairs,</td>
<td>To ensure content relevance and representativeness of items.</td>
<td>Content-based validity</td>
<td>Objective content review of roles and responsibilities of department chairs, potential challenges, and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
potential challenges, and potential supports in the role consistent with the literature and expert definitions so as to allow inferences about them?

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Do the items behave in the same way as other items that are supposed to measure the same thing?</td>
<td>To check and ensure that there is a high quality of items in the survey that meet design specifications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Item quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Look at each item, separate it from the survey and evaluate it against the other items on the scale or subscale using item analysis techniques that are supposed to measure the same thing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internal structure validity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Is there more than one dimension that explains the variance in item responses, as hypothesized based on the literature used to specify the domain?</td>
<td>To check and ensure internal structure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internal structure validity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Factor analysis of items</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>With multiple scales, and scores tied to different subdomains in my domain, how can I establish reliability of all scores I will interpret and use?</td>
<td>To make sure the scores I use and interpret are reliable across all subdomains in my survey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cronbach’s alpha for each domain to determine reliability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Logical Evidence of Validity

Through logical evidence of validity (Chatterji, 2003), I gathered reviews of my survey by suitable experts, such as current department chairs, educators, and fellow doctoral students at Teachers College, Columbia University. I also asked professors at Teachers College, Columbia University to review my survey questions. Logical evidence provides qualitative evidence of validity (Chatterji, 2003).

Empirical Evidence of Validity

Empirical evidence of validity was gathered through tryouts of my survey and collecting data (Chatterji, 2003). I piloted my survey on current department chairs in the middle school where I work to obtain the quantitative data I need.

Content-Based Evidence of Validity

Chatterji (2003) describes the first criterion for determining validity as “based on the extent to which the assessment results faithfully reflect the theoretical construct in terms of content” (p. 74). Therefore, as I mentioned earlier in the chapter and as seen in Appendix G, I created domains of the observable indicators that represents the constructs I wish to measure (e.g., psychological domains such as beliefs/practices about leadership, responsibilities).

3.9 Study Limitations

One limitation of this study is that there is was small sample size (n=9), and so the findings are limited only to participants in and across each of the sites (Maxwell, 2013). Another limitation is that the participants were in varying moments within their careers as department chairs, and therefore there might have varying interpretations of the role and responsibilities of department chairs depending on past experiences. In a future study, I might interview participants from other schools, including public schools, with a more diverse population. That
would give me greater selection so I could potentially seek out participants with similar years of experience.

3.10 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented the research design and rationale for this qualitative study with a case study approach. I introduced the purpose of my study and my research questions that will guide this study. I also described how I plan to select the department chair participants and schools for this study. I then detailed how I will collect data, namely through two ninety-minute interviews with each department chair, observations of department meetings, and a validated survey that I developed for this study. I described the data analysis procedures I plan to use such as descriptive and theoretical coding and narrative profiles, and how I will attend to various validity threats throughout the process. Finally, I described the limitations to the study.
Chapter 4: Introduction of Participants and Their Contexts

The purpose of my study was to explore with a group of nine NYC high school department chairs from three different Modern Orthodox yeshivas, their perceptions of their role and responsibilities as department chairs, their perceptions on how they manage any challenges they might face, and how, if at all, they support professional growth through any of the four pillar practices (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016, 2018, 2020). I also sought to learn how, if at all, their descriptions of their role as department chair connected to Learning Forward’s 10 roles for teacher leadership (Killion & Harrison, 2017). It is important to note that Learning Forward recently revised their standards to include eleven standards that outline a system for professional learning (2022, para. 4). Within these new standards, the leadership standard falls within what Learning Forward describes as the “Conditions for Success” where, through leadership, educators “establish a compelling and inclusive vision for professional learning, sustain coherent support to build educator capacity, and advocate for professional learning by sharing the importance and evidence of impact and professional learning” (2022). I developed a survey as well that I administered to all the department chairs within the three schools in my study to learn even more about the role within these contexts.

In this chapter, I introduce each of the nine department chairs who are at the heart of my study. To honor confidentiality, I use female pronouns (she/her/hers) to refer to all participants in this study to disguise gender. This is because of the nine participants, seven were female and two were male. I begin by offering a brief overview of each of the three settings to provide important context for the experiences the participants shared. All three schools are located in New York City; however, to honor confidentiality, I do not disclose which of the five boroughs any of the
schools are located in. I then describe the nine participants at each of those settings, presented in three categories:

- Three participants who chair the English departments at each of the three schools
- Three participants who chair the Math departments at each of the three schools
- Three participants who chair the Science departments at each of the three schools

In the subsequent chapters, I present my findings.

4.1 Setting

In this section, I provide a brief overview of the three New York City Modern Orthodox yeshiva high schools where I conducted my research, in order to provide context for the narrative summaries of each of my participants. For a full description of why I chose NYC Modern Orthodox yeshiva high schools for my research, please see Chapter III.

First School: “Zahov” Yeshiva High School

Zahov Yeshiva is a Modern Orthodox yeshiva located in New York City that includes an early childhood (ages 2-5), elementary school (grades 1-5), middle school (grades 6-8), and high school (grades 9-12). Zahov High School has its own building, separated from the elementary, middle, and early childhood students. Zahov Yeshiva High School is an established school that has been around for over 50 years (generalized number to protect privacy).

Courses

As I explained in Chapter III, Zahov, like all Modern Orthodox high schools, is a co-ed school and includes both secular and Judaic studies. Students usually arrive close to 7:00 A.M. for morning prayers followed by roughly ten periods of study divided into Judaic studies courses, taught in Hebrew, and secular subjects, finishing the around 5:00 P.M. These ten subjects include: Math, English, Science, Social Studies, Foreign Language, Halkhah (Jewish Law),
Talmud, Jewish History, Tanakh (Bible), and Jewish Philosophy. Zahov Yeshiva High School offers juniors and seniors elective programs, including AP courses. There are two honors level courses for the secular subjects, and there are four other classes that not tracked. The students at Zahov Yeshiva High School also take the New York State Regents exams. The administration at the school is considering removing the NYS Regents exams as a student requirement, an idea that came up as a challenge among three teachers within the science department during the observation who were anxious about losing the standardized exam as a benchmark, and which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Seven. There is an extensive arts program as well, including drama and music clubs, as well as art courses for all students. Lastly, Zahov Yeshiva High School offers over 120 extra-curricular activities such as enrichment clubs, community service activities, a student government, and athletic teams.

**Leadership**

The leadership team at Zahov Yeshiva High School consists of four administrators, three of whom are male rabbis and one female administrator. The team includes a Head of the Upper School, who is a male rabbi, a female Associate Principal, another Associate Principal who is a male rabbi, and an Assistant Principal who is a male rabbi. While the participants shared the names of these leaders during our interviews, I use these titles, Head of the Upper School, Associate Principal, and Assistant Principal, to describe these individuals on the Zahov leadership team to protect the privacy of the individuals as well as the school.

**Students**

There are over 600 students at Zahov Yeshiva High School, and to the best of my knowledge, all of the students identify as Modern Orthodox Jews. The student to teacher ratio is 11 to 1. Graduates are expected to attend college in the United States or study in Israel, and
therefore college is a big piece of the preparation programming at Zahov Yeshiva High School.

Many graduates of Zahov Yeshiva High School have been accepted to and/or attended ivy league or other prestigious universities such as Columbia, Barnard, Harvard, and New York University. The college guidance program begins in the tenth grade.

**Admissions**

Zahov begins its admissions process in November, beginning with an Open House. Students who wish to attend Zahov Yeshiva High School must apply in the eighth grade by completing an application with an application fee, and taking two entrance exams- one for Judaic studies and one for secular studies. Applicants must also submit recommendation letters and go through an interview process. An admissions committee within the school determines who is accepted and acceptance letters go out in the winter. The tuition for students at Zahov is over $35,000 a year. It is important to note that I collected data for two participants in the spring semester of 2022 and one participant in the fall semester of 2022, which is during the admissions time of year. This is because the time of year might have influenced some of the discussion during the interviews and observations, such as final grading and fall curriculum planning during the spring semester, and admissions and college applications during the fall semester.

**Participants**

The three participants in this study from Zahov Yeshiva High School were Alex, the English Department Chair; Jackie, the Math Department Chair; and Ricky, the Science Department Chair. As a reminder, to protect privacy, I use female pronouns (she/her/hers) to refer to all participants in this study to disguise gender. When speaking about the context of Zahov Yeshiva High School, the participants shared their beliefs that it is a positive, yet fast-paced environment to work in. For example, Alex, the English chair who has been chairing the
department for 10 years, explained during our first interview that she felt “Zahov can be very frenetic. The pace of it can be very frenetic.” Similarly, Ricky, the science chair who is in her second year of chairing the department, shared with me that the “work environment is so professional and high standard.” Jackie, who has been chairing the math department for twelve years, described her feelings that Zahov “is a happy place” and “a happy school to learn math in.”

Participants also shared that Zahov Yeshiva High School is progressive in many ways and open to new ideas. Alex, who in her ten years as chair and 24 years in the school has seen changes in the leadership team at Zahov, shared about the current leadership team:

> You know, so one of the things [Head of School] and [Associate Principal] were really good at, they’re really good at a lot of things, and one of the things, last year they took a lot of the department chairs out to visit other schools. So, like I went to spend the day at [Prestigious, Private NYC School] and someone else went to spend the day here, and we’d then discussed what we liked, what we didn’t like, what department chairs were doing.

In the above quote, Alex shared a story where the leadership team asked chairs, including Alex, to visit other schools to reflect on best practices and consider what they might think of adopting at Zahov. Jackie, the math chair, shared a similar sentiment about the current leadership team when she described that “[the leadership team] are so not afraid to shake up the status quo. So not afraid to shake it up. And if it works, they’re thrilled. If it doesn’t work, they go, ‘Okay we tried it. We’ve got to like, backtrack and try it again a different way.’” In other words, Jackie believes that the current leadership team is willing to take risks by trying something new, and open to reflection afterwards as they determine whether or not they should try something new.

Ricky, the science chair, shared in particular her beliefs that the Associate Principal “is fantastic” because she is “so good” at “getting real conversation started.” By “real conversation,” Ricky means conversations about educational practices and school policies.
Two of the chairs also shared what they felt are the school’s goals. For example, Alex, the English chair, described feeling that the school wants her to “make the kids happy, make them learn, make them get into our colleges.” Ricky, the science chair, also shared the emphasis on learning when she explained that “there are always big curricular goals that the administration is looking to promote. We had a big focus on assessments, to change assessments, look at things differently.” It seems that the school leadership team often reflects on their educational philosophy and practice to consider new ideas and make changes. Lastly, while the others did not, Ricky, the Science Chair, also shared what I interpreted to be her belief on the school’s values:

In the school, we keep redoing our mission statement and what are our core values and a lot of that conversation is happening. I remember being in a conversation once, where the last line [of the mission statement] was, Israel, Jewish people, the community of Zahov. So, one of the department chairs brought up, I think I did as well, not just the community of Zahov, the whole community. The community of everything. And [the leadership team] were like, ‘No, no, no. You have to have a sense of loyalty to this community. We want our alumni to feel this way.’

In the above quote, Ricky shared a story where the school was revising their mission statement to consider their core values, and the leadership team emphasized that their alumni should have a sense of loyalty to Israel and the Jewish community, and also the Zahov community in particular.

**Second School: “Catom” Yeshiva High School**

Catom Yeshiva is a Modern Orthodox High School located in New York City that, like Zahov, offers an Early Childhood program (ages 2-5), Elementary School (grades 1-4), Middle School (grades 5-8), and High School (grades 9-12). Like Zahov, Catom High School is located in a separate building from the other divisions. Catom Yeshiva High School is also considered to be a college preparatory school. Like Zahov, Catom High School is well established and has been around for more than fifty years (generalized number to honor confidentiality).
Courses

As a Modern Orthodox school, Catom also has a dual curriculum with both a Judaic studies program taught in Hebrew and secular studies program taught in English. The Judaic studies curriculum includes similar subjects to Zahov: Talmud, Tanakh (Bible), Judaism, and Hebrew Language and Literature, as well as similar general studies subjects, such as: English, History, Math and Computer Science, Science, Foreign Languages, Art, Music, Health Education, and Physical Education. Catom Yeshiva High School also offers enrichment opportunities such as high-level honors seminars and AP courses, and the day typically begins at 8:00 A.M. and ends around 5:00 P.M. However, unlike Zahov, at Catom High School the Science and Math departments are tracked with honors, mid-level, and low-level courses, while the humanities courses are not. Also, unlike Zahov, Catom Yeshiva High School is not a NYS Regents school, and therefore students do not take the NYS Regents exams.

Students receive four report cards each year. Once a year, teachers write paragraphs called “anecdotals” about each student. Students receive a letter grade during the second and fourth quarters. Catom Yeshiva High School also offers a variety of special programs and extra-curricular activities such as the student government, community service clubs, teams like Model Congress and Model UN, a choir, literary publications, and sports teams, among others.

Leadership

The leadership team at Catom Yeshiva High School consists of three administrators, two men and one woman. It is important to note that Catom Yeshiva High School does not have anyone holding the title of Head of the Upper School or Principal of the Upper School. It is important because this came up during the interviews with all three of the Catom Chairs as a challenge, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter Seven. However, Catom High School has an
upper administrative team that consists of the male Head of School, who oversees Nursery-Grade 12, a female Associate Principal, and a second Associate Principal who is a male rabbi.

**Students**

There are close to 500 Jewish students enrolled in Catom Yeshiva High School. Like Zahov, Catom graduates are expected to attend college in the United States or study in Israel, and therefore college is a big piece of the preparation programming at Catom Yeshiva High School. College guidance at Catom Yeshiva High School begins in the fall of junior year and is a two-year process. Students have been accepted to top universities around the country and Israel, including Harvard, Yale, University of Pennsylvania, Sarah Lawrence, Columbia, Barnard, Cornell, Brown, Duke, and Tel Aviv University.

**Admissions**

The application process begins in November with an Open House. Parents and prospective students can also schedule a tour of the school. Prospective students must fill out an application that includes recommendation letters from one English and one Judaic studies together and an application fee, along with their transcripts from middle school. Applicants must also take Judaic studies and secular studies high school entrance exams. Applicants are also expected to go through an interview process in which they are required to compose two writing samples, one in English and one in Hebrew, as part of the interview. Students learn if they got accepted in the winter. The tuition for students at Catom High School is over $40,000 a year.

It is important to note that I collected data for all three participants form Catom Yeshiva High School in the fall semester of 2022, during the admissions season. This is because the time of year might have influenced some of the discussion during the interviews and observations, as
department chairs referenced report cards, Open House, and college applications which all took place during the period of time I collected data.

**Participants**

The three participants in this study from Catom Yeshiva High School were Ruby, the English Department Chair; Jamie, the Math Department Chair; and Andy, the Science Department Chair. As a reminder, to protect privacy, I use female pronouns (she/her/hers) to refer to all participants in this study to disguise gender. When speaking about the context of Catom Yeshiva High School, the participants shared their beliefs that it is a fast-paced, high-stakes environment. For example, Jamie, who has been chairing the math department for three years, explained about the “school culture” that she feels they are “starting to subscribe to this cramming culture that many companies have these days.” Similarly, Ruby, the English chair who has chaired the department for ten years over the course of her 33 years at the school, shared that she believes Catom is “trying to be like a Jewish [Prestigious, Private NYC school]” and so students experience “grade pressure” because “all the students are college bound.” Andy, the science chair who has led her department for nine years, shared:

> There are four quarters. After the first and third quarters, instead of giving grades, a parent gets a paragraph about their kid. So, I read it for all of science, all of tech. Now this year we changed it to once in February so I’m thrilled, and I don’t mind reading it. It’s just very time consuming to read all of it. You know it’s always at the same time of like the Open House, and the quarter is ending so we have to get grades in, it’s just all at once.

In other words, similar to the “cramming culture” that Jamie described, Andy shared above that the department chairs have a lot of responsibilities during certain times of year at Catom, which I explain in further detail in Chapter Seven where I discuss some of the challenges the department chairs face.
Jamie, the math chair, also shared that C atom Yeshiva High School is relatively small compared to other schools, which she found to be helpful. She explained during our first interview that “one of the good things I think about this school is that we’re still relatively small. I also feel like we are an agile operation. We are not cumbersome.” Lastly, Ruby, the English Chair, shared that she feels the students at C atom Yeshiva High School are juggling multiple courses and a rigorous curriculum, which impacts how Ruby is able to guide her department when it comes to assigning homework and essays.

I used to bemoan so much that we really couldn’t assign enough work in a sense because they take nine academic classes. But now I just sort of, there’s no point in belaboring that point, because it’s a dual curriculum school and that’s just the nature of the school. The kids can’t go home every night with homework in 9 subjects, you know. So, I’ve come to understand that. And they don’t understand it so they feel overwhelmed a lot of times and I’ll explain to them, ‘If this were a secular school, you’d be writing twice as many papers.’ You know, it seems like so much to them because frankly I don’t see, I don’t think I could have survived as a C atom student.

In the above quote, Ruby shared with me that she recognizes how demanding the schedule is for the students who are juggling nine academic classes within a dual curriculum. She explained that she adjusted her teaching practice to account for her students’ demanding schedule by assigning fewer writing assignments.

Third School: “Varod” Yeshiva High School

Similar to Zahov and C atom, Varod Yeshiva is a Modern Orthodox High School located in New York City that offers an Early Childhood program (ages 2-6), Lower School (grades 1-8), and High School (grades 9-12). The High School is also located in a separate building from the other divisions. Varod Yeshiva High School is also considered to be a college preparatory school. However, Varod is a relatively newer high school and has been around for less than fifty
years (generalized number to protect privacy). The school services students from 15 different 
neighborhoods across New York city and its surrounding areas.

Courses

Like Zahov and Catom, as a Modern Orthodox school, there is a dual curriculum with 
both a Judaic studies program taught in Hebrew and secular studies program taught in English. 
The Judaic studies curriculum includes the following subjects: Talmud, Tanakh (Bible), Halakha 
(Jewish Law), Hebrew Language and Literature, Jewish Philosophy, and Jewish History. The 
general studies subjects include Literature, History, Math, Science, Foreign Languages (Arabic, 
French, and Spanish), Social Sciences, Design Engineering, Health, Physical Education, and 
Fine and Performing Arts. Like Catom, the Science and Math departments are tracked with 
honors, mid-level, and low-level courses, while the humanities courses are heterogeneous. In 
addition, Varod Yeshiva High School offers enrichment opportunities such AP courses. Like 
Zahov, Varod Yeshiva High School is also a NYS Regents school, and therefore students do take 
the NYS Regents exams. Varod Yeshiva High School also offers a variety of special programs 
and extra-curricular activities such as the student government, community service clubs, teams 
like Model Congress and Model UN, a choir, literary publications, and sports teams, among 
others.

Leadership

The leadership team at Varod Yeshiva High School consists of two principals, both male 
Rabbis. One principal is the founding and current Principal of the school, and the second recently 
became Co-Principal after holding the title of Assistant Principal since the school’s inception. It 
is important to note that unlike Zahov and Catom, the leadership team at Varod does not use the 
term Head of School. Therefore, in this study I use the terms Founding Principal and Co-
Principal to refer to the leadership at Varod. The chairs also often refer to the Director of General Studies, which is a position currently held by a woman.

Students

There are close to 600 students enrolled in Varod Yeshiva High School, and there is a 5-to-1 student-to-faculty ratio. Over two-thirds of the students were admitted to their first-choice colleges, including ivy league universities, and over 90% of graduates spend the year attending a yeshiva program in Israel. College guidance counselors are involved with students and parents throughout the four years of high school, and offer workshops and evening programs focused on the college application and admissions process.

Admissions

The admissions process begins in the fall semester, with an Open House in November where parents and prospective parents can visit the school. Prospective students are then required to fill out an application, student questionnaire and parent questionnaire. Students must also submit a teacher recommendation letter. Applicants are required to take both a Judaic studies and general studies high school entrance exam. Lastly, applicants go through an interview process with their parents. Applicants receive notification of admission in the winter. Upon acceptance, students take a placement exam in the spring. The tuition costs around $35,000 a year. It is important to note that I collected data for all three participants from Varod Yeshiva High School in the fall semester of 2022, during the admissions season, which might have influenced the discussions during interviews and observations when the participants were focused on report cards, Open House, and college applications.
Participants

The three participants in this study from Varod Yeshiva High School were Sam, the English Department Chair; Pat, the Math Department Chair; and Charlie, the Science Department Chair. As a reminder, to protect privacy, I use female pronouns (she/her/hers) to refer to all participants in this study to disguise gender. When speaking about the context of Varod Yeshiva High School, the participants shared their beliefs about the school being somewhat new when they began. For example, Charlie, who is in her first year of retirement as science chair after 19 years, but continues to teach in the department, shared that “it was a brand-new school, didn’t know so much. Also, they didn’t want to be just another Jewish high school. And [Founding Principal], one of the reasons I came also was because I believed in his vision.” In other words, Charlie believed in the vision of the Founding Principal and the mission of the new school when she first began chairing the department. Similarly, Pat, who is also in her first year of retirement after chairing the math department for 19 years but still continues to teach in the department, shared that “it wasn’t like this school, being so young and so new had any kind of framework for what that role looks like.” Here, Pat shared with me that the school was so young and so new and therefore the role of department chair did not have a specific framework. Sam, who is the English Chair at Varod and in her tenth year of chairing the department, explained to me that:

Being in a new school everyone was kind of doing their own thing and it was a bit of a hodgepodge. It’s sort of like when you build a school and then you’re like, ‘Oh, we need to add this annex, or this thing,’ and then it looks just a little bit not so streamlined and organized.

In the above quote, Sam described that being chair in a new school felt as though not everything was organized all of the time because they were figuring things out as they went along.
Charlie, the recently retired science chair, also shared that at times she felt limited in the Jewish day school context. She explained during our first interview that “here [at Varod], it’s a Jewish day school. You’re dealing with time constraints, and you know while it’s true sometimes I get annoyed like, ‘Really? They can’t do homework?’ But whatever, I understand it.” In other words, just as Ruby, the English chair at Catom High School shared that she changed her teaching practice to assign less homework because she knows her students juggle nine subjects, Charlie shared with me that the same is true at Varod. She is not able to assign the amount of homework she would like because of the time constraints that come with the Jewish day school context of a dual curriculum. However, Charlie also described the school as one that lives up to its values and mission of the “grand conversation,” to bring together the Jewish and secular:

I’ve since had colleagues who have gone to other schools, like one of them went to, she’s teaching in another school and she wrote to me, ‘Don’t underestimate how important it is,’ like she had kids coming to her class who were very upset that they were learning evolution, and this is a Modern Orthodox school, so she said, ‘Well did you ask your Tanakh teacher about it?’ and they said, ‘No.’ She said, ‘Did you ask your bio teacher?’ ‘No.’ She said, ‘Don’t take it for granted that these are important conversations.’

Therefore, although Charlie feels limited at times as a result of the scheduling, because Varod is a Modern Orthodox school with a dual curriculum and time constraints, she also recognizes the unique attitude Varod has to being open to more controversial science ideas, such as evolution, that might not be taught in other Modern Orthodox settings. In Table 4 below, I outline key similarities and differences between the three sites of the study. For example, the three schools have very similar programs, but different sizes in student body with over 600 students at Zahov, 500 at Varod, and 400 in Catom. Additionally, while Zahov and Varod do have students take the NYS Regents exams, Catom does not. Two of the three schools, Catom and Varod, are tracked
for science and math but they are not tracked for humanities, while Zahov is tracked for honors only for all subjects but heterogeneous for non-honors classes.

### Table 4

**Key Similarities and Differences Among the Modern Orthodox Sites**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>NYS Regents</th>
<th>Tracking</th>
<th>Leadership Team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Zahov  | • 9-12 grades  
• Dual curriculum  
• Secular subjects are co-e-d  
• 600+ students  
• College focused  
• Over $35,000 a year tuition  
• Established 50+ years ago | • Yes | • Honors levels for all subjects  
• Other classes are heterogeneous | • Head of High School, male, rabbi  
• Associate Principal, female  
• Associate Principal, male, rabbi |
| Catom  | • 9-12 grades  
• Dual curriculum  
• Secular subjects are co-e-d  
• 400+ students  
• College focused  
• Over $40,000 a year tuition  
• Established 50+ years ago | • No | • Tracking for science and math.  
• Humanities subjects are not tracked. | • Head of School, N-12, male  
• Assistant Principal, female  
• Assistant Principal, male rabbi |
| Varod  | • 9-12 grades  
• Dual curriculum  
• Secular subjects are co-e-d  
• 500+ students  
• College focused  
• Over $35,000 a year tuition  
• Established within the past 50 years | • Yes | • Tracking for science and math.  
• Humanities subjects are not tracked. | • Founding Principal, male rabbi  
• Principal, male rabbi |
4.2 The Participants

In this section, I provide narrative summaries of each of the nine participants in my study. The nine department chairs who participated in the study included one Science, Math, and English chair from three different Modern Orthodox New York City high schools. For each set of participants, and by set I am referring to the set of three Science chairs, three Math chairs, and three English chairs, I first describe them demographically. I grouped the chairs this way because it is interesting to see the similarities and differences among the disciplines from the three schools. Please keep in mind that to protect privacy, I refer to all participants using female pronouns (she/ her/ hers) due to the fact that 7/9 participants are female and I do not wish to include any identifying information. I then share the participants’ stories in the form of narrative profiles, using mostly the words of the participants themselves (Seidman, 2013). In each narrative summary, I tried to capture the participants’ stories: how and why the department chairs first took on the role, their core values, main responsibilities in the role, and main challenges they face. I wrote the narrative summaries after I conducted, transcribed, and coded the first round of interviews, the purpose of which was to learn the aforementioned. This is because after conducting, transcribing, and coding my first interviews, I felt the participants had shared their stories on who they were and why they became department chairs. I added my interpretations to the participants’ words to assist in sharing their stories and bringing together their ideas (Miles et al., 2014).

The narrative summaries provide some insight in response to my first research question, [How do nine department chairs from NYC yeshiva high schools describe and understand their own role and responsibilities as a department chair] and my third research question [What challenges, if any, do department chairs face in their roles as department chairs and how do they
manage them]. In other words, I offer this because I give an overview to what I interpreted to be each participant’s key sharing about their role, responsibilities, and challenges. I go into further detail on some of these responsibilities and challenges in Chapter VI and Chapter VII, respectively. As I mentioned previously, all the names I used are aliases to protect the identity and confidentiality of the participants.

Table 5 shows the demographic data and years of experience for the nine department chairs in the study. It is interesting to note the variety of age ranges, years’ experience as teachers, and years’ experience as chair, among the participants. For example, as illustrated in Table 5, Ricky, the science chair at Zahov High School, is in her 20s and has been chairing the department for two years, while Charlie, the science chair at Varod, is in her 60s and chaired the department for close to 20 years before retiring from the role. Similarly, among the math chairs, Jamie is in her third year as chair at Catom High School, while Jackie and Pat have been chairing for over a decade at Zahov and Varod, respectively. Also interesting is that the three English chairs have all been chairing for ten years; however, each is in a different age bracket with Alex, the Zahov English chair in her 40s, Ruby, the Catom English chair, in her 50s, and Sam, the Varod English chair, in her 30s.

Table 5

Demographics of Department Chairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Approximate Age Range</th>
<th>Total Years Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Total Years Department Chair</th>
<th>Number of Teachers in Department</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ricky</td>
<td>Zahov</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>Catom</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlie</td>
<td>Varod</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>60-70</td>
<td>51 years</td>
<td>19 years</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Science Department Chairs

*Ricky, Zahov Yeshiva: “I like being the human voice.”*

Ricky has been teaching for eleven years and this is her second year chairing the department, which consists of about 5 science teachers. Ricky also teaches science in her department. When Ricky first started teaching at Zahov Yeshiva High School, the department chair was “on her way out.” The next chair was a “role model” for Ricky and “inspired her” in many ways. However, Ricky explained that soon after the second chair left, Ricky described the department as “fragmented” because there was no other chair set to take over, and so she “felt isolated” as a teacher at Zahov. Ricky shared that she felt very “lonely.” There was a “void in leadership.” Ricky told me that she thought about leaving the school. Instead, with encouragement from her colleagues, Ricky surprised the administration by asking for the position. It was her sixth year teaching at the school. Although she was worried about her “young age” and inexperience, Ricky recalled what the previous chair, her “role model,” had done. Ricky said that she wishes he could have been a “mentor,” especially because she was not given a job description and felt the job of the science department chair was “amorphous,” or “whatever got thrown onto her lap.”
Ricky spends a lot of time thinking about how to be there to “emotionally support her teachers,” especially as a result of the Pandemic. She wishes she had that herself and prioritizes that for her department. Ricky also would like to spend more time “as a visionary” for her department, “researching,” “inspiring teachers,” and “dreaming.” At times, Ricky feels as though her opinions are not validated by the administration. She is also challenged by the workload her teachers are under. Ricky tries to stay away from school politics because it is important to Ricky to be “professional” and she considers it “gossip.” Ricky also prioritizes her teaching role, and finds it challenging at times to “teach as a department chair.” However, it is important to Ricky to be seen as an “excellent teacher.”

Ricky feels as though there “isn’t enough time” to accomplish what she wants do, like being a “visionary” and “setting goals” for the department. However, Ricky emphasized during the interview that she truly “loves her position” and “working with her teachers,” and she feels “proud of their accomplishments.” Ricky feels that “the more I am me, and true to myself and, what I could bring to the department, the more I can be successful.” She believes she “knows what needs to be worked on” and that she has the “strengths to hold this department together.” Ricky told me that she uses that self-esteem as support when facing the challenges of department chair, in addition to support from her husband, teachers in her department, and an administrator.

**Andy, Catom Yeshiva: “We want to make it better for the students.”**

Andy has been teaching for over fifteen years and this is her ninth year chairing the department, which consists of about 6 science teachers. Andy also teaches one science class in her department. Andy’s very first teaching position began at Catom 16 years ago. Andy became Science Department Chair nine years ago. Andy is also the Director of General Studies, chairs the technology department, advises 9th graders, and teaches one class. Andy shared that although
she felt like the Head of Upper School at the time “did not want [her] to be department chair,” she felt that “bringing someone from the outside would be kind of disruptive” and applied with the “encouragement of the other science teachers.” When she became department chair, Andy explained to me that “nobody ever told [her] what it meant” and she was “not given a job description”. She shared during the interview that she felt “overwhelmed” and “unprepared,” particularly with “running department meetings.” Andy didn’t have the chance to be trained by the former chair, but she did have “help from the math chair who was also an administrator at the time.” Ultimately, that Head of Upper School left and Andy shared that the “entire administration” from that time “is not here anymore.” When I asked Andy how she interprets the role, she responded that she felt it was to “manage the teachers in the department.” Although the administration once asked her to “write down her responsibilities,” Andy told me she is “not sure what happened to that document.”

Andy finds it difficult when her teachers “don’t agree with the administration,” because while she “wants to back up her teachers” she doesn’t think it “sends the right message” to “go against the administration.” Therefore, it is a challenge for Andy to have “difficult conversations” with her teachers if there is something that needs to be changed. It is also a challenge when “parents are persistent” in calling Andy asking for “grade changes,” usually because of how their children performed during Covid. However, Andy appreciates her team of “seasoned teachers” who “really care” which “makes it fun to work with them.” It’s also “helpful” that since they are “solid teachers,” she does not “need to be mentoring anyone.” It is important to Andy that she “observes” her teachers and that her teachers “feel comfortable” coming to her with “anything.”
Charlie, Varod Yeshiva: “Teachers should continue growing no matter how long they’ve been teaching.”

Charlie has been teaching for over fifty years and she chaired the science department for almost twenty years, which consists of about 8 science teachers. Charlie taught while she was chair, and she continues teach science in her department although she is retired from the chair position. When the Founding Principal asked Charlie if she “would start the science department” at Varod High School, she first said “no.” Charlie shared with me that had a job at a prestigious New York City public school that she “did not want to leave.” However, she explained she felt an obligation to better the “Jewish community,” and thought about her father’s words that “the Jewish continuity is ensured by the education of Jewish children.” Originally, she took on the position for a year “on leave” from her position to “start the department.” She then “extended the leave to another year,” and ultimately had to make what she described as “one of the hardest decisions of [her] life.” She decided to “take the plunge” and become the Science Department Chair at Varod. However, she needed the Founding Principal “to commit” to a few items: teaching evolution, NYS Regents exams, and allowing Charlie to design the labs. When the head of school agreed, and gave Charlie the “architect’s plans,” Charlie spent “the whole summer” redesigning the plans with former students. She was “very invested” because “if [she] was going to do it, it was going to be right.” Designing the labs was one aspect of Charlie’s “vision” for the department. Charlie also wanted to “teach evolution full blast,” unusual in a Jewish school, because it is a religiously sensitive theory (Spetner, 2007). She had a rabbi “speak to the kids” about evolution, and other speakers come in for other “Jewish views” on real-world scientific matters, like “doing research on little embryos.” Charlie also helped students enter “science competitions,” attend science summer camps, and got “kids out into science experiences in the
city.” In other words, Charlie wanted “to make kids feel like science is real.” It was important to Charlie that the teachers in her department “buy into this philosophy” and “are all on board.” For that reason, Charlie “takes hiring very seriously” and says “hiring is huge;” she “only wants to get great teachers.” To Charlie, this means she “looks for” teachers who “don’t just lecture” and instead agree with her “philosophy” on “the importance of Socratic method” and “making the subject relevant to [students] lives.” Charlie “mentors new teachers” by “meeting with them weekly,” and recently has been working with one or two new teachers out of her department of eight. To Charlie, “it’s worth the investment.”

As department chair, Charlie also worked on administrative responsibilities such as “ordering equipment” which “takes forever.” She wrote the curriculum and met with the department each week to review the content. Charlie’s greatest challenge was when she had “to hire somebody who’s less than,” meaning someone who did not buy-in to her philosophy on teaching science Socratically and real-world. She also worried that sometimes other departments complained that “science gets everything” because Charlie often advocated for her departments’ needs, such as tracking, labs, trips, schedule changes, and speakers, to the Founding Principal, and he often agrees.

Covid in particular presented a great challenge to the science department when the medical team the school created to help make decisions about the pandemic “said we could not be in the lab room. And we feel strongly about it.” So, “the entire department collaborated” and “spent the entire summer making video tapes, video recordings of us doing the labs.” They “wanted the kids to see their teacher, and we’d stop it, and say okay now collect the data, and then we would do the various parts of the experiment, and then the kids would see, hold it up, and they would record the data.” Charlie told me that she is proud of “how the individual teams
really brainstormed” and “everybody bought in.” Charlie stepped down from the role last year but continues to teach in the department. She encourages the new chair to “feel free to consult on anything” but also to “do it [her own way].”

Math Department Chairs

Jackie, Zahov Yeshiva: “That’s what department chairs do. Just make sure it all works.”

Jackie has been teaching for over thirty-five years and this is her twelfth year chairing the department, which consists of about 10 math teachers. Jackie teaches math in the department as well. When Jackie was hired at Zahov High School, the administration told her they were looking for a change in the math department to become more of a “community,” and it was not a surprise that in her fourth year she was asked to take over as chair. Initially, Jackie was told “very little” about the job and wasn’t given a job description from a previous administration. When the newer administration did provide one, Jackie felt “what they decided to tell people to do are the things that I was already doing.” Jackie sums up the position by saying department chairs “make sure it all works.” Initially, the department Jackie took over was “just dysfunctional” because Jackie explained she “had a lot of people who shouldn’t be teaching” and were “very negative.” Jackie shared that the administration at the time asked her to “please help [the school] in changing it,” but she faced challenges when trying “to clean up the department” when the administration at the time ultimately “threw her under the bus” and didn’t support her in the process.

Through “blood, sweat, and tears,” Jackie shared with me that she is most proud of “turning the department around” by bringing in teachers who she describes as having “the yummy factor.” To Jackie, this means “somebody who’s going to love the kids, love the material, be energetic about it, give it over in a fun way, [and] be receptive.” It is important to
Jackie that “everyone is a team player” and considers the math department “a community” where “everyone contributes.” Jackie considers herself “a mentor more than anything else.” Now Jackie describes the school as “a happy school for people to learn math in” even though math is considered “the most challenging subject.” Jackie shared during the interview that she felt proud her department changed from “the department they always called to complain about” to the “one that came in first place” in a school survey. Jackie attributes that to the feeling of “support” that her teachers give to students. As a result of that support, they “feel loved.”

**Jamie, Catom Yeshiva: “I’m trying to shape the department into something that aligns my core beliefs.”**

Jamie has been teaching for five years and this is her third year chairing the department, which consists of about 7 math teachers. Jamie teaches four classes in the department, and she also teaches one class in the technology department under a different chair. Jamie explained during our first interview that when she began teaching at Catom High School five years ago, the former Head of the Upper School asked if she would be interested in chairing the department eventually, because at the time two math teachers were “splitting the administrative duties” but there was no chair. After teaching for two years, Jamie became chair of the math department at the beginning of the pandemic when there was a clear “need for leadership” and “action.” Jamie prepared for the position by meeting with one of the teachers who conducted most of the administrative duties, and the former Head of the Upper School, throughout the spring and summer of 2020. The majority of those meetings related to the pandemic and reopening school.

While there is a written job description “posted somewhere,” Jamie has “never read it” and does not believe that the job description depicts all of her duties. They mainly illustrate the “bureaucratic” elements of the job, such as holding meetings and observing teachers, but Jamie
also sets the vision of the department. Jamie’s core values are related to “strict meritocracy” and offering top-tier students top-tier courses. For that reason, she spent “a lot of time” diving into “data” to prevent grade inflation. Jamie was looking for consistency in the department’s grading policy, and explained that currently, “if I pick any two A+s, those students are not equivalent. One is a genuine A+ and the other is probably not.” I interpreted that to mean Jamie feels one of those top grades is merited, and the other is inflated. Similarly, students should not enroll in an AP course so they can add it to their college application, and then drop out of the class after they are accepted. For that reason, Jamie shook up the status quo by instating a policy in her department that once a student enrolls in an AP, he/she must stay there the entire year. Jamie described how she stood up to parents, students, and endured “a battle with the college office,” who were all not happy with this policy. Jamie is proud that the policy stood, and that other departments are instating the policy now as well.

Jamie explained to me that she is challenged by the number of “complaints” she receives from parents and students. She spends majority of her time addressing the complaints and “acting as a middle person” by deciding which complaints she will relay to the teachers and which are “inappropriate.” It is not unusual for Jamie to receive an inappropriate message or complaint from an unhappy parent, and she expressed that other department chairs do not have this same issue with parents. Jamie also shared that she spends a lot of time on placements, writing exams, looking at data, and making decisions about students. Jamie believes in mobility between tracks and therefore spends a lot of time addressing student concerns if they would like to move mid-year. Jamie feels the school contributes to “cramming culture” in that some seasons, such as the November season, are very busy and chairs are overworked.
**Pat, Varod Yeshiva: “The quality of the math department is a reflection on me. I felt that burden on me.”**

Pat has been teaching for over 25 years and recently retired the chair position, which she held for almost 20 years, and consisted of about 9 math teachers. Although Pat retired from her position as math chair, Pat continues to teach in the math department as she did while she was chair. Pat began teaching at Varod High School during the second year of the school’s opening. She originally held the title of “curriculum coordinator,” which soon grew to “department chair” as the department “grew from three or four people to ten people.” To Pat, being the department chair means “setting a vision for what math education should look like.” It was important to Pat for her teachers to “move away from thinking of math as just solving for x,” and instead, “see the beauty of math; we want kids to appreciate math, see its power, see its poetry in some ways.” For that reason, Pat “hires every teacher in the department.” She looks for teachers who “love kids more than math,” people for whom “teaching is a calling.”

Pat describes the role as “amorphous,” like the wild “West,” a “figuring it out as you go along kind of thing.” She was “asked to write [her] own” job description. The role includes curriculum and administrative duties, with “spreadsheets, spreadsheets, spreadsheets,” to determine student placements and teacher placements. Pat also spent a great deal of time on “teacher growth” to “push the department’s thinking” at the beginning, such as conversations where they might think together about certain topics:

Like think about homework, what’s the purpose of homework? Why do we give it, how can we revamp and shape our future homework to make them more effective? It could be talking about the calculator, how do we use it, it could be thinking about tests, writing tests that are thoughtful and effective, it could be policies like returning a test, stressing a policy, it could vary.
However, as the school grew “a lot of that dropped by the wayside” because “it was always kind of at the bottom of [her] priority list.” Pat shared with me that she felt it was “tough” when she had “so much on [her] plate all the time,” knowing she was not able to “spend a lot of time, or give enough attention to” that area.

Pat shared with me that she felt a responsibility to “advocate for the department,” and “over the years, the role [of department chair] expanded and took on a much more, a bigger part of a decision-making body in the school.” Pat lists challenges in the role to include time pressure, teaching as chair, tracking, having difficult conversations with teachers, and conflicts with parents over student placement. She realized that a “high stakes decision” about placement was happening in 7th grade, and as a result created new “policy” and a new course to help those “late bloomers.” Pat shared with me she is most proud of her policies [e.g., grade threshold requirements for advanced courses, tenth grade readiness exam], and in a support system she created of department chairs from other yeshiva day schools, she feels the chairs “admire” Pat’s policies. Pat also receives support within her school from other chairs, the director of general studies, and the administration, with whom she feels she “is on the same page.” Pat also turns to her partner often as a source of support to “figure it out” and “talk things over.”

Pat stepped down from the role last year after speaking with the Director of General Studies about “how busy the job is, how, just how many pieces of the puzzle there are, balls I’m juggling all the time, feeling that many parts that I’m just not doing well.” When the Director of General studies asked “in the most respectful, polite way,” if Pat would be “interested in taking on a co-chair?” Pat “didn’t [have to] think about it very long,” because she “was very excited for that.” However, after speaking with her partner, Pat realized that after “a particularly stressful May and June,” she was instead “ready to sort of take a backseat to focus on teaching.” Pat
shared with me that “it felt right emotionally, it just, almost like my soul saying, yeah this is right, and I listened to my soul.” While Pat continues to teach, she also helps the new math chair by giving her “coaching tips” so that it would be a “very smooth, very amicable” transition within the department.

**English Department Chairs**

**Alex, Zahov Yeshiva: “I know I’m doing a good job when my teachers can shine instead of me.”**

Alex has been teaching for almost 30 years and this is her tenth year chairing the department, which consists of about 11 English teachers. Alex teaches four classes in her department, a change from teaching five classes in previous years. Alex became department chair when the former department chair, her “mentor,” chose her as her “successor” when she fell ill. Although two other teachers in the department were older and wanted the position, Alex shared that she felt prepared because she was able to ask her mentor questions while she was in the hospital, before she passed away.

Alex was not given a job description. Instead, Alex was told to “just do what [former chair] does.” Alex interpreted that to mean she should “make sure that I’m covering everything that I think needs to happen for the wheel to go clean and turn.” Alex describes her role as department chair as “straddling admin and teaching,” which she says is “a very difficult place to be.” She considers the department “like a family”, which can also be tricky because “sometimes it’s hard to be truthful and honest and stern with your family.” Alex takes an approach with her teachers where “she oversees and guides”, rather than “mandate and prescribe.” In fact, Alex measures her success in the role by how much her teachers shine and whether “things would still
Alex believes that helping students is the common goal and “glue” that holds teachers in her department together.

During the pandemic, which she describes was like “The Wild West,” her department made curricular changes and she reassessed her goals and expectations for her teachers as well. They spent time helping students “feel held,” and since then her department is “more cognizant of the social-emotional aspect of learning”. She did the same for her teachers, “checking in” on them to give them “that space” as well. Alex prioritizes her students, and with the four classes she teaches, eleven teachers in her department, and the number of other roles in the school she is involved in [e.g., admissions committee], Alex is pulled in a lot of directions and “feels like an octopus sometimes,” like “there’s not enough of [her] to go around.” The start of the year is particularly challenging because of “college essays.” This year, Alex explains the role is “evolving” to include more “meetings with teachers” while “teaching less,” and she is curious about how that will go, feeling like while her “teachers need her,” some don’t need that much “one-on-one” time with her. To Alex, it is “more than just a job” and she really loves to teach and learn. English in particular she believes is a “pivotal” subject because “it bleeds into a lot of the other subjects”; they “do it all.” Alex means that “the reading and writing” taught in English are important for other subjects as well. She also shared with me that English is pivotal because when “kids write for [the English teachers],” the teachers learn “a lot more about the students,” and therefore the discipline might “overlap with guidance,” in terms of what the teachers can learn about the students through their writing.

Ruby, Catom Yeshiva: “I love sharing with my colleagues”

Ruby has been teaching for over 30 years and this is her tenth year chairing the department, which consists of about 5 English teachers. Ruby teaches English classes in her
department. Although the administration asked Ruby to “take over as department chair four or five years ago,” Ruby has been department chair for ten years on-and-off over the past 33 years at this site. Ruby had “mixed feelings” about taking on the role again, because she “already had [her] finger in so many different little things,” and “wasn’t in [her] twenties anymore.” However, she “had a lot of concerns” about “hiring someone from the outside to chair the department,” and so she took the position even though “it’s just a ton of work that no one really wants to do.”

Ruby interprets her role as “representative for the department.” She advocates for her team in department chair meetings with the administration, and she is there for them when “a teacher doesn’t feel comfortable” meeting with students or parents, often about “plagiarism.” When Ruby took over the department, “it was not a collaborative department.” It is important to Ruby to unify her department both with curriculum and socially. Ruby wants to make sure there is “some kind of norming going on” where “we’re all teaching the same thing, but in terms of the assignments we give, how many assignments we give, the kinds of assignments we give.” In other words, her department is “functioning as a collective.” Ruby is also “active in finding things for [the teachers] to do” as a department, such as attending events throughout NYC.

This “social aspect” of the position was important to Ruby during the pandemic as well; she created a Zoom film club with her team. The pandemic was “very, very isolating,” and it was “a very stressful time,” especially because they “didn’t even have any training” for remote instruction when they “were thrown into” Zoom. Ruby “mentors” a newer teacher and finds it “phenomenal” because it’s “gratifying helping someone kind of find their way.” It also helps Ruby “to kind of rethink some of the things we’re doing,” because “when you have to explain to someone else,” she forgets “that all these things that I assume and take for granted about how a classroom functions and works.” Ruby is “happy” that for the first time “this year there are no
new teachers.” Ruby spends time doing “observations for all kinds of reasons,” like to “see how
the kids are interacting, see what’s going on, make some sort of suggestions.” She also gives
workshops on teaching practices, such as the Harkness method, both for her department and the
faculty of the school. Ruby shared that it was “very interesting” bringing that to the faculty
because she was able to foster a discussion among faculty about “texts [that] were literary but
they related to gender roles, and we had a lot of divisiveness.” It seems that to Ruby, that would
be an example of talking about “more substantive things” with faculty rather than “logistical
things” which she hopes the school can “move away from.”

Ruby uses new methods of teaching within her classroom, and she takes students around
NYC to see various shows connected to the curriculum. Ruby had to “put her foot down” this
year when it came to the testing schedule and giving her students “90-minute essays,” mainly to
prevent plagiarism and students working with tutors: “you see a huge discrepancy between a
student who cannot even write a sentence, and then he’s handing in, you know, graduate level
work.”

Sam, Varod Yeshiva: “I do feel like at a certain point the administration is going to have to
lean more on the department chairs.”

Sam has been teaching for 20 years and this is her tenth year chairing the department,
which consists of about 9 English teachers. Sam also teaches English in her department. Sam
became chair at Varod 10 years ago, after the administration asked her to take on the position.
Sam wasn’t sure she “had what [she] needed,” and asked for a “co-chair.” She also “asked for a
job description” because one did not exist at the time. Although it was “very challenging, a little
toxic even” to manage the previous chair and another difficult teacher, Sam felt she “was tasked
to do it” because she “got along with everybody” and “knew how to deal with people.” When
Sam took on the role, she shared with me that she felt the position was not well “scaffolded” and she was unsure of how to “observe teachers” and “what to do in department meetings.” Sam describes the position as “amorphous” in that “there’s no real formula for how it all works.” Sam described her responsibilities to include administrative duties, such as scheduling and managing the test calendar, as well as being a buffer for her teachers. Sam says her job is “to support [her] teachers.” It is also important to her that she “gives a voice to the English department” during administrative meetings. Sam spent a lot of time unifying the department, which she described as a “hodgepodge” when she first took on the role, especially because it was “a new school and everyone was kind of doing their own thing.”

Sam prioritizes “getting teachers to think about things and challenge themselves, and allowing themselves to grow,” and wishes she could “meet more individually with teachers, and set up growth plans.” Sam “really enjoys working with new teachers” and “making people feel appreciated and seen.” Sam is conflicted about her “dream of [the department] being more standardized” in terms of what the teachers teach each semester, which she feels doesn’t happen because she’s “tiptoeing around people’s sensitivities and their personal styles.” She describes these big changes as “new matzah balls” that she worries about “opening up” because “if we open it all up it might be a big mess in here,” and “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” She wishes she had more “direction” from the administration in that area. However, Sam did succeed in “standardizing” a lot of the curriculum in her department which I discuss in more detail in Chapter VI. She turns to her co-chair often for support because “it’s nice to have someone who understands those people and who is in my department to actually speak to and troubleshoot.” Together, they have their department collaborate and team up to create lesson plans on plagiarism or observe one another. Sam would also appreciate “communication on the
department chair level without the administrators” present to make the position less “amorphous” because “right now, we’re just swimming in our own ponds.” Without having the administrators there, Sam believes the chairs might be more open about their challenges because they would not have a supervisor present. During COVID, Sam led the department by focusing more on “the human being side” of her faculty and students, and since COVID feels “there definitely was a greater sense of empathy between one another.”

4.3 Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to offer a contextual overview of the three research sites in this study and the nine participants. The nine participants include three Science chairs, three Math chairs, and three English chairs. I created these narrative summaries from 13 hours of interview data after the first interviews to provide a picture of how each of the participants became department chair, how they describe some of the responsibilities, and how they might identify some challenges and/or supports in the role. In the next chapter, I provide insight into the survey data where I present key findings on what all department chairs from the three schools identified as their roles and responsibilities, challenges, support, and employment of the pillar practices. Then, in Chapter VI, I provide my key findings on the roles and responsibilities of these nine chairs, and I highlight the patterns I noticed among these nine chairs within their disciplines and school settings.
Chapter 5: Survey Results and Summary of Findings

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the major learnings from my survey to answer my fifth research question, *How, if at all, do all department chairs from these yeshiva high schools perceive their roles and responsibilities, challenges, collaboration, leadership practice, and possible employment of the pillar practices with teachers in their departments?* While the stories, descriptions, and experiences of the nine department chairs are at the heart of my study, the purpose of this survey was to learn even more about the context of department chairs in a Modern Orthodox setting, and to pilot the survey specifically for department chairs as a potential tool for future researchers, which to my knowledge does not exist.

The survey was also meant to triangulate my data, which involves using different methods as a check on one another, seeing if methods with different strengths and limitations all support a single conclusion to reduce the risk that my conclusions will reflect only the biases of a specific method, to allow me to gain a more secure understanding of the issues I am investigating (Maxwell, 2013). The topics included demographics on each of the department chairs, and through a Likert scale I asked the chairs about their roles and responsibilities, collaboration within the role, potential challenges within the role, and potential supports within the role. I also included questions on the pillar practices (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016, 2018, 2020) to learn how, if at all, the department chairs might support adult learning within their departments.

In this chapter, I present the findings from the survey that I administered to all the department chairs in the three Modern Orthodox schools that participated in this study: Zahov, Catom, and Varod. These data helped inform my understanding of how the department chairs perceive their role and responsibilities, challenges, supports, and possible employment of the
pillar practices with teachers in their departments. They also provided demographics on the department chairs in these three schools, which I present first. I then present findings on what the chairs reported to be their responsibilities, roles, challenges, supports, and how they might employ the pillar practices in their roles.

These findings support that the department chairs (n=24) mainly view their role and responsibilities to be a position of instructional leader for their departments, as they reported the primary role of the department chair is one that is central to improving the instruction and learning of their departments, and the main responsibilities of department chairs are to support their teachers through instructional leadership. This finding supports prior literature that demonstrates the growing notion that department chairs’ roles include leadership responsibilities aimed at improving teaching and learning (Brent et al., 2014; Peacock, 2014). These findings also show that the department chairs (n=24) support the teachers in their department by creating a holding environment and employing the pillar practices, mainly of teaming and collegial inquiry, with the teachers in their departments.

5.1 Overview of the Survey

The primary methodological approach of this study was a case study investigation with nine department chairs in three Modern Orthodox schools (Yin, 2014). Because no other survey for department chairs exists to the best of my knowledge, I designed the survey to better understand how the other department chairs in these three schools experience the role in the same context. I also used the survey as a pilot for a department chair survey that can be used by other researchers in other contexts. Twenty-seven department chairs filled out the survey, but only 24 of those responses were complete. The three chairs who did not complete the survey did complete the section on demographic information, and I wonder if they did not complete the
survey because they have many responsibilities and it was administered during a busy time of year, challenges that I discuss in more detail in Chapter VII. With a small sample size of 24 respondents, the power of the statistical tests to measure reliability were limited (Mertler & Vannatta, 2017). Therefore, to assess the reliability of the survey, I calculated Cronbach’s alpha to measure the internal consistency of four constructs within the survey: pillar practices, unifying the department, growing teachers, and instructional leadership. Within the pillar practices, I had three sub-constructs: teaming/collegial inquiry, which I grouped together because in my qualitative analysis I found the two were closely linked as collegial inquiry often occurred with or as a team, providing leadership roles, and mentoring. Furthermore, Drago-Severson (2004, 2009, 2012) explains that while there are four distinct pillars, they are mutually reinforcing initiatives and should be used together to support and challenge adults at different development levels. In Table 6 below, I identified the Cronbach’s alpha for each of the constructs, as well as the items included for each construct. In Appendix H, I included a correlation matrix of the items included in each construct to further identify the relationship among each item within the constructs. The value of Cronbach’s alpha is .7 or above for each of the constructs, which indicates that the questions on the survey within each construct are similar and are intercorrelated.
### Table 6

Cronbach’s Alpha for the Four Constructs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pillar Practices</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaming and Collegial Inquiry</td>
<td>9.3 As department chair, I have teachers in my department use inquiry to ask each other questions and share ideas together.</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.4 As department chair, I have teachers in my department collaborate using approaches such as critical friends.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.5 As department chair, I have teachers in my department participate in professional learning communities (PLCs).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.6 As department chair, I have teachers in my department share teaching and learning practices through professional development.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing Leadership Roles</td>
<td>9.8 As department chair, I share decision making with teachers in my department.</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.9 As department chair, I distribute tasks and/or responsibilities to teachers in my department as a way to support their learning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.10 As department chair, I provide supports and challenges appropriate to the teachers in my department, depending on their capabilities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>9.12 As department chair, I reflect with teachers in my department on their practice.</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.13 As department chair, I take teaching walks with teachers in my department to informally discuss their teaching practice.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.16 As department chair, I engage in meaningful conversations with teachers in my department about teaching and learning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unify the Department</strong></td>
<td>2.11 As department chair, I meet with teachers in my department.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.17 As department chair, I create a sense of camaraderie among the department.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grow Teachers</strong></td>
<td>3.11 Department chairs should meet with teachers in their department.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.4 As department chair, I mentor teacher(s) in my department.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.8 As department chair, I observe lessons of teachers in my department.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional Leadership</strong></td>
<td>2.9 As department chair, I offer feedback to the teachers in my department.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.1 Department chairs should carry out roles in writing and/or setting curriculum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.7 Department chairs should review teachers’ lesson plans and/or unit plans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.8 Department chairs should observe lessons of teachers in their department.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.2 Department chairs should be central to improving the instruction (teaching and learning) in their department.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My analysis of survey data was designed to inform my fifth research question, *How, if at all, do all department chairs from these yeshiva high schools perceive their roles and responsibilities, challenges, collaboration, leadership practice, and possible employment of the pillar practices with teachers in their departments?* I analyzed responses on a numerical scale and noted the total number of responses and percentages of each of the Likert questions. I used descriptive statistics to identify the means, standard deviations, and ranges. These results showed that department chairs reported meeting with teachers as a main responsibility (M=3.7).
Department chairs also reported their primary role as being central to improving the instruction of teachers in their departments (M=3.21).

Additionally, the most common ways department chairs reported supporting their teachers with the pillar practices is through teaming [having teachers in their departments share ideas (M=3.46), and sharing decision making with their teachers (M=3.25)] and collegial inquiry [reflecting with teachers on their practice (M=3.25), and engaging in meaningful conversations with their teachers about teaching and learning (M=3.25)]. Interestingly, these actions connect with the department chairs’ beliefs that the primary role of chair is central to improving the instruction (teaching and learning) in their departments (M=3.21) because these are ways department chairs can support their teachers to improve their practice. These actions might be carried out during department meetings, or other meetings with teachers, which is also the responsibility the chairs reported employing most often (M=3.75). The top three challenges department chairs reported were struggling teachers in their departments (M=3.42), not having enough time to observe teachers (3.38), and students entering high school below grade level (M=3.25), which are all challenges that instructional leaders might face as they seek to improve the teaching and learning within the school. The greatest support department chairs listed as helpful is speaking with other department chairs within the school (M=3.42).

Survey Participants

I administered the survey (Appendix E) directly through e-mail to the nine department chairs who participated in the study, and indirectly to all department chairs in the three schools by asking the leadership team in each school to send out the survey to whomever they recognize to hold the position as department chair (n~30). Twenty-seven department chairs took the survey, and 24 of those respondents completed the survey. In Table 7, I present the
characteristics of the department chairs who participated in the survey and responded to the questions regarding their characteristics. Of the 27 department chairs, 11 were male and 16 were female. This connects to previous literature from a decade ago that found majority of department chairs to be female (DeAngelis, 2013). A large majority of the department chairs (n=19) self-identified as being an educator for over 15 years and were in the school between 11 and 20 years (n=15). There was a wide range of ages of the department chairs; however, the highest number of chairs were between 41-50 years old (n=9) and 31-40 years old (n=8). This is also supported by previous literature that found department chairs were mostly middle aged with over eleven years of teaching experience (DeAngelis, 2013). However, this survey also includes ten of the chairs who were in their first four years of chairing their departments. There was also a wide range of disciplines the participants chair, including both secular subjects (math, science, English, history, language), Judaic subjects (Navi, Torah, Talmud), and the arts (music, art).

Table 7

Characteristics of Survey Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Characteristic</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>40.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>59.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years as an educator</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15+ years</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age bracket</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61-70</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71-80</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in the school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years as department chair</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>11-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>55.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Department

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Science</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>History (American, European, Jewish)</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Navi</th>
<th>Torah</th>
<th>Talmud</th>
<th>Art</th>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2 Survey Results

In this section, I share results from my analysis of the survey data. As discussed in Chapter III, the survey consisted of nine sections (Appendix E). The first section asked for the respondents’ characteristics, which I outlined in Table 7 above. The next sections called for Likert scale responses that attempted to examine what the respondents identified as their role and responsibilities of department chair, their challenges and supports, and how, if at all, they might employ the pillar practices. The results showed that department chairs reported meeting with teachers as a main responsibility. They also showed that department chairs believe responsibilities of chairs should include supporting teachers with parent and/or student issues and creating a sense of camaraderie within the department, two responsibilities I interpret as a way chairs can create a holding environment for the teachers in their departments. Additionally, department chairs believe that chairs should mentor teachers, provide feedback, and model
strong teaching, which are all ways that department chairs can further support the instructional practice of teachers in their departments. This interpretation is further supported by the department chairs’ reporting their primary role as being central to improving the instruction of teachers in their departments.

**Responsibilities of Department Chairs in Modern Orthodox Schools**

The first section of Likert scale questions was designed to examine what department chairs identify to be the responsibilities of a department chair. Department chairs were asked, “Please circle how often you perform these tasks on a scale of 1-4” for a variety of responsibilities (i.e., curriculum, paperwork, providing feedback). Respondents were instructed that 1 indicated “never” which was further defined as “I’ve never done that,” 2 is “sometimes,” clarified to mean “around once or twice a year,” 3 is “regularly” or “between three to five times a year,” and 4 is “very regularly” or “more than six times a year.” Respondents were also asked to identify “how important you believe each of the following tasks are for department chairs to fulfill on a scale of 1-4, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 4 representing strongly agree,” for the same variety of responsibilities as the set before. The intention behind this was to measure how, if at all, the responsibilities of what department chairs do are similar or different to what department chairs believe that chairs should do.

In order to analyze the Likert scale data, I first calculated the mean Likert scale response for each responsibility the department chairs self-identified as doing. Based on these results, the department chairs (n=24) reported eleven responsibilities they do on a regular basis (M=3.0 or higher): meet with teachers (M=3.7), relay important information from the administration to teachers (M=3.54), support teachers with parent and/or student issues (M=3.58), mentor teachers (M=3.38), create a sense of camaraderie within the department (M=3.3), provide feedback to
teachers (M=3.25), model strong teaching (M=3.2), make decisions for the department (M=3.17), observe teachers (M=3.08), approve activities or programming for the department (M=3.08), and write and/or set curriculum for the department (M=3.04). Second, I calculated the mean Likert scale response for each responsibility the department chairs identified to be something department chairs should do. Here, department chairs responded that they “agree” (M=3.0 or higher) chairs should do 16 of the 17 responsibilities: meet with teachers (3.71), support teachers with parent and/or student issues (M=3.67), mentor teachers (M=3.67), create a sense of camaraderie within the department (M=3.67), provide feedback to teachers (M=3.67), model strong teaching (M=3.67), observe teachers (M=3.58), write teacher evaluations (M=3.58), model learning (M=3.5), write and/or set curriculum for the department (M=3.5), approve activities or programming for the department (M=3.38), remain up-to-date on the current research (M=3.29), make decisions for the department (M=3.21), order and/or approve supplies for the department (M=3.17), and review lesson and/or unit plans (M=3.17). Interestingly, although the same eleven responsibilities department chairs identified as doing are also what the department chairs agree that chairs should do, there were some differences between the two groups. In Figure 3, I display the overall mean for each responsibility department chairs reported doing and believing department chairs should do. The responsibilities are arranged from least to greatest differences in mean between the two sets of questions.
Note: Data is displayed on a scale of 0-3 for visual representation (N=24).

It is also interesting to note the responsibilities the chairs identified as believing department chairs should do with a mean of 3.5 or greater are mostly responsibilities I categorized as improving the instruction and learning of the teachers in their departments: meeting with teachers, mentoring teachers, providing feedback to teachers, modeling strong teaching, observing teachers’ lessons, and writing teacher evaluations. The primary
responsibility in both sections is reported as meeting with teachers, which I interpret to be a way that department chairs can enact their other responsibilities. Additionally, supporting teachers with parent or student issues and creating a sense of camaraderie within the department were listed as important responsibilities in both sets, and are responsibilities I interpret contribute to chairs creating a holding environment for the teachers within their departments. In both sets of questions, the lowest ranked responsibility was creating teacher schedules, which is largely an administrative responsibility.

In Appendix I, where I present a frequency distribution for each item, the responses to these items are fairly spread out among small sample of survey participants (n=24). Interestingly, chairs responded in general with more participants agreeing and strongly agreeing to the responsibilities they believe chairs should be doing. I interpreted this to mean that perhaps the chairs feel the role has many responsibilities, which might also contribute to the literature that describes the ambiguities of the role (Peacock, 2014). This is because when chairs were presented with these responsibilities, there was a much higher percentage for department chairs to agree or strongly agree that they should be enacting those responsibilities, which leads me to wonder if department chairs are more likely to agree to responsibilities when presented to them. It is also interesting to note that in particular, curriculum is a responsibility that had a wider diversity in frequencies when chairs were asked if they currently write or set the curriculum (4%, 25%, 33%, 38%), but had very different frequencies when chairs were asked if they should be writing or setting curriculum, with 50% of chairs responding they agree and 50% responding they strongly agree. I wonder, then, if not all chairs are given the opportunity to work on the curriculum for the departments, and if someone else in the school, such as a Director of General
or Judaic Studies, decides curriculum. It seems as though chairs would like to have that
responsibility or feel that they should.

**Results of T-Test Between Department Chair Responsibilities**

I used a two-tailed t-test to compare the means of the responsibilities the department
chairs (n=24) reported as currently doing and the responsibilities the chairs responded that
department chairs should do. It is important to note a limitation in this t-test that the population
distribution is not normally distributed. With such a small sample (n=24), the purpose of this
survey was to pilot the survey for future use with a greater sample of department chairs. In Table
8, I present the results of the t-test where I compared each pair of responsibilities to determine
whether or not the relationships between the pairs are statistically significant. The results indicate
a medium strength positive relationship (Pearson correlation of 0.42) between the responsibility
of writing and/or setting the curriculum. The statistical analysis shows that the relationship is
statistically significant, as the t-statistic of -2.695 is lower than the critical t-value of 2.06
(p<.05). Additionally, there is statistical significance with the relationship between the way
department chairs view the responsibilities of mentoring teachers in the department (p<.05),
modeling strong teaching (p<.05), modeling strong learning (p<.05), reviewing teachers’ lessons
and/or unit plans (p<.05), observing lessons (p<.05), offering feedback (p<.05), keeping up to
date on research (p<.05), creating schedules for teachers (p<.05), and creating a sense of
camaraderie for the department (p<.05).
**Table 8**

*Results of T-Test for Differences in Department Chairs’ Reported Responsibilities with Believed Responsibilities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Mean 1 (currently do)</th>
<th>Mean 2 (should do)</th>
<th>t-statistic</th>
<th>Degrees of freedom (df)</th>
<th>t Critical two-tail</th>
<th>Significance level (p)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing and/or setting curriculum</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>-2.69</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>p&lt;.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relay important information</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making decisions for the department</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>-0.24</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor teachers in the department</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>-2.59</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>p&lt;.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model strong teaching</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>-3.82</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>p&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model strong learning</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>-3.98</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>p&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review teachers’ lessons and/or units</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>-4.3</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>p&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observe lessons</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>-4.15</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>p&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer feedback</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>-4.05</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>p&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write teacher evaluations</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>-6.28</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet with teachers</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Role of Department Chairs in Modern Orthodox Schools

The next section of Likert scale questions was designed to examine what department chairs identify to be the role of a department chair. Respondents were asked, “Please circle if you believe the following statements to be true about your role as department chair on a scale of 1-4, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 4 representing strongly agree” for five different roles. Respondents were also asked to identify “how important you believe each of the following roles are for department chairs to fulfill on a scale of 1-4, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 4 representing strongly agree,” for the same choices of roles as the set before. The intention behind this was to measure how, if at all, the roles of what department chairs believe to be true about their roles are similar or different to what department chairs think that the roles of chairs should be.

In order to analyze the Likert scale data, I first calculated the mean Likert scale response for each role the department chairs identified as believing to be true about their position. In Table 9, I present the descriptive statistics for the responses of this section, the role of the department chairs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support teachers</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>-0.49</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order supplies</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>-1.97</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approve programming</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>-1.77</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep up-to-date on research</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>-4.65</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>p&lt;0.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create schedules for teachers</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>-3.8</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>p&lt;0.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a sense of camaraderie</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>-2.5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>p&lt;0.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
chair. I present the means and standard deviations as a result of the limitations of a small sample size (n=24). The table shows that department chairs reported their primary role to being central to improving the instruction and learning in their departments (M=3.21). This correlates to the instructional responsibilities department chairs identified in the first section (i.e., observing teachers, providing feedback). The department chairs also agreed that their roles include being the link between teachers and the administration (M=3.13) and being an advocate of change rather than a protector of the status quo (M=3.08). The other two roles included department chair being subject matter experts (M=2.96) and department chair being an administrative role (M=2.96). Interestingly, Melville and colleagues (2016) advocated in their study that department chairs need to be more than content specialists, which is what the findings of this survey on department chairs seem to support as well, with the role of subject matter experts falling behind improving instruction, linking teachers with the administration, and advocating for change.

When the participants were asked their beliefs on what the role of department chair should be, department chairs reported even lower agreement with the notion that department chairs should be subject matter experts (M=2.88), and even higher agreement with the notion that department chairs should be central to improving the instruction (teaching and learning) of the teachers in their departments (M=3.46). In both sets of questions, department chairs reported being central to improving the instruction of teachers in their departments as the primary role of department chair, with a median and mode of 4 ("strongly agree") when department chairs were asked if they believe that’s what the role should be. It is also interesting to note that the chairs gave a wide variety of responses about the role of department chair as subject matter expert (Appendix I). Out of the five roles presented, this particular item had the most diversity in terms
of participants’ responses. I wonder if this is because the role is changing to be less of a content expert, which is how the role began, to one of instructional leader (Peacock, 2014).

**Table 9**

*Descriptive Statistics of the Role of Department Chair*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Mean: Self-identify</th>
<th>Mean: Should be</th>
<th>Standard Deviation: Self-identify</th>
<th>Standard Deviation: Should be</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject matter expert</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central to improving instruction (teaching &amp; learning)</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role is administrative</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link between principals and teachers</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocate for change</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Challenges of Department Chairs in Modern Orthodox Schools**

The third and fourth sections of Likert scale questions were designed to examine what department chairs identify to be the challenges and supports of a department chair. Respondents were first asked, “Please circle if you believe the following statements to be true about the challenges you experience as department chair on a scale of 1-4, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 4 representing strongly agree” for thirteen different statements. The top three challenges department chairs reported were struggling teachers in their departments (M=3.42), not having enough time to observe teachers (3.38), and students entering high school below grade level (M=3.25). In Table 10, I present the descriptive statistics for the challenges the department chairs identified, followed by a graphical display of the means in Figure 4 below.
**Table 10**

*Descriptive Statistics of Department Chairs’ Challenges*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students entering high school below grade level</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in my department are struggling</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers have students who show little growth at year end</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure to improve standardized test scores</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough time to observe teachers</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High teacher turnover rate</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot of teachers in the department</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too few teachers in the department</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure from parents</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure from administration</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching as chair</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping up with paperwork</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing unexpected complexities</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Higher averages signify greater challenges. For example, the greatest challenge for the department chairs is struggling teachers in the department (M=3.42) while the least challenging is pressure to increase standardized test scores (M=2.00).

Figure 4 displays the overall mean for each challenge that is presented in Table 10.
Note: Data is displayed on a scale of 0-3 for visual representation (N=24).

Supports for Department Chairs in Modern Orthodox Schools

In the next section, department chairs were asked, “Please circle if you believe the following statements to be true about the supports you experience as department chair on a scale of 1-4, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 4 representing strongly agree”. The greatest support department chairs listed as helpful is speaking with other department chairs within the school (M=3.42). Speaking with department chairs in other schools (M=3.14), letting go of small issues (M=3.14), practicing self-care (M=3.14), and asking the administration for help (M=3.14) were all the next greatest supports. Department chairs found keeping up-to-date with academic research (M=2.86) and subscribing to educational journals (M=2.5) least helpful of the listed
supports. In Table 11, I present the descriptive statistics for the challenges the department chairs identified, followed by a graphical display of the means in Figure 5 below.

### Table 11

**Descriptive Statistics of Department Chairs’ Supports**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subscribing to educational journals</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping up-to-date with academic research</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking with department chairs in my school</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking with department chairs from other schools</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letting go of small issues</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicing self-care</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking administration for help</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking teachers in the department for help</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking colleagues from outside department for help</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delegating responsibilities to teachers</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Higher averages signify greater supports. For example, the greatest support for the department chairs is speaking with other department chairs within the school (M=3.42) while the least support is subscribing to academic journals (M=2.5).*

Figure 5 displays the overall mean for each support that is presented in Table 11.

### Figure 5

**Overall Means Likert Scale Score of Department Chairs’ Supports**
Department Chairs and the Pillar Practices

In the last section of the survey, department chairs were asked, “Please circle how often you perform these tasks on a scale of 1-4” for a variety of responsibilities chairs can enact with the teachers in their departments that are specifically related to the pillar practices (teaming, collegial inquiry, mentoring, and providing leadership roles). Respondents were instructed that 1 indicated “never” which was further defined as “I’ve never done that,” 2 is “sometimes,” clarified to mean “around once or twice a year,” 3 is “regularly” or “between three to five times a year,” and 4 is “very regularly” or “more than six times a year.” The most common way department chairs reported supporting their teachers with the pillar practices is having teachers in their departments share ideas (M=3.46), sharing decision making with their teachers (M=3.25), reflecting with teachers on their practice (M=3.25), and engaging in meaningful conversations with their teachers about teaching and learning (M=3.25). I categorized these practices with

Note: Data is displayed on a scale of 0-3 for visual representation (n=24).
teaming (sharing and exchanging ideas as a department and sharing decision making responsibilities with the department) and collegial inquiry (having meaningful conversations with teachers about their teaching and learning, and reflecting with teachers on their practice).

Interestingly, these actions connect with the department chairs’ beliefs that the primary role of chair is central to improving the instruction (teaching and learning) in their departments (M=3.21). Additionally, these actions might be carried out during department meetings, or other meetings with teachers, which is the responsibility the chairs reported employing most often (M=3.75). I am also interested in the seeming disconnect between the responsibility the chairs reported as being decision makers for their departments (M=3.25) and the department chairs reporting that they share in their decision making with teachers in their departments (M=3.25). This leads me to believe that although department chairs feel responsible for making decisions for their departments, they include the teachers in their departments as part of this decision making. Additionally, in Appendix I, the frequency distributions of the pillar practice items are fairly evenly distributed, which leads me to believe that this survey might be a helpful pre-interview screening tool to get a general sense about how department chairs might, or might not, employ the pillar practices before learning even more about why and how through qualitative research. In Table 12, I present the descriptive statistics for the pillar practices the department chairs identified, followed by a graphical display of the means in in Figure 6 below.
**Table 12**

*Descriptive Statistics of Department Chairs’ Employment of Pillar Practices*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Related to Pillar Practices</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ask teachers in the department to team teach</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have teachers use strategy development to solve problems together</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have teachers use inquiry to ask each other questions and share ideas together</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have teachers collaborate using approaches such as critical friends</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have teachers participate in professional learning communities</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have teachers share teaching and learning practices through professional development</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have teachers share and exchange ideas</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share decision making with teachers in department</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribute tasks and/or responsibilities to support teachers’ learning</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide supports and challenges appropriate to teachers in department</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in inquiry with teachers to guide decisions and practice</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflect with teachers in my department on their practice</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take teaching walks with teachers to informally discuss teaching practice</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create study groups with teachers in the department</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize educational retreats with teachers</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in meaningful conversation with my department about teaching and learning</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore firmly held convictions and/or beliefs with teachers</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish developmental relationships with teachers</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6**

Overall Means Likert Scale Score of Department Chairs’ Use of Pillar Practices

Note: Data is displayed on a scale of 0-3 for visual representation (n=24).

### 5.3 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented an overview of the major quantitative findings of my study through my analysis of the survey (Appendix E) to answer my fifth research question, *How, if at all, do all department chairs from these yeshiva high schools perceive their roles and responsibilities, challenges, collaboration, leadership practice, and possible employment of the pillar practices with teachers in their departments?* I administered the survey to all department
chairs in the three Modern Orthodox schools, of which 24 participants completed the full survey. I identified the characteristics the chairs self-identified, and what they identified to be the responsibilities, roles, challenges, supports of department chairs, and how the chairs support their teachers through the pillar practices. I found that chairs believe the role to be mainly central to improving the instruction of teaching and learning for their departments, and the responsibilities and challenges the chairs identified support that finding. In addition, I found that the chairs create a holding environment for the teachers in their departments through their responsibilities and use of teaming and collegial inquiry to further support the teachers’ practices within their departments. In my next chapters, I build on these survey results by providing my key qualitative findings to provide a more rich and thick description on the roles and responsibilities, challenges, and supports of nine department chairs, and I highlight the patterns I noticed among these nine chairs within their disciplines and school settings.
Chapter 6: Department Chairs’ Descriptions of their Role and Responsibilities

In this chapter, I discuss what I learned from exploring my first research question: how do nine department chairs from NYC Modern Orthodox yeshiva high schools describe and understand their own role and responsibilities as a department chair? To address this question, I conducted two interviews with nine department chairs, with each interview lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. I also observed a department meeting for eight of the nine chairs, because one department chair, Sam, the English chair at Varod, did not feel her teachers would be “comfortable” with an observation. During the second interview, I asked follow up questions about what I observed during the department meeting with the eight chairs who agreed to allow me to observe a meeting in order to learn more about how the chairs described and understood their actions as they enact their roles and responsibilities. I then coded the responses to identify the specific responsibilities the department chairs described in the interviews.

The first finding about the department chairs’ roles and responsibilities I discuss in this chapter is that all nine chairs had difficulty differentiating between their roles and their responsibilities, which I interpreted as the result of the ambiguity within the position. A second finding I discuss in this chapter is that all nine department chairs in the study described some type of administrative responsibility within the role. The three science chairs described these administrative responsibilities as it relates to lab work in their discipline, the three math chairs described administrative responsibilities such as administering testing, like the Regents exams or placement exams, and the three English chairs discussed the testing calendar and scheduling within their departments.
I also include in this chapter my findings on the curricular responsibilities of the nine chairs in this study. While all nine chairs described their curricular responsibilities, the three English chairs discussed curriculum in more depth than the other disciplines. I interpreted this to be because unlike science and math, English is a discipline with no set curriculum or content, and the material taught in an English classroom can vary greatly among high schools. I found that the three English chairs in this study unify their departments through conversations about curriculum by providing leadership role and engaging in collegial inquiry. Additionally, I found that they enact Learning Forward’s leadership role of curriculum specialist, as they help their teachers become sophisticated users of the curriculum and developers of their own classroom curriculum (2022).

6.1 Process of Analysis for Role and Responsibilities

I began to write this chapter by thinking broadly on what the chairs shared with me about each of the responsibilities. After coding their responses to identify what I interpreted as their responsibilities, I wrote short paragraphs where I generalized the information to think about how I might bring the descriptions back together after the coding to understand what the department chairs were really saying. After discussions with my sponsor, I was encouraged to dig even deeper and get more specific to identify themes and potentially make claims about what the department chairs shared about their responsibilities through tables and matrices. In other words, rather than repeat or restate the responsibilities the chairs shared during our interviews and the observations, I was encouraged to think about what the chairs were saying about those responsibilities. Each of those paragraphs then turned into four or five paragraphs as I started to provide richer descriptions from the voices of the chairs, and identify patterns among the chairs. Soon after, I shared this document with a group of doctoral students trained in qualitative
research in an advanced research seminar at Teachers College, Columbia University. After thinking deeply about their feedback and the feedback, thoughts, and questions from my sponsor, I went even further into the analysis of the first responsibility, the administrative duties. I began to feel the difference as I moved away from repeating and organizing what the chairs said to analyzing and connecting what they said with each other, their disciplines, their schools, and years of experience. I then followed that method with the other responsibility I discuss in this chapter, curriculum.

6.2 Differentiating Between Roles and Responsibilities

It is worth noting that the chairs themselves had trouble differentiating between the terms “role” and “responsibilities” and I decided to keep the two linked because the chairs seemed to have linked the two. I define the word “role” as the overall purpose of the position, and “responsibilities” as what’s required of the position, more like the day-to-day. I’ve defined those two in those terms during the interviews with the department chairs before asking about each of them. However, when I asked chairs to identify their role they mostly listed their responsibilities. I think this might be because the role is so ambiguous from their perspectives, that the department chairs had difficulty discerning between the overall purpose of their position and the responsibilities they are held accountable for during the interviews with me. The literature on department chairs consistently lists ambiguity in the role, supporting this conclusion (Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021; Kelley & Salisbury, 2013; Klar, 2013; Klar, 2012; Peacock, 2014).

6.3 Overview of Administrative and Curricular Responsibilities

In the next sections, I delineate two of the responsibilities the department chairs all discussed during the interviews, and that I identified based on the chairs’ understandings and descriptions as they responded to the interview questions. I begin with administrative duties, then
curriculum. I found that all nine chairs discussed both administrative and curricular responsibilities. However, these responsibilities varied by discipline in the three schools. The three science chairs described the most administrative responsibilities, and these duties were mainly related to labs. The three math chairs, on the other hand, described administrative responsibilities relating to testing and placement exams, which might be because math is a tracked subject in two of the three schools. The three English chairs, however, discussed administrative responsibilities related to scheduling and the testing calendar. I also found that while all nine chairs discussed curriculum, the English chairs discussed the ways in which they unify their departments through their curricular responsibilities by providing leadership roles to teachers in their departments when it comes to curricular decision-making, and engage in collegial inquiry as they discuss and reflect on curriculum as a department within the three schools. I discuss these findings in more detail in the narrative that follows.

It is important to note that all of the department chairs did list other responsibilities, such as meeting and observing teachers, making recommendations with hiring and firing teachers, being a buffer between the teachers in their departments and parents, students, and/or the administration, unifying the department, and providing emotional support. These responsibilities align with the literature on department chairs; of the research on department chairs over the past 50 years, Peacock (2014) describes that chairs are expected to carry out a variety of administrative, managerial, supervisory, curricular, and instructional responsibilities (2014). Yet, these chairs shared deep insights into these responsibilities and through the interviews I was able to learn why and how the department chairs spend time on certain responsibilities more than others. For example, although there was a variety of administrative duties, as Peacock (2014)
described, I learned that the chairs enacted different administrative duties depending on their discipline and years of experience, which I discuss in more detail in the narrative that follows.

For that reason, in this dissertation I am focusing deeply on two of the responsibilities that all nine chairs described during the interviews: administrative duties and curriculum. I also weave in the two lenses in this study, Learning Forward’s 10 roles for teacher leaders (2022), and the four pillar practices (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016, 2018, 2020), to answer my second and fourth research questions, respectively: How, if at all, do their descriptions and understandings of their role as a department chair connect to Learning Forward’s 10 roles for teacher leadership and how, if at all, to what degree, and why, do these nine department chairs employ any one of the four pillar practices (teaming, providing leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring) in their practice with teachers in their department as department chairs? I found that when enacting the two responsibilities of administrative duties and curriculum, some of the chairs enact these responsibilities as a team within their departments (3/9). Other chairs provide leadership roles to the teachers in their departments as a way of support and also as a way to create buy-in with the teachers in their departments (4/9). Additionally, through collegial inquiry, the English chairs make space for discussion as a department to discuss and reflect on curriculum (3/9). The chairs also described aspects of Learning Forward’s Leadership Roles such as Data Coach (1/9), Curricular Specialist (3/9), Catalyst for Change (1/9) and Instructional Specialist (1/9) when it came to these two responsibilities. I weave in these findings throughout the chapter as I discuss what the department chairs shared with me about their administrative and responsibilities.

Administrative Duties

“Spreadsheets, spreadsheets, spreadsheets.”
– Pat, Math Chair, Varod
“Around the pandemic we spent a lot of time on logistics. What are we doing and how are we doing it, you know. But more and more now I’m hoping that we’ll be able to talk about some more substantive things.”
– Ruby, English Chair, Catom

“I probably [spend more time on] the empty kind of stuff, like scheduling, and just doing the busy kind of work that needs to be done like administrative, setting the scene, talking to people, coordinating times, schedules, stuff no one likes to do.”
– Ricky, Science Chair, Zahov

In the above quotes from Pat, Ruby, and Ricky, who are each from different disciplines and different schools, the chairs share different aspects of administrative duties they feel responsible for in their disciplines and schools. In fact, all nine chairs across the three different schools listed administrative duties as part of their responsibilities. These administrative responsibilities included reviewing exam dates and other calendar items, ordering equipment, scheduling teaching assignments and room scheduling, administering the AP exams and NYS Regents exams, and budgeting. These administrative duties align with Volonnino and Matthews (2019) article where they describe the tedious and mundane duties often given to department chairs, such as distributing and ordering textbooks, assisting in course placement, ordering supplies, and checking grade submissions. However, in this narrative I present a deeper look into why the department chairs enact these responsibilities, how the department chairs fulfill these responsibilities, and what characteristics of the chairs, such as years of experience and discipline, might influence these administrative responsibilities as I provide my interpretations of what the nine chairs described.

In Table 12, I include a list of the chairs and responsibilities I interpreted as administrative tasks. Each of these responsibilities the chairs mentioned during the first interview as a response to the question, “Can you tell me about your responsibilities as department chair?” Although I
list all of the administrative responsibilities the chairs mentioned in Table 12, it is important to note that not all of the chairs emphasized all of these responsibilities with equal weight during our interviews. I give voice in the narrative that follows to the administrative responsibilities that the chairs emphasized most during our interviews. It is also important to note that the time of year I collected data might also have influenced what the chairs shared about their administrative responsibilities, because it might have been top of mind for the chairs. For example, Jackie, the math chair at Zahov, only mentioned administrative responsibilities related to Regents exams, and our first interview took place in May as she was getting ready to administer this exam.

I organized Table 12 by discipline as a way to identify any patterns across discipline, in order to note any similarities among the science, math, and English subjects. In the narrative that follows, I discuss the findings first by discipline and then by school. This is because I identified patterns among the disciplines and I also wondered if the administrative responsibilities vary depending on school context. In other words, what about the administrative responsibilities are connected to discipline, and what about these duties are connected to school context? I begin with the science department, followed by the math department, and lastly the English. Afterwards, I look at the three chairs within each setting to understand how the setting might intentionally or unintentionally set the administrative responsibilities for the department chairs within each school. I begin with Catom, followed by Varod, and lastly Zahov.

Table 12

Administrative Responsibilities of Department Chairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Administrative Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ricky</td>
<td>Zahov</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>• Setting up appointments with teachers and students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Ordering textbooks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Administering final exams, including proctoring and grading
- Scheduling for faculty
- Organizing the labs
- Ordering lab equipment
- Budgeting
- Reviewing department exams
- Editing report card anecdotes for department
- Approving equipment for labs
- Ordering lab notebooks
- Ordering lab equipment
- Ordering textbooks
- Reviewing department policies
- Room scheduling for labs
- Setting up Regents exams
- Packing up Regents exams
- Collecting exam data
- Reviewing department exams
- Tracking/ student placements
- Reading students’ report card anecdotes within the department
- Going over exams
- Creating a test calendar
- Writing and administering a placement exam
- Setting teacher placements
- Tracking/ student placements
- Creating a test calendar
- Scheduling teacher meetings
- Scheduling teaching assignments
- Administering AP exams
- Managing the testing calendar and scheduling conflicts
- Managing the testing calendar and scheduling conflicts
Science Chairs

As visible in Table 12, the science departments in the three schools generally listed the most administrative responsibilities. It seems as though for the science chairs in these three schools, science is a subject that has more logistical responsibilities than the other disciplines, because all three science chairs included ordering lab equipment or supplies, and labs are unique to the science discipline.

For example, Ricky, in her second year as science department chair at Zahov, listed setting up appointments with teachers and students, ordering textbooks, administering final exams, faculty scheduling, organizing the labs, and budgeting as some of her other administrative responsibilities, in addition to the ordering of lab equipment and supplies. Ricky described this aspect of her position as “busy work.” She said that she can get “bogged down” by the “details” of the “busy, busy, busy,” and that she does not always have the time to spend on being the “visionary,” which is what she “really wants to be.” She does not “want to be the person who is so busy doing the job that they forget about, you know, the bigger picture.” However, in response to the question of what she spends the most time on, Ricky answered that it’s the “empty kind of stuff, like scheduling, and just doing the busy kind of work that needs to be done.” She calls these “administrative” tasks “stuff no one likes to do.” While Ricky does “love” her job, it seems that the administrative duties take away from the aspects of her job she is most passionate about, such as “the people,” “the creativity,” “the dream,” and the “vision” she has for her department:

I kind of wish somebody would force me to take the day off and say, ‘We’re paying you, like, take the day off, and go, and research, and go to the library, just go and sit, look up some stuff, think about things, dream, and vision, and you don’t have to come back and prove that you did anything with that day, but we know that’s valuable to you, like a day off.’
Here, Ricky expressed to me during the first interview that she wishes someone from the administrative team at Zahov (a Head of Upper School and two Associate Principals) would give her a day to think about her department and “dream” or “vision.” Interestingly, Brent and colleagues (2014) identified a similar finding in their study with principals who were surveyed about the position of department chairs, where the principals viewed the department chairs’ role as managers much less important than visioning. Ricky continued by explaining the reason she would want time for visioning:

For somebody who’s hardworking and somebody who has so much to think about, I want more time for reflection and I don’t get that. I’d love to just think. Like, that’s where I am. In my brain I have so much. I have so much creativity. But, if you don’t give me that downtime, I won’t produce the way I want to. So, I think that would be something very valuable, but we live in such a fast-paced environment, it’s like there’s always the next thing and the next thing and the next thing. Which, I’m good at keeping up, but I’d love to, you know.

Ricky shared with me that she feels she is thinking about so many aspects of her department that she needs “downtime” in order to tap into her “creativity” and “produce” the way she wants for her department. Although Ricky did not get specific about what she would want to “produce,” she expressed to me during the first interview that she wishes she had more of an opportunity to spend time on “dreaming” and creating a “vision” rather than constantly thinking about the “next thing and the next thing and the next thing” for her department. I wonder if Ricky here is saying that she wishes she could move away from the administrative duties to take on more of a teacher leadership role, such as Learning Forward’s (2022) Catalyst for Change, which they describe as a leader who “seeks to influence improvement not only by disturbing the status quo and introducing new ideas, but also by shifting interpretations and assumptions.” When Ricky discusses her desires to “dream,” “vision,” and tap into her “creativity,” it seems like she is
expressing a wish to have the time to change the status quo as she considers her current
assumptions and interpretations for her science department.

Similar to Ricky, Charlie, another science chair who has chaired the department for 19
years at Varod and recently retired, lamented that “ordering equipment takes forever.” However,
Charlie delegated this responsibility by having “a Chem teacher who puts together the Chem
order, Physics teacher, [name omitted], put together, and the Bio teachers put it together.” I
interpreted this as Charlie employing the pillar practice of providing leadership roles to teachers
tasking one individual with ordering equipment, and simply distributing the task or
responsibility, it seems Charlie is very intentional about the teachers she asks to put together the
lists by choosing one teacher from each subject put together an equipment list with the other
teachers on that subject team. In addition to ordering lab equipment, Charlie orders the course
textbooks and the specific notebooks students use for their labs. Charlie is also responsible for
making sure her teachers are scheduled in the correct rooms for lab work, orders the lab cart with
supplies for teachers to bring their rooms during scheduling labs, Charlie reviews the school’s
updated policies with her department:

Here’s another thing, to make sure that teachers are teaching in rooms where they can do
demonstrations. We all have lab carts that we can bring from room to room. You can be
going between floors you know between periods. Ordering equipment, ordering textbooks,
weighing in on all the issues when the school is changing its policy about testing, about
this, about that.

Although Charlie spends time on these administrative tasks, she does not describe it in the
same way that Ricky had. Perhaps a key difference is that Ricky is very new to the role of
science department chair, just beginning her second year, and she is still learning how to manage
these administrative tasks and responsibilities, whereas Charlie had been chairing her department
for close to 20 years. Also, Charlie provided leadership roles to teachers in her department to help her with the administrative aspects of the job that take “forever” by having teachers within the specific subjects of the science discipline, chemistry, physics, and math, put together their own list of supplies they need to order.

It is therefore helpful to look at Andy, the third science chair who has chaired her department for close to 10 years, almost exactly in the middle experience-wise. Andy also said that part of her responsibilities includes “ordering a lot of equipment.” However, it is interesting to note that Andy has someone in her department she describes as a “lab technician” whose role is to organize and run the labs: “she doesn’t teach any classes… that’s her role.” Andy also describes this individual as a “lab assistant” who “helps with setting up labs and everything.” Although Andy approves the orders, it is the assistant who “orders the supplies.” The lab assistant also “helps with the office, like puts up everyone’s schedules, and gets what you need.” When the teachers are “teaching something and we remember we want to do a demonstration, she’ll come and get it for us.” Andy explained that “it’s nice that we have her.” In the second interview, Andy shared that:

She’s the lab technician for science only, so she also like sets up all labs, like all in-class labs that we do, she cleans up afterwards, she’ll help in the lab period… for the teachers who want a second person there, and she also stays on top of our inventory and what we need to get. And then if someone wants to do it, they go through her.

Perhaps this is why Andy’s administrative responsibilities look a little differently than the other science chairs. When I asked Andy if she found it very supportive, she said, “it’s amazing,” and when I asked Andy if any challenges came with delegating those responsibilities to a lab technician, she responded, “No, I can only see challenges if I didn’t have it, I mean I really can’t imagine, if teachers had to set up their own labs, I feel like it just wouldn’t happen.” This might
be why rather than scheduling and organizing labs, Andy’s administrative tasks mirror the other disciplines’ responsibilities to review report card anecdotals, student grades, and department exams.

**Math Chairs**

All three math chairs included some aspect of exams within their administrative responsibilities. Jackie, a veteran teacher at Zahov who has been chairing the department for 12 years, only listed “Regents” as a responsibility I coded as administrative: “make sure that the Regents gets administered for your departments, and that it gets packed back up.” This is one aspect of the job that was never directly communicated to Jackie: “Now, they never told you how you’re supposed to pack back up the Regents. So, it’s like, just make sure it gets done.” Last year, the Zahov administration, which consists of one Head of School and two Associate Principals, gave out a typed job description to the chairs and “now it’s… less micromanaged, better managed.” Interestingly, it’s worth noting that Regents exams are not specifically stated on the job description. When it comes to assessments, the only directive on the job description is to “create and evaluate appropriate assessments of student learning” during “weekly or biweekly” meetings with “individuals or groups of teachers in your department.” Therefore, on the job description testing is viewed by the administration more as a collaborative, instructional responsibility rather than a logistical, administrative responsibility to physically administer and pack up the Regents exam. Jackie does not list other administrative responsibilities, and she began the interview explaining that, “I don’t want to have an administrative kind of position, I’ve been offered a position of being principal even in places, I have no interest in administration- I have an interest in teaching.” It seems that Jackie intentionally does not focus on the
administrative responsibilities of the position, and instead looks more at the big-picture responsibilities, such as curriculum.

In Catom, where there are no Regents exams, the math chair Jamie who is relatively new to the position and has been chairing for three years spoke about needing an “assessment that sets the standard.” Jamie explained:

> We don’t have Regents. So, the Regents, in a way, they work as an objective benchmark. Sure, you could call yourself an honors student but then if you bomb the Regents, I may have a follow up question on what you actually know in math. The problem is for us, the benchmark is the AP exam. But the AP counts second semester in senior year in May. That is very late. It is very, very late.

As a result, Jamie spends a lot of time “collecting data,” using “spreadsheets” for “colleagues [to] enter data on every test, every quiz” so they can make decisions as a department. Jamie also creates, administers, and refines placement tests for incoming freshmen to best track them the following year:

> I spoke with the chairman of the Middle School, and I had a placement test and not all of them did well, and for the past few years we’ve been getting students and they’re tracked and they’re struggling freshmen and sophomore year. So, I was asking the parents to have just a diagnostic assessment in geometry.

Tracking students and collecting the appropriate data for making those decisions is an ongoing process for Jamie and it seems to be very time consuming. This is a different responsibility than Jackie mostly for two reasons: firstly, because there are no Regents exams at Catom to create a benchmark, and secondly, because students at Catom are tracked on multiple levels, whereas at Zahov they are only tracked for honors. Jamie provided more insight to this process of tracking students throughout the year:

> I believe in keeping mobility between tracks, especially students come in an age where their skills are developing. So, just because you are tracked in regular or lowest level math, doesn’t mean you will be there forever, and vice versa. So, I really try to keep an eye on
students and move them as appropriate, like in both directions. But, as a result, that creates a lot of work for me. And, even just like managing the communication that happens behind that, and sometimes I have to test the students. Like sometimes they ask me, I have very limited information about how they’re performing and they ask for an assessment, then I have to write it, they have to take it, they have to grade it, so it’s a lot of work.

Above, Jamie shared that it is important to her to make sure there is some type of “mobility between tracks,” because students are still developing their skills and Jamie wants to be able to move them “as appropriate,” and in “both directions.” Therefore, although it is “a lot of work” for Jamie, this administrative responsibility of collecting data and using spreadsheets actually needs to be in place for Jamie to act as Data Coach, which Learning Forward describes in their 10 roles for teacher leaders as someone who is “analyzing, interpreting, and using a variety of data to improve decision making, performance, and results at the classroom and school level.” Jamie reviews the data with the teachers in her department to make decisions about students’ performance and classroom placements. As a result, although the responsibility of collecting data in itself is administrative, it helps Jamie make key decisions about her students as she reviews the data with her department. Jamie also explained that this responsibility seems to be a year-round responsibility:

Sometimes, we assess in the middle of the year. So, most of it happens like either at the end of the year or the beginning of the year, but in certain occasions we also assess in the middle of the year. And when a student needs to move down, that is done as needed. Like, it can even be after a month. Like, especially with freshmen, if they come in and the section is really not working for them, we move them as soon as possible.

This responsibility of administering and refining placement exams is not unique to Catom. At Varod, Pat, the recently retired chair of 19 years, spoke about writing a “placement exam,” working on the “test calendar” and scheduling conflicts related to that calendar. She used “spreadsheets, spreadsheets, spreadsheets” to keep track of student data for placements. She also
spent time “deciding who teaches what every year.” Pat considers administering the placement exams as “in the weeds kind of stuff” related to her position as chair. Interestingly, although Pat did discuss the placement exams as a large aspect of her responsibility, Pat did not talk about it in the same way as Jamie. While Jamie spoke of a lot of conflict involved in placements, such as parent or student complaints about their tracking assignments, Pat who has held the position of chair for close to 20 years put policies in place with her department to prevent that from happening:

So, for example, it used to be that juniors could apply to be in a course. A teacher had to give permission. That became kind of a slippery slope, teachers became pressured by kids and parents, you know, ‘I’ll let you go into B/C calculus’ even though it wasn’t the right fit for them. And it’s not just for them, it’s also, when there are students in classes where it’s not the right fit it also brings down the level and pace of the class. More than that, you want students to be challenged at the right level. So, that became refined to having certain grade threshold requirements. And, putting the nuance in that, and, what class are you coming from?

Here, Pat explained how she made sense of the challenge that came along with a policy where students would ask permission of their teachers to join higher level courses. Parents and students would pressure teachers to place the students in these higher level courses despite it not being “the right fit” and bringing “down the level and pace of the class.” When Pat instead changed the policy to have a grade threshold requirement, she explained that:

Other department chairs have been very, have admired [the policy] I suppose, because when we have conversations it’s like, ‘Oh, here’s our policy on that. I’ve just shared that.’ And they’re like, ‘Oh that’s great.’ So, we have a lot of policies in place that we’ve refined over time that just made our jobs easier. That’s the policy. And we could always very quietly, you know, play around with that if there are extenuating circumstances, if there was any balance that needs to be drawn, but we can very quietly do that. But on paper, though, we had our policy so we didn’t have to do that if it didn’t feel like it made sense.

In this example, Pat explained to me that although adding a policy might seem like an administrative responsibility, it is one that enables Pat to become a school leader, or a role that
Learning Forward describes as working “as a thought partner with teachers and building-level administrators to advance school change initiatives that focus on educator and student results.”

Pat worked with her teachers to identify a problem and create a policy that worked, and shared that policy with other department chairs. Additionally, similar to what Jamie had shared about students placed in the wrong track freshmen year, Pat explained in her interview:

We started about four years ago a tenth-grade Algebra I class. We call it Advanced Algebra. What was happening was kids were coming from eighth grade, and this was really the bane of my existence is too strong a word, but really a challenge we had, was that a very high stakes decision was being made with incoming ninth graders, which was, ‘Are you going to be tracked in Algebra, or Geometry?’ And that really dictated your course for the next four years. So, you couldn’t be in Calculus if you were tracked in Algebra I in ninth grade, and so that, those decisions came from even seventh grade math. So, it seems like a very high stakes decision was being made in seventh grade. And kids change, and kids grow, and there’s some late bloomers as we call it, so how could we figure out how to do that?

Here, just like Jamie who explained that it was important for her to be able to move students up and down tracks when needed, Pat also expressed her worry that a “high stakes decision” was being made in seventh grade that could potentially prevent students from taking advanced courses, like Calculus, during senior year. Here, too, Pat created a new policy to help resolve that issue:

So, our old policy was the kids take summer school after ninth grade if they have a certain grade requirement. Okay but, to give up your camp experience for summer school? Also, a lot of it you can’t really learn over the course of six weeks as you can in the year. So, we ended up creating a new class in tenth grade. What happened was, we were advancing more borderline kids into tenth grade Geometry. You had a chance to take Calculus, but you had a fallback, this exit ramp, of tenth-grade Algebra I, so if a student really struggled in tenth grade, they can go into tenth grade Algebra I and then be re-tracked. In order to determine that, we had a tenth-grade Algebra readiness test. So, we had an exam we prepared kids for, this document that was sent to parents, so it felt like a very nice way to solve a problem that was really stymying us a long time.

Pat considered these policies as her department’s “greatest strength” to deal with the “nitty-gritty things” like class placements. It is interesting to note that Pat uses the collective “we” and
“our” when describing her experiences creating the policy, which leads me to interpret the policies as something Pat created together with the teachers in her department. Therefore, Pat seems to employ the pillar practice teaming, because as department chair she engaged in “collaborative decision making and reflecting on curricula, school missions, and teaching philosophies” by reviewing policies to create new ones together with her teachers that would better support the students at Varod (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012).

Pat also explained that tracking is a responsibility more unique to the math department in her school: “there were things that were unique to math that other chairs don’t have to deal with, incoming placements because we’re tracked.” Although math is not the only subject that is tracked at Varod, Pat explained that “math is tracked with science, but science is based on math.” In other words, the science classes follow the tracking that Pat’s math department sets based on the placement exams her team administers. And, while the math chair Jackie did not list tracking or placement exams as part of her administrative responsibilities, it is important to note that in Jackie’s school, Zahov, each grade has two honors sections and four sections that are non-tracked.

**English Chairs**

The English department chairs all listed testing and scheduling as part of their administrative responsibilities. Ruby is an English chair at Catom who has held the position on-and-off for the past 33 years, most recently holding the position for five years consecutively. Ruby described the administrative responsibilities as “logistical things.” In particular, she referred to the testing calendar and scheduling conflicts that come up as a result of the special programming unique to Jewish day schools, such as holiday events and guest speakers:
You know, we’d schedule things in the way we were supposed to do that, but then we’d find out that some other administrator had planned you know, ‘Oh, we’re visiting the matzah factory that day, oh rabbi special from Israel is coming that day.’

She described these conflicts as “very problematic” and had to “put [her] foot down” this year and say that while her department might not give tests, “essays are tests. They’re invaluable. Don’t move them around.” The testing schedule is something Ruby described three times as a “logistical thing”, and said she “hope[d] we can move away from it” by talking “about some other things other than the schedule.” She explained that the logistical issues arise as part of “the complexities of the school program, and helping new teachers understand the Jewish calendar.” When Ruby shared with me that she hoped she “can move away from it,” she explained how she wanted to spend time on “more substantive things” with her department, which include pedagogical classroom techniques such as discussion activities. Here, administrative responsibilities seem to be a block for Ruby to be able to enact teacher leadership roles such as Instructional Specialist, which Learning Forward describes as an individual who “affects the planning and implementation of classroom instruction to increase student learning” (2022).

English is not a tracked subject at Catom, and Ruby does not list tracking or placement exams as any part of her administrative duties.

The other English chairs, Alex and Sam, who have both chaired their respective departments for ten years, each spoke about scheduling as well. Similar to Ruby, Sam explained that a big part of her responsibilities as chair in Varod includes navigating the “testing calendar” with the holidays and other “calendar issues” like special events:

So, we have like a testing calendar, right, so we’re giving an assessment for when a test day is due, so this teacher is a little behind because she missed these classes because of Rosh Hashanah, and, well, she wants to change the date. But this teacher doesn’t want to change the date, and so those kinds of things, which we actually made a rule about, like,
please don’t ask to change the dates, stop doing it, but they’ll still ask [laughs], so managing those calendar issues.

Sam shared with me that other times, teachers might miss their classes because of a new testing schedule that Varod implemented where students have two periods to take an exam, and it might bleed into an English class. Because essays are not on the testing calendar, “that teacher’s coming to me like, ‘I was going to give them time to write their essay, and now I don’t have those class periods.’” It seems that in the English department at both Varod and Catom, essays are an important form of assessment that is not necessarily placed on the testing calendar, and therefore the chairs spend time on managing the scheduling to make sure the essays are still administered despite any schedule changes or changes to the program.

At Zahov, while Alex also mentioned scheduling and exams as an administrative responsibility, Alex did not speak of scheduling in the same ways that Ruby and Sam had. Rather than spending time on scheduling conflicts, Alex spoke about the “calendar” she creates with “all [her] established teachers” to put their “dates in” for testing. Alex gets this calendar from the administration in June and sets her dates for the year. In her second interview, Alex did mention the administrative duties that come with administering the Regents in eleventh grade, a responsibility that Ruby did not express because they do not administer the Regents at Catom. Alex explained that she considers the Regents exam “a good test, but I think it tires us, ties our hands in some of the things we have to do.” She explained further that “we do the Regents, it’s like a three-day affair where my teachers are sitting here.” However, Alex seemed conflicted about the Regents. While on the one hand she does consider it a “good test”, and “love[s] that, I love that for the Regents we’re all grading together, we all grade off the Regents rubric, and it’s really nice stuff to do,” she shared with me that:
We don’t need the Regents to do that. I can, like a couple of my ninth-grade teachers who were having problems, I said next time we’re meeting with them individually I’m looking at the essays they graded to see whatever. And sometimes in the meetings when we’re between stuff, I’ll bring in an essay and a rubric and say let’s all grade it. To collaborate. So, the Regents does do it and it’s really nice and teachers like it, but I, I don’t think the Regents is necessary for English.

In the above quote, Alex seems to be explaining that while an advantage to the Regents is having the teachers in her department grade the Regents exams together with the Regents rubric, that is a practice she does with her teachers even without the Regents exams. She explained to me that she might meet with some of her ninth-grade teachers who were “having problems” or meet with them individually to review their grading, or she might have a department-wide meeting to “collaborate” and practice grading an essay together as a department.

Here, I interpret Alex’s descriptions of grading with her department as acting as an Instructional Specialist by using an “instructional framework” or rubric “for consistency” and planning “instructional strategies individually and in small teaching groups” (Learning Forward, 2022). In addition, Alex is engaging in the pillar practices of teaming and collegial inquiry as she is “promoting personal and organizational learning through collaboration” with both grade-level teams as a full department. As the teachers in her department share their challenges with grading, or what Alex described as “having problems,” Alex engages in collegial inquiry by giving the space for her teachers to meet as a group to “work intentionally to understand thinking, behaviors, and events from a variety of perspectives” (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012).

Therefore, while some aspects of administering and grading Regents might be considered an administrative responsibility, there are other aspects of that administrative responsibility that Alex brings to her department as a way to reflect on and improve teacher instruction as a team. Alex explained that how she feels about the Regents might be unique to her specific discipline:
I think if we were the kind of school that wasn’t doing what we were meant to be doing then I think the Regents keeps you in line. But our scores are so high, and I draw charts of them every year and whatever. I think in our Regents last year in eleventh grade, I think we had three kids who did 70s. The rest were 80s, and 90s, and 100s, you know, so I, I don’t, I guess I don’t need the Regents to keep me, to keep the kids scared. Do you know what I’m saying? I think math or science may be different. Bio may be different.

Interestingly, that does connect with the concept that Jamie, a math chair, had expressed about wishing she had a Regents as an “objective benchmark” for math at Catom. Similarly, Charlie, a science chair, made it very clear before she took on the position at Varod that it was very important to her that the students took the Regents exams:

I said to him at that first meeting, ‘I really believe in standards like the kids should be taking the NYS Regents exams, those are good exams, you know they’re not perfect, but it’s a bottom line,’ and he has supported that.

In fact, during her interview with the Founding Principal before agreeing to take the position, Charlie asked whether the Founding Principal would “commit that the kids are taking the Regents exam.” After returning Covid, when the school toyed with the idea of dropping the Regents exam, Charlie “fought it.”

I went in and really got involved, we went in and we said, ‘Like, if you want this school to have a standard, like if our kids can’t take the bio Regents exam, like this is not a terribly hard exam, like every kid in NYC has to take it, you can’t expect,’ whatever, so they did. They went along with it. They stuck by.

This is an aspect of her position that is very important to Charlie. She credits the Founding Principal with standing by his early commitments whenever the Regents exams are up for debate:

And [Founding Principal] one of the reasons I came also was because I believed in his vision. And he, I mean, he has stood by his commitments both with giving the Regents exam was a major battle. Like, so many people here think standardized exams are stupid and you know, like, we don’t need them, and we have nothing to learn from everybody else. And I don’t think that’s true. And it was a huge battle. Which we keep having to fight.
The support from the Founding Principal from the school’s inception is one of the main reasons Charlie ultimately decided to leave her position at another prestigious New York City school that she “loved” and “did not want to leave”:

I’ll never forget those first six months we were at, we were in the [building name omitted], and the school had made some policy, I don’t know what, and I was like, ‘What are they out of their minds?’ And I went to [Founding Principal] and I spoke very strongly. I said, ‘[Founding Principal], you can’t, we can’t,’ you know whatever, I spoke very strongly, and then when I left the office I thought, ‘Oh my god, I can’t believe how I just spoke to him. Like, as if we were peers or something,’ so I went in a few minutes later and I apologized and he said to me, which I will never forget, which I think is relevant to your study, he said, ‘Don’t apologize.’ He said, ‘I don’t want yes people around me.’ You know, he said, ‘I want you to tell me what you think.’ And he has always been that way.

Here, the Founding Principal supported Charlie by making it clear that Charlie had a leadership role and that she was an important part of their “shared vision” as he encouraged her to “engage in inquiry to guide decisions and practice, and reflect on what does and does not work within the school” (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). It is interesting to draw this parallel between the leadership role that the Founding Principal supported for Charlie, and the leadership roles that Charlie supports for the teachers in her department, which I discussed earlier and I discuss in more detail in the next chapter.

**Administrative Duties and School Contexts**

When looking at school context, it is interesting to notice that all three chairs from Zahov discussed the calendar and scheduling in some form as a responsibility of the role. Alex discussed creating the testing calendar with her teachers, Jackie spoke about the Regents schedule, and Ricky spoke about scheduling appointments with teachers and students. However, at Varod, the three chairs listed very different administrative responsibilities. Pat, the recently retired math chair, spoke mostly about the need for her to keep data on spreadsheets and
create placement exams both relating specifically to tracking the subject. While science is also tracked in the school, Charlie didn’t mention those exams and spreadsheets as one of her responsibilities. Instead, she spoke about ordering the lab equipment and scheduling the lab carts for science demonstrations. This might be because the tracking responsibilities at Varod seem to fall under the Math chair. However, although she might not be directly responsible for tracking, it is still very important to Charlie, and was one of the commitments she asked of the Founding Principal before she agreed to chair the department:

I said, ‘We’ve got to track science with math like you use math, it’s the language of science, you’ve got to do it.’ And he agreed to that. And then the second year of the school he forgot. And, or whatever they didn’t do it and it was a disaster. Like I was tearing my hair out. It was unfair to both groups of kids. But, they walked it back and then in the future they did.

As I discussed earlier, the Founding Principal supported Charlie with this leadership role. However, Sam, whose subject of English is not tracked in the school, and spoke specifically about calendar issues and scheduling conflicts, also expressed that she was conflicted about English not being tracked at a school where other subjects are tracked. Unlike Charlie and Pat, Sam did not begin with the school at its inception and therefore she was not involved in the decision making in the same way: “English classes are not tracked. And neither are history classes. Everything else is tracked. I didn’t make that decision.” Sam elaborated by explaining why she is conflicted by this:

Because everything else is tracked, right, so if you’re in lower classes, and working hard, you’re doing well. And then you show up in my English class, sorry, then you go to history class, and it’s all like, okay when did this happen, when did that happen, so like if you’re good at memorizing, you’ll do well. If you show up in English where I’m asking you to do analytical things, if you’re a concrete thinker who’s in a lower math class but is doing well, suddenly I’m the only B on your report card. So, this happens all the time.
Here, Sam is explaining that while Charlie and Pat, two department chairs that began with the founding of the school, had say in key decision making such as tracking, Sam did not. When Sam took on the role as department chair, there was a Director of General Studies in place and Sam did not have that same direct communication on key decisions with the Founding Principals that Charlie and Pat did. Without that direct support, Sam shared with me that sometimes she feels she does not have a voice. Sam is frustrated that she “didn’t make that decision. So, sort of discerning what is the difference between department chair choice and administrative choice, and we have to live with those consequences.” Sam struggles with this feeling of not having a voice or say in these large-scale decisions:

And, so we have no say in, hey, should English be this way? Does it make sense for kids who are really strong in English not to have an honors class the way the math kids do? And it feels like I should have more of a say in that.

However, Sam is also much younger than Charlie and Pat, and I wonder if their ages and years of experience also have something to do with the ways the Founding Principal included them on key decisions during the formation of the school. Charlie had already been teaching science for 32 years at a prestigious NYC high school before the Founding Principal asked her to start the science department at Varod. Although Charlie was not the department chair at this school, she was “taking courses towards an administration and supervision degree” which she said “helped.” Charlie was also on a committee at the previous school that made “all the decisions about whether or not to rehire teachers.” She was on that committee for “nine years,” and learned a “tremendous amount” because:

You don’t just observe science teachers, like I observed math teachers, language teachers, history teachers, and every, and you learn so much, and then in writing up the reports, you know, so coming in, back to your first question, I felt like I was confident in what works, and what doesn’t, and that helped me a tremendous amount.
In fact, the administration at Varod asked Charlie for help processing teacher evaluations, and Charlie brought up this “great system of teacher evaluation at [previous school], and so we worked that form for observations.” In other words, Charlie didn’t only bring her experiences at the other school with her as she interpreted the role as chair, but also brought those experiences to help Varod establish itself as a new school. Therefore, although Charlie was brought on to help start the science department, the administration valued her expertise and supported her with what she needed. Charlie was not mentored by anyone at Varod school, but she had the necessary mentoring and training required for the position from the previous school where she was on track to become department chair, and was being mentored by that chair: “I was supposed to become science chair [at former school], because the current chair was thinking to the future, and so she wanted it, and also I had worked very closely with the principal there.” Sam did not have that same background, and she needed more mentoring when she first took on the role. I go into more detail on the challenges and supports Sam, Charlie, and the other department chairs faced when first taking on the role in the next chapter.

At Catom, the science and math chairs both spoke about report cards and looking over their teachers’ grading, with the science chair also explaining that her lab responsibilities are supported with a lab assistant. This seems to be a big support that is unique to Varod. While Ruby mentioned logistics such as giving teaching assignments and giving the AP exams, she repeatedly emphasized how she hopes logistical conversations were more tied to the pandemic and that her department can move away from them to talk about more substantial items, such as curriculum, which I discuss more in the section that follows.

6.4 Writing and Setting Curriculum

“I was going to teach bio to those first ninth grade [students], so I said, ‘I’m going to teach evolution, and I’m going to teach it full blast. Will you have a problem with that?’”
— Charlie, Science Chair, Varod

“So, my concern right now is more about preserving curriculum than worrying about some fads, okay? That I’m not interested in. The common core I think brought a lot of toxicity to the world of teaching mathematics.”
— Jamie, Math Chair, Catom

“But I don’t believe that my ninth-grade teacher only teaches ninth grade. I believe my ninth-grade teacher teaches one year of four years. And that we are responsible for four years. If my twelfth grader can’t do things that were taught in ninth grade, that’s, that’s bad on us.”
— Alex, English Chair, Zahov

In these passages above, Charlie, Jamie, and Alex, who are each from different disciplines and different schools, share their different descriptions of what it means to them to work on setting the curriculum for their disciplines within their schools. All nine chairs across the three different schools spoke about the importance of curriculum as a department chair’s responsibility. In this section, I discuss the findings in great detail with the English department. This is because while all the chairs mentioned various important aspects of curriculum as a responsibility, the English chairs spoke about curriculum with a lot more detail than the chairs from the science and math departments. I wonder if this is because, while all disciplines require a curriculum, there might be more freedom, and therefore a lot more conversations about curriculum, in a high school English classroom since these classes are not necessarily content-specific. This is an aspect unique to English that Sam discussed during our first interview:

I think English is the only subject where, well there’s Tanach maybe, where you’re not necessarily teaching the same thing you taught in another school. So, if I’m a math teacher, ‘Did you teach Algebra or did you teach Geometry?’ Here, it’s like, ‘Well, I taught these five books,’ ‘Well we’re doing these books, sorry.’

However, although I discuss the English department chairs in great length in this section, I created Table 13 as a way to illustrate all the chairs’ descriptions of their responsibilities.
regarding curriculum. While I did not specifically ask about curriculum in the interview questions, all nine chairs did bring up some aspect of curriculum as a responsibility, which I list in Table 13 and describe in more detail with the English chairs in the narrative that follows.

**Table 13**

*Curricular Responsibilities of Department Chairs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Curricular Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Alex      | Zahov  | English | • Making decisions with faculty on what to teach each year  
• Adding resources to the curriculum  
• Backwards design of curriculum with faculty  
• Meeting about curriculum with teachers as a department  
• Reflecting on the curriculum at the end of each year  
• Creating a common language about the curriculum among the department  
• Overseeing teachers’ curriculum instruction in the department |
| Ruby      | Catom  | English | • Set the curriculum  
• Unify the curriculum through assignments  
• Evaluate the curriculum  
• Creating guidelines for academic integrity  
• Enriching the curriculum  
• Meeting about curriculum with teachers as a department |
| Sam       | Varod  | English | • Creating teacher independence within the curriculum, while standardizing skills and assessments  
• Unify the department through curricular conversations, formal and informal  
• Meeting about curriculum with teachers as a department, particularly by grade level.  
• Creating guidelines for academic integrity  
• Creating a rigorous, but fair and diverse curriculum  
• Creating teacher buy-in about curriculum |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Ricky   | Zahov   | Science | • Develop and write curriculum  
• Coordinate curriculum  
• Improve, enrich, and refine curriculum  
• Create assessments  
• Set goals for students  
• Raise the standards |
| Andy    | Catom   | Science | • Planning curriculum for 9-12  
• Lab curriculum and instruction  
• Overseeing assessments and providing feedback on assessments for new teachers  
• Changing curriculum with input from teachers |
| Charlie | Varod   | Science | • Developing and writing curriculum in all subject areas that aligns with NYS Regents  
• Developing and writing curriculum that makes it real-world  
• Enriching curriculum with guest speakers and outside experiences and competitions  
• Lab curriculum and creating new labs |
| Jackie  | Zahov   | Math    | • Writes and develops curriculum with input from teachers  
• Changes and refines curriculum |
| Jamie   | Catom   | Math    | • Increases rigor within curriculum  
• Preserving curriculum |
| Pat     | Varod   | Math    | • Creating the scope and sequence for the four years of high school  
• Enriching the curriculum  
• Refining the curriculum  
• Making curricular decisions for the department throughout the year |

**English**

For the three English chairs, Alex, the English chair at Zahov, Ruby, the English chair at Catom, and Sam, the English chair at Varod, curriculum seems to be used as a way for them to unify their departments, provide leadership roles to their teachers, and engage in collegial inquiry. Additionally, they each seem to enact Learning Forward’s leadership role of curriculum
specialist, as they help their teachers become sophisticated users of the curriculum and developers of their own classroom curriculum (2022).

For example, during the second interview, Alex called the curriculum the “meat and potatoes of what runs the classroom every day.” In particular, Alex explained that there is a “two-to-three hour” department meeting that is “kind of like a backwards design” where Alex makes sure the teachers in her department are “teaching the whole four years of the child.” During this meeting, Alex also makes sure “every teacher has a buy-in” so the curriculum is “not mandated” by Alex. Alex explains that “every single teacher” has “input in every single grade” so that “everyone’s responsible for everyone,” and “everyone’s responsible for every child.” During both interviews, Alex spoke about this meeting and explained that:

We start with 12th graders, so we stick to 12th graders, we put out the whole curriculum for 12th grade, then we put up the whole curriculum for 11th, 10th, 9th, and then we start moving things around as a department. And then people who teach, let’s say, 10th grade, will say, ‘That assignment was dreadful, let’s do this instead.’ So, everyone has to come to the meeting prepared. It’s about a 2, 3-hour meeting, and by the end of the meeting, the whole year is mapped out. I get the calendar from [Associate Principal], we put our dates in, everything’s done.

Here, it seems that Alex provides leadership roles to the teachers in her department by giving them say in the curriculum during this important meeting. In fact, Alex explained that during this meeting she “put[s] different teachers in charge of different sections.” She further elaborated on this concept by explaining that, “I have to work with each teacher because they know their students the best.” Alex shows her teachers that she trusts them and values their ideas about curriculum. As a result of this meeting, Alex shared that with her department she creates a “common language, a common curriculum, a common working towards that 12th grader finishing school from 9th grade,” thus unifying her department.
Alex emphasized during the interviews that the curriculum is created “very collaboratively,” and during this meeting, Alex encourages all of the teachers to also share their materials with one another to further create a culture of collaboration. She explained, “Then, everyone just starts dropping their stuff in [the Google Drive] and asking each other, ‘Do you have this, don’t have this?’” In other words, Alex unifies her department by empowering the teachers in her department to set the curriculum together as they engage in collegial inquiry to reflect on the previous year during this one big meeting. Alex continued to discuss curriculum during other department meetings throughout the year as well, and explained, “When we meet as a department, sometimes we just chat about curriculum or we chat about writing because they haven’t been all together for about a month.” This shows that Alex values discussion about curriculum with her teachers during department meetings. This aligns with the literature on department chairs which discusses the department chair’s role in generating, shaping, and managing collaborative departmental cultures by empowering others and encouraging collaboration (Vanblaere & Devos, 2018). In the research, this happens when department chairs support teachers in exchanging ideas, developing material, and discussing practices (Vanblaere & Devos, 2018). This study extends the literature by providing insight into how a department chair might do this important work.

During Covid, Alex had to make some important decisions regarding curriculum. Alex explained that during the initial shutdown in March 2020, when the school went remote, Alex had to “spend a lot of time deciding what to teach, what to cut,” and wondered with her teachers if they would be “cutting out parts” of Shakespeare from the curriculum. Alex also used this time to add resources for her department so they could teach differently during Zoom. She explained:

Actually, for the most part we had a successful, there was a lot of stuff that was available online from England actually, from the Royal Shakespeare Company that we were able to
use, and we made choice boards. We really pivoted to teach it differently giving the kids options in terms of what they had to complete, 3 out of 9 assignments, you know, so we worked together and did that.

Here, Alex described how she added resources online for her teachers during Zoom, also demonstrating Learning Forward’s role of resource provider as she helped teachers access and use resources for planning and instruction (2022). She also emphasized that it was a “very unique, difficult time” when decisions were made very quickly; in fact, Alex described this time as feeling like “We were cowboys going out into the Wild West.” Even still, Alex and the teachers in her department “worked together” to collaborate on many of those decisions. During Covid, Alex prioritized her students’ and teachers’ emotional needs as well:

I think learning for the kids was a sense of people showing up, and they need to show up, and we only did 15 minutes of learning but we kind of talked for ten minutes, that was also okay with me for my teachers, just so the kids really felt held.

Alex described that it was important for her students to feel held, and she treated her teachers the same way by calling them regularly to check in:

I did phone my teachers, not weekly, but I would check in with them on What’s App weekly. I would take a rotation of at least phoning every one of my teachers every two to three weeks, just to say, ‘How are you doing? Like, what’s going on with you?’ So, I try to give my teachers the space, but also hold them so that they could just show up every day as opposed to, you know, I was in, everyone was in a funk. It was horrible. I don’t even want to revisit it, you know. I’m getting butterflies in my stomach thinking about it.

During that very difficult time, Alex created a holding environment, which includes the kinds of environments that would provide opportunities and holding adults need throughout our lives—guidance, support, nourishment, care, and developmentally appropriate challenges (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012). Alex did this for her teachers by checking in with them regularly and making sure they were okay, while also including them in key decision making for the
department. With curriculum, Alex employed the pillar practices throughout her time as chair before and during the pandemic, which can serve as holding environments to develop her teachers to meet the demands in today’s highly complex environment—especially with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic (Drago-Severson, 2012, 2016; Kegan & Lahey, 2016). This is especially important considering today, Alex spends time thinking of “how to fill the gaps, lacunas in learning” as a result of the pandemic. For example, Alex shared that she and her department might reflect on changes in the curriculum in a Post-Covid world:

> We usually do this with eleventh grade but maybe we need to step back and check that they can do what the tenth grade, so there was a lot of kind of backpedaling in terms of checking what kids could do, so we restructured that quite a bit.”

Similar to Alex, Ruby, the English chair at Catom, also seems to unify her department through conversations about curriculum. Ruby explains that it is important that there is “some kind of norming going on” in regards to the curriculum within the department. However, Ruby seems to have a different purpose than Alex for doing this. While Alex’s intention is for all the teachers to work on curriculum together to teach “the whole four years” of each student, Ruby’s intention is also to prevent parents from complaining about getting “the hard teacher.” Ruby elaborated:

> So that it wouldn’t be a sense of, ‘Oh no, I got the hard teacher.’ Oh, you know what I mean, we’re all teaching the same thing, but in terms of the assignments we give, how many assignments we give, the kinds of assignments we give.”

Ruby explained that in some cases, some parents might complain because they “would just kill to get the ‘easy teacher,’ you know it’s, ‘Oh my god, if I get into Ruby’s class, I might not get an A.” At Catom, there is a lot of pressure on students to get into top colleges, as Ruby mentioned when she spoke about the school context and which I discussed in Chapter IV. Therefore, it is
important to Ruby to unify her department regarding curriculum and assignments so that they are each providing equal instruction to students.

Similar to Alex, Ruby also evaluates the curriculum with her team, engaging in collegial inquiry, and she pushes her teachers to listen to one another despite “very strong opinions” in the department. Ruby explained:

People are, people have very strong opinions about the things they like and don’t like, but we realized that you know, we’re functioning as a collective.

Here, Ruby explained to me that while teachers in her department might feel strongly about teaching, or not teaching, a certain text, Ruby reminds them that they are a team and they work together. Ruby further elaborated on this process regarding curriculum design:

We do it [curriculum design] sort of democratically, and we just try to vote on it and people kind of, you know, there’s a little bit of horse trading going on, sort of like, ‘Okay, I’ll let you do Catcher in the Rye even though I hate it, but you have to let me do Sula.’

Ruby encourages her faculty and these strong voices within the department to bend a little as they decide together on what their curriculum for the year will be. Ruby also explained that nothing is set in stone, because they “evaluate year by year,” further demonstrating collegial inquiry within her department by providing her teachers opportunity for guided reflection on the curriculum. Ruby explained:

We evaluate year by year, you know, that text didn’t go very well, what do you think, did we not know how to teach it, or, you know, like we loved it but the kids hated it kind of, or they loved it but we hated it, those decisions.

Additionally, while Ruby did not speak about curriculum within the Covid context, Ruby did explain how isolated she felt, further demonstrating the way she views chairing the department as a collaborative position. Just as Alex shared it was the “Wild West,” Ruby shared that she felt
she was “inventing it as [she] went along.” Ruby continued to hold “Zoom English department meetings” during this time, but rather than focus on curriculum, Ruby explained that she had “a film club on Wednesday night, because otherwise we never saw each other,” and other times they discussed instructional best practices over Zoom:

So, a lot of the sharing was, ‘So I tried the breakout rooms, but then this happened in the breakout room,’ you know, trying to talk about, trying to like, problem solve. Basically, a lot of times there were either complaint session meetings, or very task-oriented. ‘Okay, how are we going to quiz? How are we going to test when kids are at home, with mom, and dad, and all their devices?’ So, in that sense it was very focused.

It seems that with both Alex and Ruby, the department itself serves as a team, which Drago-Severson describes as a powerful way to enable adult growth through collaborative decision making and reflecting on curricula, school missions, and teaching philosophies (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). As a team, Alex and Ruby build collaborative structures within their departments to share and exchange ideas and decision-making responsibilities, such as curriculum (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Just as Drago-Severson lists that a benefit to teaming include opportunities for group and individual reflection, innovation, building capacity, and a decrease of isolation, Ruby and Alex both turned to department meetings during Covid to decrease the sense of isolation they felt during that difficult time, both for themselves and for the faculty within their departments (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Therefore, having those teams in place served as a form of support during that time for both Alex’s and Ruby’s departments.

Sam, the English chair at Varod, at times also uses meetings with her department to focus on curriculum decision-making. However, unlike Alex and Ruby, Sam makes these decisions with her department more during the “grade-level team” meetings, which she explained “feels more
productive.” This might be because, like Ruby, Sam explained that there are some very strong voices in her department:

Sometimes, when certain people speak up at department meetings, it shifts the direction of the meeting. So, if someone kind of comes out of the gate with a strong opinion, sometimes it’s harder to kind of move away from that opinion or move onto some possible other idea because that person has a more assertive role, let’s say, in the department.

In fact, Sam explained to me during our first interview that she feels she is “tiptoeing around people’s sensitivities and their personal styles” within her department. Although, just like Ruby and Alex, it is important to Sam to have a standardized curriculum, Sam feels that it’s because of these very strong personalities that her “dream of [the curriculum] being more standardized doesn’t happen.” Sam further elaborated on this challenge she faces in our first interview:

There are certain things that I feel like need to be changed or fixed. But, I’m sometimes not sure if they are worth the sacrifice of people having to change their style, or someone getting offended by something, that it’s, it’s like, ‘if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.’ Okay, this could be better, but it’s also still very good, and if we open it all up it might be a big mess in here.

In other words, Sam has ideas for her department and she seeks to unify her department through conversations about curriculum, but she is worried about these very different personalities in her department. Sam explained that she believes there is a “mild competitiveness” within her department that might prevent her from speaking about curriculum during her department meetings when “a person comes out of the gate with like this very strong comment” and her “agenda” for the meeting “goes in a very different direction given how people respond.” This is a “really hard thing” for Sam to manage, and so in general Sam gives her teachers more freedom in regards to curriculum. Sam explained that her meetings “could be more about curricular type stuff potentially. I think in another school it would be, but here we really decided to give the teachers sort of their independence with that.” When she first became chair, standardizing curriculum was a top priority for Sam. She explained:
Well, in the beginning we worked really hard to make sure everyone was reading the same text at the same time. And that was a challenge because people felt really strongly about, well, ‘I know you love Romeo and Juliet, but I want to do Richard III,’ and having those conversations you know was difficult.

Sam would rely on a lot of informal, one-on-one conversations before the meetings to put her ideas in place:

So, I feel like I had a lot of those kind of one-to-one straight talk type conversations, either like a, ‘Do me a solid,’ or a sort of, ‘I’m going to have this conversation before the meeting with you to sort of set the stage for everything else,’ and that kind of like, you know, I don’t know what it’s called, like, that back room wheeling and dealing type thing.

Today, Sam does give her teachers more independence, while still maintaining some sense of standardization:

I’ll say, ‘This is the unit, these are the major skills we’re doing for this unit, these are the major assessments we do for this unit,’ and then, ‘Here’s all my material, use what you want, what you don’t want, whatever, but you have to hit these skills and you have to hit these major assignments.’ So, that’s how we maintain the standardization.

Therefore, like Alex and Ruby, Sam does require a standardization within her department in regard to curriculum. However, Sam mainly only requires the skills to be standardized and not necessarily the texts themselves. Sam also added that she wants the curriculum to be rigorous, but fair: “we want the curriculum to feel diverse, we want students to be able to read the book so that it’s accessible, but we also don’t want it to be too easy.” For this to happen, Sam explained that there are limited texts to choose from and so ultimately the freedom teachers have with curriculum is actually more to do with the companion text the teachers assign, rather than the primary text itself:

So, there happens to be more change in the companion text which is not the primary text that we’re discussing, but something [students] can read outside on their own. There’s
more change when it comes to those things and that’s actually on an individual teacher basis, but that’s pretty much how it gets decided in terms of books.

However, this freedom also comes with challenges and Sam explained that sometimes teachers feel left out of curriculum planning conversations:

So some people, let’s say there are six teachers who teach ninth grade, and two or three of those teachers like to be in lock step and kind of do the same thing, and the other two teachers do their own thing, but they feel left out of that partnership, even though they are okay doing their own thing, but then sometimes conversations are had, and they’re left out of those conversations and kind of managing the different styles that people bring to it, and, I have a certain perception of, ‘Okay, you’re deciding to do your own thing and I feel like you’re fine with it,’ but then that person comes to me and says, ‘I’m offended that I’m not included in the conversation,’ and it’s like, ‘No, I wouldn’t have thought that.’ Right? So, those kinds of personality issues where people are kind of like bumping up against each other I would say those are probably the biggest challenges.

In the above quote, Sam explained that navigating these very different personalities is something she is still challenged by within her role as department chair, and it is interesting how this challenge manifests in regards to curriculum planning and instruction. While Sam gives her teachers more freedom with curriculum to avoid difficult conversations, teachers share with Sam that they feel “left out” when they are not included in curricular conversations.

6.5 Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to offer key findings on two of the responsibilities the nine department chairs all described during the interviews. In particular, I focused on the administrative responsibilities the department chairs described and explored how these responsibilities might connect or differ from one another by examining both discipline and school context. I then described the curricular responsibilities of the department chairs, focusing in greater detail on the English chairs and how they each interpreted this responsibility, and the challenges they faced when trying to enact this responsibility. In the next chapter, I provide my
key findings on other challenges these nine chairs described facing within the role, as well as the supports they identified during the interviews.
Chapter 7: Exploring the Challenges and Supports of the Nine Department Chairs

In this chapter, I discuss the findings that emerged in response to my third research question: *What challenges, if any, do department chairs face in their roles as department chairs and how do they manage them?* The first finding about department chairs’ challenges I discuss in this chapter is that while all nine department chairs in the study described some type of challenge when they first took on their roles as chair, some focused more on feeling ill-prepared (4/9), and others emphasized conflicts with teachers in their departments (2/9). I highlight these two because these department chairs spoke about these challenges with great detail during our interviews. The second finding I discuss in this chapter is that all nine department chairs described their challenges with time, such as having the time to teach a full course load as chair (5/9), or challenges the chairs faced during the November time of year (5/9), the month I conducted most of the interviews.

The five department chairs who spoke about teaching as chair described this challenge in great detail, which is why I highlight this challenge in this chapter. I also interpret connections between this challenge and the number of classes these department chairs teach, as well as the number of teachers in their departments. Although not all five of the department chairs described the challenge of chairing during the November time of year with great detail, I felt it was important to share because it was a top-of-mind challenge for these chairs, since I collected the data for these five department chairs during November. In other words, it was interesting that these chairs brought up the busy time of year, even if it was only a brief sentence at the start of our interviews. It leads me to wonder what these chairs would have shared as a challenge had I interviewed them during the winter, spring, or summer.
I also include in this chapter some of the supports the nine department chairs listed as ways they manage these challenges. I found that some of the chairs turned to an individual on the school’s leadership team (3/9) or other department chairs (2/9) for support when they first took on the role. Other chairs turned to the teachers in their departments (2/9), outside mentoring programs (1/9), or their partners (1/9) for support. Therefore, while each chair spoke about their supports, many shared different types of support as they manage the aforementioned challenges. Although the chairs shared other supports throughout the interviews, I highlight these because these supports the chairs described as ways to manage the challenges I highlight in this chapter. For that reason, this chapter is organized in a way that describes the supports of each chair directly underneath the challenge each chair described for clarity so readers can make that connection.

7.1 Pillar Practices as a Theoretical Lens to Understand the Challenge and Supports

I explore these findings of challenges and supports through the lens of the four pillar practices (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016, 2018, 2020), to answer my fourth research question: How, if at all, to what degree, and why, do these nine department chairs employ any one of the four pillar practices (teaming, providing leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring) in their practice with teachers in their department as department chairs? This is because the pillar practices can be used to offer a healthy balance of both high supports and high challenges to support and challenge adults at different developmental levels (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Although this research question asks about the ways in which the department chairs support their teachers with the pillar practices, I found that the department chairs also described ways in which they felt supported with the pillar practices as a way to manage their challenges. Feeling supported and supporting others were closely linked for
the department chairs in this study; just as it was helpful to the nine department chairs to feel supported by the pillar practices, they in turn described supporting the teachers in their departments with the pillar practices. Therefore, throughout this chapter, I explore the pillar practices through the supports and challenges the nine chairs described during our interviews.

I found that the department chairs in this study described the pillar practice of teaming in three specific ways: viewing the department itself as a team (2/9), viewing the department chairs within a school as a team (2/9), and co-chairing the department as a team (2/9). The second finding within the pillar practices I discuss in this chapter is that some of the chairs described being mentored by the former chairs of their departments before they took on the role (2/9) or from an outside organization (1/9). Those three chairs also described ways that they employ mentoring themselves as chairs of their departments to the teachers within their departments (3/9). In other words, the three chairs that described being mentored in some way when they first took on the role also described supporting the teachers in their departments through mentoring.

7.2 Challenge 1: Taking on the Role

While all nine of the chairs described their experiences taking on the role as department chairs, some described feeling unprepared (4/9) and others described facing conflicts within their departments (2/9). Four of the chairs, Sam, the English chair at Varod, Pat, the math chair at Varod, Andy, the science chair at Catom, and Ricky, the science chair at Zahov, shared during their interviews that they did not feel completely prepared when they first became department chairs. This aligns with previous literature on department chairs which shows that department chairs can feel ill-prepared because of not receiving any formal training for the position (DeAngelis, 2013; Kelley & Salisbury, 2013). Just as one study described chairs who expressed hesitancy to take on the leadership role because they were not sure if they were ready, three of
the chairs in this study, Sam, Andy, and Ricky, described a similar feeling (DeAngelis, 2013). Interestingly, of those three chairs, Andy and Ricky overcame their hesitancy to take on the role from the teachers within their departments, a support that is not mentioned in the DeAngelis (2013) study or others, to my knowledge. For Andy and Ricky, the teachers in their departments encouraged them to take on the role of department chair and the chairs continued to turn to this encouragement and support when they faced challenges. Sam, on the other hand, was not able to turn to the teachers in her department for support and instead asked the administration if she could co-chair the department. Other chairs, such as Alex, the English chair at Zahov, and Jackie, the math chair at Zahov, did feel prepared for the position but they each faced a different challenge when they first took on the role, such as challenges with the faculty in their inherited departments when they first became chair. Although these two chairs come from the same school, Zahov, Alex felt very supported by the Head of School when she was met with this challenge while Jackie did not. I describe their different experiences with the same challenge in the narrative that follows.

In Table 14, I alphabetically list all nine chairs and the challenges they described when they first took on the role, as well as the supports the chairs shared that helped them manage those challenges. I list the chairs alphabetically for ease of reference throughout the narrative that follows. I also added how many years the department chairs were teaching before taking on the role, which I explain with the challenges and supports in more detail below. For example, for chairs like Alex, who was teaching for close to two decades before becoming chair, and Jackie, was teaching for over two decades before becoming chair, their challenges when becoming chair related to the other teachers in the department. For Andy, Pat, Ricky, and Sam, who had all been
teaching for ten years or less, their challenges when becoming chair related to feeling unprepared for the role.

Although the other three chairs in this study (Charlie, the science chair at Varod; Jamie, the math chair at Catom; Ruby, the English chair at Catom) also described challenges when they first took on the role, such as aligning the department with their values (2/9) or starting a department in a new school (1/9), which I include in Table 14 below, these chairs did not talk about these challenges in the same ways the other six chairs had because they did not spend as much time describing these challenges as the other six chairs. For that reason, I highlight the challenges of the chairs who described feeling ill-prepared (4/9) and described facing challenges with the teachers in their departments (2/9).

**Table 14**

*Department Chairs’ Challenges and Supports When Taking on the Role*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chair</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Years Teaching Before Becoming Chair</th>
<th>Main Challenge When Taking on the Role</th>
<th>Main Support to Manage the Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Zahov</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>• Challenges with faculty within inherited department</td>
<td>• Turned to the Head of School at the time for support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Catom</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>• Unprepared</td>
<td>• Enrolled in an outside mentoring program • Math chair: administrative support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlie</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Varod</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>• Creating a department in a new school</td>
<td>• Turned to the Founding Principal for support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Subject</td>
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<td>Year</td>
<td>Challenges</td>
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<td>Jackie</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Zahov</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>• Challenges with faculty within department</td>
<td>• Turned to the administration for support</td>
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<td>• Hiring teachers with “the yummy factor”</td>
<td>• Turned to the administration for support</td>
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<td>• Turned to the administration for support</td>
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<td>Jamie</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Catom</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>• Challenges aligning department with values</td>
<td>• Turned to the teachers in her department</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Varod</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>• Unprepared</td>
<td>• Turned to the teachers in her department</td>
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<td>• Turned to the teachers in her department</td>
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<td>Ricky</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Zahov</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>• Unprepared</td>
<td>• Turned to her partner for support</td>
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<td>• Turned to the teachers in her department</td>
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<td>Ruby</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Catom</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>• Challenges aligning department with values</td>
<td>• Turned to the teachers in her department</td>
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<td>• Turned to the teachers in her department</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Varod</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>• Unprepared</td>
<td>• Turned to the Director of General Studies</td>
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<td>• Asked to co-chair the department with another teacher</td>
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Feeling Unprepared when Taking on the Role: Challenges and Supports

When taking on the role, four of the chairs described feeling unprepared. As I outlined in Table 14, all the chairs in this study described challenges when they first became department chair. Of the nine chairs that described their experiences taking on the role, four of the chairs, Sam, the English chair at Varod, Pat, the math chair at Varod, Andy, the science chair at Catom, and Ricky, the science chair at Zahov, shared they did not feel completely prepared when they first became department chairs, while the other five chairs in this study did not describe feeling unprepared when they first became chair.

The four chairs who did describe feeling unprepared (Sam, Andy, Pat, and Ricky) also had also been teaching for fewer than ten years when they first took on the role as department chair. I wonder if that is connected to these chairs’ feelings of being unprepared in their first years as chair. In fact, four of the chairs in this study who had been teaching for more than 10 years before they took on the position of department chair (Alex, Charlie, Jackie, and Ruby), did not describe the challenge of feeling unprepared when they took on the role. They instead described other challenges, such as conflicts with colleagues within the department. I wonder, therefore, if the number of years these chairs taught ultimately influenced how prepared they felt for the position.

However, interestingly, Jamie, the math chair at Catom who had only been teaching math for two years before taking on the position, did not feel as though she was unprepared for the role. Yet, Jamie also explained that it was a “time for action” and not a “time for planning” when she took on the role during April 2020, at the beginning of the Covid pandemic, which might explain why Jamie did not have time to think about whether or not she was prepared when she had to make fast decisions about remote instruction. She explained that, “besides, it was the
pandemic, everybody was regrouping, figuring out what we would do moving forward, so there was a need for leadership at that time. And so, I did it.” Therefore, when Jamie took on the role it was set in the context of the early pandemic, which was a unique experience to Jamie that the other department chairs did not have when first taking on the role. This might have influenced her feelings of readiness and urgency.

**Sam’s Challenge of Feeling Unprepared When First Becoming Chair**

Sam, the English chair at Varod, who shared that she felt unprepared for the position, explained to me that she “didn’t ask for the role.” In fact, Sam, who had been teaching at the school for a few years, “wasn’t totally sure” she even wanted the position. Although she was “excited by the challenge,” there was also a part of her that was “scared” and “nervous by the challenge.” What Sam felt most apprehensive about was the fact that the previous chair was asked to step down by the administration, but remained a member in the department. Sam described feeling unprepared to manage that situation because it was uncomfortable for her to chair over the previous chair who was asked to step down. Sam shared with me that she believes she was “tasked” to chair the department because she “got along with everybody” and “knows how to deal with people.” However, Sam explained during our first interview that she “felt like there wasn’t so much… scaffolding for a person who was coming just as a teacher to becoming someone who was going to have to go into classes and observe people.” Sam explained that it was “very challenging” and she “had to really cut [her] teeth” on learning what to look for during observations, because although she knew “what works and what doesn’t work” in her own classroom, she explained that she felt “it’s harder to see” that in other teachers’ classrooms.
Sam’s Supports to Help Manage Her Challenge of Feeling Unprepared When First Becoming Chair

Sam described turning to the Director of General Studies as support when she first became chair. Specifically, Sam turned to this individual for help with observations, and she shared that:

So, we [Sam and the Director of General Studies] actually went to observe another department chair who was teaching, together, in this school, and we said, ‘Hey, can we come and observe your class? Because I don’t have practice observing,’ basically. And, that was actually very helpful both in terms of, okay, here’s how I write things down, I have this on this column, this on that column, here’s what I write down, here’s the kind of things I’m looking for, here’s what I would say in the follow up, here’s what I would not say in the follow up. So, that was actually pretty helpful.

Here, Sam explained how she found support in the help she received from the Director of General Studies as she learned the technical aspects of conducting an observation and providing feedback. Sam described how this helped her feel more prepared for that part of the position.

However, there were other challenges Sam was still struggling with at the time of our interviews, such as “what to do in department meetings,” something Sam shared she is “still not sure” about. I wonder if this is connected to the conflict Sam felt with chairing the department that included the previous chair. In other words, this might be because Sam also shared that when she first took on the role, she “did not feel comfortable dealing with certain people in the department” who she felt would “be too difficult to deal with on [her] own.”

Sam’s Support with Teaming. For support, Sam asked to co-chair the department with another teacher, as she explained:

I felt like I needed someone to increase the strengths of that position given these other characters, and I also felt that [co-chair] in particular, he had sort of done the job for a year or two maybe at the beginning of the school, so I felt like he had some experience that might be helpful to me. That was primarily how the co-chair partnership came about.
Sam and her co-chair are a great example of teaming, one of the four pillar practices that can support teacher leaders:

I think we balance each other very well. So, for example, [co-chair] can rattle off an email in 50 seconds, with the most beautiful prose, and I think I’m very good at the relationship building and being able to be honest with a person without offending them. Not to say that either of us can’t do those different things, but we do them differently. So, I think that we lean on each other in terms of how we complement each other. You know, sometimes that works really well.

Together, Sam and her co-chair share and exchange ideas and decision-making responsibilities within the department (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). They also work together to balance one another’s strengths and areas of improvement to lead their department together. Sam shared with me that she strongly believes “having him as a partner has helped [her] tremendously.” Sam explains:

I think I learned a lot from him, and can pretty confidently say the reverse is likely true as well. And I definitely think that like we sit in our roles, but I also think there’s a lot of, I’ve gotten better at this, he’s gotten better at that, sort of thing as we’ve gone through the years.

In other words, Sam and her co-chair help each other grow as leaders. Sam also explained that she and her co-chair “discuss a lot of things together,” and Sam finds it helpful to “process what [they’re] going to be talking about so that when [she] present[s] it to the department [she] feel[s] prepared.”

Sam finds tremendous balance with her co-chair as they discuss issues together on a level that they can connect on:

Honestly, it’s been helpful, not just because my co-chair and I balance each other so nicely, but also because there aren’t too many people to talk to about issues that come up, like, ugh, a teacher said this and I don’t know what to do… so it’s nice to have someone who understands those people and who is in my department to actually speak to and you know, troubleshoot in that kind of way.
Together they “kind of go back and forth” as they discuss their department, and Sam explained that she finds “it’s helpful because [disagreeing with her co-chair] really allows, forces me to think through things in ways I wouldn’t if I just decided to go with my initial gut.” Here, Sam described a form of collaborative reflective practice, or collegial inquiry, as she and her co-chair work through issues within their department together to push one another’s thinking (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). As I shared in Chapter IV, Charlie, the science chair at the same school, also described co-chairing the science department that she created for Varod.

**Pat’s Challenge of Feeling Unprepared When First Becoming Chair**

Just as Sam did not ask to become department chair, neither did Pat, the math chair at Varod who told me she became department chair because she “was asked to,” by the Founding Principal. Pat remembered feeling “a sense of imposter syndrome, a sense of fake it till you make it kind of thing,” because she shared she did not “think [she] really knew what [she] was doing.” Pat explained during our first interview that she “felt unprepared in many ways,” and further elaborated her feelings at the time by sharing:

> It wasn’t like this school, being so young and so new had any kind of framework for what that role looks like. I didn’t have any mentors. It wasn’t like the Director of General Studies said, ‘Here’s what the role’s going to look like.’ It was very amorphous, it was like, Western kind-of, like, figuring it out as you go along kind of thing, without a real history or anything like that. It was a little scary.

Pat’s description of the role as “amorphous” aligns with the literature. More specifically, for a long while and still more recently, researchers identified the ambiguous nature of the role of department chair as a challenge nationally (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013; Klar, 2013; Klar, 2012; Peacock, 2014) and internationally (Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021). The specific type of ambiguity Pat described in the quote above, being unsure of the job description, is similar to what Zepeda and Kruskamp (2007) described as a lack of direction
where department chairs often have to create their own roles. Interestingly, although that study is from close to two decades ago, Pat first became department chair 19 years ago. Pat further explained what she meant by the ambiguity of the role that first year:

The first year? I didn’t know what I was doing [laughs]. No coaching, no mentoring, a very vague sense of responsibilities, a vague sense of a scope of the position, as I said, I was very young and raw.

Pat explained that in addition to a vague sense of responsibilities, scope of the position, and a lack of mentorship or coaching, she was also “very young,” (i.e., mid 20’s) something all four chairs who described feeling unprepared had in common when they first took on the position.

**Pat’s Supports to Help Manage Her Challenge of Feeling Unprepared When First Becoming Chair**

Pat found that her “biggest support system” during this time were the “other department chairs” in the same school who she felt were also “winging it just like I was.” Pat explained how her fellow department chairs helped her navigate this ambiguity:

I had conversations with many of them, ‘How would you handle this situation? What would you do about this teacher? How do you handle when teachers in the office complain about things in the school when you’re there? You’re in this middle management position, what do you do?’ Questions like that. They were there as a resource.

**Pat’s Support with Teaming.** It seems like here Pat is describing a sense of teaming with the other department chairs as they worked together to problem solve and learn from one another’s perspectives and opinions about chairing a department. Pat seemed to really value this network of department chairs she created within the school, and she shared with me during our first interview that a few years later she created “also a math department chair email circle, for chairs in other schools.” Pat elaborated on how this network began:
I had already been friendly with the department chair at [Modern Orthodox yeshiva], because we went to graduate school together for math education. And, so, I think it started with four of us or so who were emailing each other some advice and all that, and so we met once a year actually. I don’t remember what year it might have started. It might have been three years after I was chair, I’m just guessing. So, every June we met for a day, talked over various mutual issues, whether it was use of calculator, whether it was things like kids want to advance over the summer, various grading requirements, again a lot of stuff in the weeds sometimes, bigger picture stuff, and also sometimes complained about whatever it is, but we got together for three hours, one day in June.

Pat also explained how the network she created evolved over time:

That [network] grew from four, to five, to six, and we kind of expanded a lot over the years, and now it’s probably eight or nine people who are part of this email circle, still get together once a year, and also still email each other when we have certain questions, because we don’t have to reinvent the wheel. Schools have been doing this, with good ideas and policies in place, so if you can hear from five schools what their policies are on this, and then you can say, ‘This works better at [name of school], this doesn’t work here,’ etc.

Pat created this outside network of teaming among department chairs that she uses as a way to promote personal and organizational learning through collaboration, enabling herself and the other chairs to take a broader perspective on their work as department chairs as they learn from one another’s perspectives in different yeshivas.

*Asking for the Position: Ricky’s Challenge of Feeling Unprepared When First Becoming Chair*

However, while Sam and Pat were asked to chair the department by the Founding Principal of Varod, the two other chairs who described feeling unprepared for the role, Ricky, the science chair at Zahov who is in her second year of chairing the department, and Andy, the science chair at Catom who is in her ninth year chairing the department, each put herself forward for the role when it became available in their schools.

Ricky explained during our first interview her mixed feelings about applying for the position of science chair:
This position was open, and I was looking, and I was just thinking to myself, ‘I really should do this job. I should try.’ But I didn’t quite feel capable. Like, who am I to be department chair? You know, I didn’t have a PhD, I hadn’t been teaching as long as anyone else, I’m the youngest in the department, but I did apply for the position. And, they were quite shocked because they didn’t think I’d want it. And it was true I was like, ‘I never thought of myself quite in that lens.’

Interestingly, in the quote above, like Pat, Ricky shared that her young age added to what she described as her feelings of “self-doubt” when she first considered taking on the role. Ricky shared that she felt these mixed feelings even after she was accepted for the position, and listed ambiguity in the seemingly never-ending responsibilities as one of the top three challenges she faces in the position as a new chair:

The role is not clearly defined, and maybe it can be, but the too many different kinds of things is a problem. Because I can’t really do everything and I push myself to. And so, the standards are really high, and I love to reach high standards, and I love to do more than high standards, and I like being in an impossible role, but we might not be appreciated for just what kind of impossible role it is. Being there for your students all the time, being there for the principal, being there for your teachers, having great classes, great professional development, sending out so many emails, being involved in the small nitty-gritty stuff, there’s just an impossible amount of things to get done and get accomplished.

Like Pat, Ricky described the many responsibilities she was met with upon taking on the role that contributed to these feelings. Also, Ricky became chair only two years ago, which could indicate that not very much has changed in terms of the ambiguity Pat and researchers Zepeda and Kruskamp (2007) described close to twenty years ago.

**Ricky’s Supports to Help Manage Her Challenge of Feeling Unprepared When First**

**Becoming Chair**

Ricky shared that she mustered up a sense of self-pride soon after becoming chair to help her through those challenges. When I asked Ricky in our first interview how she felt when she was first appointed, Ricky responded:
A sense of ownership, like if I was going to do this, I was going to do this absolutely, like, this was going to be my role. Definitely proud of what I had done, and how much I accomplished and got to this place. And also, slightly intimidated. This school was huge. Was I fit? Was I ready to take on this position? Am I right for this position as well? Self-doubt which I had to push away and say, ‘I’m here. I’m in the right place, at the right time, let me try. I think I have something valuable to offer.’

Just as Pat had shared she felt “imposter syndrome” when she first took on the role, Ricky also shared that she was plagued with self-doubt by questioning whether or not she was right for the position. However, unlike Pat, Ricky did not turn to other department chairs within or outside the school for support. Instead, she turned inwards for support. Ricky shared that she didn’t feel the “emotional support” she needed during that time would come from a school like Zahov. Ricky elaborated by sharing that she felt:

This school is not a place where you can kind of show that you’re not feeling [confident], like you have to be the confident one. You have to show that you’re capable for the position. So, I would say, the workplace is not a place for emotional support.

A Deeper Look into Ricky’s Supports. I wonder if Ricky held back from sharing her feelings of self-doubt with the administrators at Zahov because unlike Pat, Ricky asked for the position and might have been feeling like she couldn’t show any vulnerabilities. Although Ricky did not say specifically that she did not feel comfortable sharing her feelings of self-doubt with the administration, I interpreted it this way because Ricky did share that she felt very supported during this time by the teachers from within her department, so there were individuals in Zahov that did help Ricky during this time. Ricky shared how much their support meant to her during that time, and she describes them as a team:

The members of my team really wanted me to take on the position. They also pushed me, like, ‘You have to apply for this job.’ I’m like, ‘You’re crazy, why me? I mean, I’m the youngest one, you guys should be doing it.’ I did not think I was ready for it. So, knowing that they wanted me to do it, and knowing they not only had my back, but were saying, ‘Come on, you should do it. We don’t want to do it. We want you to do it,’ they have been so supportive. So, it let me sort of, like fall into the role, and I can make
mistakes, and just be their friend and their leader, and they have been very supportive and
generous, and kind, so they’ve really been amazing. My team is amazing. I feel very
proud to be a part of them.

In the quote above, Ricky explained to me how her colleagues not only encouraged her to apply
for the position, but continued to support her tremendously during her first years in the role.

While only in her second year as chair of the department at the time of the interview, Ricky
described feelings of teaming with her department and it seems that she feels very supported
with that pillar practice in place. Ricky also shared that she turned to her partner often during that
time:

My husband is amazing. I could not do this job without him. He wants me to be
successful. He wants me to feel good. He wants me to like my work. And even though
I’m a great teacher and he’s thinking, ‘You know enjoy the kids, stay home, you don’t
have to work so hard,’ I told him, ‘I can’t stagnate. I just, need to do more. Like I need to
feel good about what I’m doing. I always feel like I need to do more, and more, and it’s
for myself.

Yet, although Ricky felt that support from her husband and from the teachers within her
department, when I asked her if she wished for anything to have been different when she first
took on the role, she shared that she wished she had “a real, true, mentor” or “someone who had
been in the position.” She elaborated that the former chair would have been perfect as a mentor,
and when I asked why, Ricky responded:

I remember being observed by him, and the feedback being very supportive and what he
wanted me to improve in a certain area, which looking back was a huge area I really had
to grow in. But he was very sensitive about it, and supportive, and gave me great ideas,
and was there for me and encouraged me, and motivated me, and told me what I was
doing right. So, he really, I would say, focused on the positive a lot, and appreciated what
a tough job being a teacher is. Motivated me, I would say, in that direction. Again, there’s
a sensitivity in giving critical feedback.

Ricky described in the above quote the delicate balance of supports and challenges to support
growth that mentorship can provide (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Ricky shared that she
emulates the former chair and she explained to me that it’s “what [she] want[s] to be like.” Ricky
recalled the “loneliness” in the position after he left and shared that under temporary leadership

“I just didn’t feel like I was growing. I wanted to be pushed a little. I wanted someone to open up
my mind a little, like try something new, and so that I felt was lacking.” That type of
professional growth is important to Ricky and she shared that she often leads her department
meetings in a way that develops her own teachers’ practices:

    Usually I focus on a topic strengthening someway our curriculum. Something about our
teaching practices, you know, trying to inspire us to do better. I would do, like an
introduction, something to read, something to talk about, what we’ve done in the past,
something to try in the meeting, to try to implement, change, to approach effectively.
We’ve covered all sorts of topics this year, we did sort of anxiety in the classroom, we
talked about history and science, we spoke about conducting useful and clear surveys, we
discussed how to get more labs into our class, more inquiry, more student support, those
were all really valuable conversations we’ve had as a team.

Ricky’s approach to chairing, as inspired by the chair that came before her, incorporates teacher
leadership roles that the Learning Forward literature would describe as resource provider and
instructional specialist, as she distributes and recommends resources to teachers and affects the
planning and implementation of classroom instruction to increase student learning.

    Ricky shared that she continues to rely on her husband and the teachers in her department
for support, as well as her own internal values on what makes a good leader, heavily influenced
by the department chair that she so much admired when she first began working at Zahov. Ricky
captured these feelings during our second interview, when I asked her what she learned about her
challenges in the role and if anything may have changed:

    That I can’t do anything on my own, and I don’t see myself as just an individual, because
my leadership role is only as strong as my department. Leaders who don’t [empower
others], and are looking to take a center stage for themselves, and are looking to sort-of
empower themselves, for their own goals, and not bring the rest of their staff with them,
are not going to be successful. So, I think investing in everyone else is really an
investment in my position.
In the above quote, Ricky emphasized how important it is for her to support the teachers in her department and invest in them in the ways that are similar to how her former chair invested in her.

**Asking for the Role: Andy’s Challenge of Feeling Unprepared When First Becoming Chair**

Similar to Ricky, Andy, who has been teaching science at Catom for 16 years and took on the role during her seventh year, also put herself forward for the position:

The department chair who had hired me had been here for a very long time and was retiring. The Head of Upper School at that time really wanted to look elsewhere, and didn’t really. No one else here really wanted to. I wasn’t sure if it was the right thing to do or not. I was young, but I just figured, I loved everyone I worked with, I loved teaching science here, and I just felt like bringing someone in from outside would kind of be disruptive, so that’s kind of why I said I would do it and then I said I would it for one year, and it just stuck.

Here, Andy shared with me how she put herself out there for the position mainly because of her passion for teaching science and her positive relationship with her colleagues, like what Ricky shared as her reasons for asking for position. Andy also brought up her “young” age (i.e., 20’s) at the time, just like Ricky and Pat. When I asked Andy if she felt prepared for the position, Andy quickly responded, “No.” She elaborated by saying:

No one really told me what the role of department chair meant. I mean, I had just watched [former chair], for 6-7 years, observed what she did, but no one really prepared me for what the role actually means and defined it.

It seems like in the quote above, Andy described the same kind of ambiguity in the role the other chairs (4/9) had shared. She also added that there wasn’t really “a transition between the old department chair and the new department chair,” because the former chair’s “husband was very sick and she had to leave.” Andy relied on observing “what [the former chair] did” during the six years she taught under that chair, and explained:
It would’ve been helpful if the department chair before me would’ve sat down with me for a while and explained to me what she thought the role meant and passed on any information. I didn’t have any of that, so that was challenging.

**Andy’s Supports to Help Manage Her Challenge of Feeling Unprepared When First Becoming Chair**

In a way similar to what Ricky described, Andy felt close to her former chair and felt “she was a great mentor” when she “had just started teaching” and felt “very comfortable going to her with anything.” It therefore seems that working as a teacher under a previous department chair really helped Ricky and Andy shape their understanding of the role, unlike Sam who had explained that she only learned what not to do from the previous chair. However, Andy also understood that her relationship with the former chair was unique, because the former chair had also “alienated a lot of teachers.” Yet, just like Ricky, Andy shared that she adapted the way she chaired the department by reflecting on the way the former chair led. Andy explained, “I also knew what I didn’t think was the right way, so I tried to change those, but everything else I did try to model a little bit.” One of the things Andy meant by “the right way” is observing teachers, because the former chair “hardly observed teachers.” Andy elaborated by saying that she “had been [teaching] here for seven years” and the former chair “had been in [her] room one time for a few minutes.” It was important to Andy to observe her teachers and provide that support, and in fact, “a few years later” Andy joined a mentoring program with an outside organization that trains Jewish educators in new leadership positions which she shared was “very helpful”. Andy credits this organization with her learning how to observe the teachers in her department- “[the mentoring program] was really where I learned [observation skills],”- something she was unsure about when she first started chairing.
Additionally, Andy described the math department chair at the time, who was also the Assistant Principal, as another “mentor” when she first took on the role. However, Andy acknowledges that although she called her a mentor, “she didn’t act as a mentor in the sense of, what a real mentor does.” In other words, the math chair didn’t have formal mentor meetings with Andy or observe her. Instead, “it was more that she showed” Andy “how she organizes, how she keeps data for every student in every grade, and what level they’re in,” and helped Andy with “this amazing spreadsheet” that Andy still uses. The Math Department Chair at the time mostly helped Andy with administrative duties:

The math department chair really showed me how she organizes all of her spreadsheets for each grade of students, you know the placement test score, and where they’re placed, and like, the whole month of September is kids asking to change track levels, so she showed me like how to organize that.

As a result, Andy’s interpretation of the role depended a lot on what she liked and didn’t like about the way the former chair enacted the role, what she learned about the administrative responsibilities from the Math Chair at the time, and what she learned about observations from the outside mentoring program. Even still, Andy explained during our interviews that there was one area in particular she felt she needed more guidance:

Another thing I wasn’t prepared for was running department meetings. Like, for that I felt like I had no mentorship. It’s not like the ones before me were anything productive, so that’s like something I spoke to my [outside mentoring program] mentor a lot about, and she put me in touch with someone, I think it was at [another Modern Orthodox school], I’m not sure. I don’t think it was really helpful. Like, I don’t think that my department meetings are like the best that they can be, but I like bring to the table things that we need to talk about every time. But like, that’s something I feel like I could work on.

Andy shared that she still feels she needs more guidance when it came to running department meetings, just like Sam had shared. Andy felt in this instance she couldn’t rely on what she learned from her former chair, because she didn’t feel they were “anything productive,” and she did not share with me any supports that she has in place to help her manage this challenge.
Conflicts with Teachers When Taking on the Role

Of the nine chairs who shared their experiences when first taking on the role, two chairs who felt prepared and had been teaching at the school for over ten years shared that they faced conflicts with teachers in their departments. None of the other chairs in the study mentioned this particular challenge when first taking on the role, although they did list other challenges which I outlined in Table 14 and described in the narrative above. However, I wonder if the other chairs did not share this challenge during our interviews because other challenges were top of mind, and I therefore recognize that this does not mean they did not face this challenge. I interpreted a connection between the ways that the two chairs who did share this challenge, Alex, the English Chair at Zahov, and Jackie, the science chair at Zahov, made decisions that about how they would run their departments and who they would hire as teachers in their departments, which I describe in the narrative that follows.

Alex’s Challenge of Conflicts with Colleagues When First Becoming Chair

More specifically, Alex, the English chair at Zahov, and Jackie, the math chair at Zahov, both felt prepared for the position when they were first promoted to department chair, but they each faced challenges with the faculty in their inherited departments when they first became chair. At that time, Alex had been teaching at Zahov for fourteen years and was “very happy teaching” when suddenly the department chair became very ill and asked Alex to chair the department, or what Alex described, “chose [Alex] as her successor.” Alex shared how she felt at the time and explained what happened:

I didn’t know she wasn’t coming back, and she asked me. And she, whatever she, if she said, ‘Jump,’ I just jumped. So, I took it over, and then, she went to the hospital and six months later she was dead and the position was given to me the next year.
In the above quote, Alex explained how much she admired the former chair and how suddenly the former chair passed away. However, although it was sudden, Alex shared that she felt prepared to take on the role because the former chair, who she deeply respected, mentored her both before and during her time in the hospital. While ideally, she “would have liked to have had a year of doing it while [former chair] came and mentored me once a week or something like that,” she still felt “quite happy to step in” because “she had trained me,” and because “she had often said to me, ‘Okay this needs to be done, Alex could you do it for me?’ So, there were a lot of things that I already knew how to do.” Therefore, with that mentorship and a role model, Alex felt like she understood what needed to be done, and so she did not feel unprepared in the same ways that Sam, Pat, Ricky, and Andy had shared.

However, Alex faced a different challenge during this time. While age came up as an issue with Pat, Ricky, and Andy feeling young and therefore feeling unprepared or self-doubt, Alex struggled with age because there were “one or two teachers who were much older than [Alex] and had been there a long time, who were actually part-time, who had wanted the position and were very angry.” In other words, while Alex (mid-30’s) felt ready for the position, teachers who were older and in the school longer than she was had wanted the position and were angry with Alex for taking on the role. When I asked Alex during our second interview to describe her top three challenges during her first year, Alex responded, “The two teachers who were, who totally thought they should have the job instead of me, and they really put thorns everywhere. That was challenge one, two, and three. Without a doubt.” This was not only a challenge, but it was also very painful for Alex because she had considered one of them “friends”. Alex explained how she felt during that time:

The one teacher who I had been friends with didn’t see [Alex’s promotion to chair] coming. But everyone else did. I don’t know why. She stopped talking to me. I was
department chair of someone who wouldn’t talk to me. It, she has to go or I have to go. And I tried, and finally [Former Head of School] was incredibly supportive and got involved, and ultimately, she got into a screaming match with [Former Head of School] not about me, about other things and so she was hurt about not getting the job and it came to me.

Alex explained to me in the above quote that because this teacher, and former friend, was hurt about not getting the job, she stopped speaking to Alex, and Alex turned to the Former Head of School for support. Alex also added that she also “had another teacher at the time, and these two women used to make [the other teacher] cry.” Alex was greatly challenged by these two teachers who made it difficult for Alex and the other teacher in their department because they were hurt by Alex being chosen for chair over them.

Alex’s Supports to Help Manage Her Challenge of Conflicts with Colleagues When First Becoming Chair

Alex shared another example of when the Former Head of School supported her during this challenging time:

I asked her if she would teach [an extra class] because we didn’t want to bring somebody in for five classes, scattered over the week. It’s hard to get somebody who would come in Monday at 8, Tuesday at 4, and she got really angry, thinking that we had asked her to do this because we wanted to get rid of her. So, [name omitted] at the time was headmaster, and he called her in and said, ‘This was my decision.’ He took away the fact that while she wanted to put the blame at me because she wanted to blame me for anything, and it was very unfortunate because we had been friends for years, but he said, ‘This is my decision. It’s not Alex’s.’ [Former Head of School] ran interference a lot, and you know, took that stress off me when he could’ve just kind of said, ‘Alex needs a teacher and you’re the teacher and that’s what they decided.’

In this example, Alex explained how she felt the Former Head of School “ran interference” to help Alex manage this challenge. While Alex was able to sort things out with one of the teachers, this second teacher and former friend ultimately left the school. Alex explained what happened and how she felt during our second interview:
So, one of the teachers we made peace, and she went on to do other things in the school. The other one, not at all, and after many years of being in the school she got into a screaming match with [Former Head of School] and never stepped into the school again. And it was a very, I cried, and it still bothers me because we were friends, she came to my son’s bris, we were friends! I went to her house, or whatever, and that was a very, it was a hard lesson, you know.

**Influence of Early Challenge on Alex’s Practice as Department Chair.** When Alex described that experience as a “hard lesson,” she explains why it’s so important for her department to be collegial: “that’s why I talk to you about my department being collegial.”

In addition, Alex shared a very recent story which highlights how her early challenges with teachers in her department influenced her practice as department chair. In this story, Alex shared how she had to “let someone go” because Alex did not feel she was collegial:

I had a teacher who I had to let go last year because I didn’t think she was totally upfront and honest and collegial. And a lot of my teachers knew. A lot of my teachers came and started complaining that, ‘She’s not doing this, she’s not doing this,’ whatever, and I had to call her on it. And in the end, I just had to say... I don’t want a thorn in [the department], and if she’s not going to play nice with my teachers, and I saw it, and you know, they talk to me, they come and talk to me. They’ll come and tell me.

Alex created with her department a sense of collegiality that she shared is important to her and the teachers in her department, and therefore when one teacher was not demonstrating that sense of collegiality, Alex asked her to leave. Alex also shared another recent experience that I think demonstrates Alex’s support and collegiality for her teachers:

Like yesterday. Let me explain. One of my teachers doesn’t like confrontation. So, she has another teacher come into her room from another department who writes all over the board, second time they’ve done it, and puts a big sticker on it saying, ‘Please do not erase.’ So, my teacher walks in and she doesn’t like confrontation. So, she says to me, she comes down and says, ‘I don’t know what to do. So, I handled it for her. I said, ‘This is what I’m going to do,’ because I know that she’d rather not write on the board. Not that she’s a scaredy cat, she just doesn’t like confrontation. So, I went to the teacher, so I said, ‘Hi, so I know you teach in this room, I know you put up a sign, so, you can’t,’ so I act as a buffer sometimes and I say, ‘So I had to erase it.’ She said, the teacher’s like, [raises voice], ‘I asked no one to erase it! I teach in there!’
Here, Alex described ways that her teachers turn to her for support when they face conflicts with teachers, just as Alex had turned to the Former Head of School with support when she faced conflicts with teachers when she first took on the role. Like the Former Head of School did for her, Alex advocates for the teachers in her department by using her positional power as department chair:

So, I said [to the other teacher], ‘Actually I’m a department chair, and when I went to watch my teacher teach and she wasn’t using the board, I am going to have to write that down and have that discussion with her, and that’s not fair for her because of you. There’s another board in the room. I can have another board put into the back, she can leave it in the back.’ So, I diffused something because my teacher… she can’t do it. So, I did it. Because that’s what she needed.

In the story above, Alex shared an example of how she provides for her teachers that same type of support that she shared the Former Head of School providing to her when she faced those conflicts with the teachers in her department. Both instances involve conflicts with other teachers, and it seems Alex learned from the support she received from her early challenges as chair how she can best build and support the teachers in her department to create the sense of collegiality she shared she felt was missing, and the sense of support she shared she had needed.

**Jackie’s Challenge of Conflicts with Colleagues When First Becoming Chair.**

Similarly, Jackie, who was also a math teacher at Zahov and in her mid-30’s before she became chair, faced conflict with teachers in her department at an early challenge when she first took on the role. While Jackie had only been teaching at Zahov for four years when she became chair, she already had twenty years of teaching experience before teaching at Zahov. This might be why Jackie did not feel unprepared for the role when she first became chair. In fact, Jackie explained her thinking at the time they asked her to chair: “I was already an experienced teacher, I already had taught twenty years.” However, when I asked Jackie how she felt, she shared that:
It was nice, but, how honest am I supposed to be over here? I’m about to be honest. When I took over the department, it was dysfunctional. It really was. It was just dysfunctional. I had a lot of people who shouldn’t have been teaching. And I said, ‘I will take over the department, because I knew that that was the next step that I needed to do.’ Everybody else had been here longer than I had been. They hired me to take over that department. I said, ‘You should know I’m taking over the department even though I have an issue with a lot of the people who report to me.’

In the above quote, Jackie shared that she recognized from the beginning that she would have a challenge with the teachers who were already in the department. Similarly, like Alex, Jackie felt that the other teachers had seniority and that might have added to the challenges she faced.

When I asked Jackie if she felt prepared, she answered, “So, in one sense yes and in another sense no.” What Jackie explained is that she felt prepared “in the sense of what I wanted the role to be, I felt prepared for that.” However, she was “not totally prepared, because you’re not totally prepared until you’re doing it,” for the challenge of working with teachers who she felt “shouldn’t have been teaching.”

In an example from her early years, Jackie shared:

The curriculum would change, and one teacher would blurt out, ‘They can’t change the curriculum. The kids can’t handle it.’ It’s like, there’s no discussion. The curriculum is changing. Now let’s figure out what to do about it. Or, they would say, one person would say, ‘Nobody knows how to do, fill in the blank.’ It’s like, ‘Okay, so did you show them how?’ Not like, ‘Oh, cluck, cluck, cluck, isn’t that terrible they don’t know how to do it?’

In the above example, Jackie shared the challenges she faced with the teachers in her department when she first started when she tried to introduce a new curriculum. Jackie explained to me that she “felt very uncomfortable” during these meetings:

When somebody says, ‘No I’m not going to do that,’ it’s like, ‘I’m sorry, you have to.’ And I don’t like that kind of relationship. But that’s really the way my position started. And I felt very uncomfortable talking about it because they were almost all of them older than me. And, all of them in this school longer than I was. And it was just very uncomfortable saying, ‘No, I’m sorry, you’re going to have to.’
Jackie explained that, like Alex, she felt some of the challenges came with being younger than the other chairs and in the school for less time. Jackie then shared with me an example of conducting her first written evaluation for one of those teachers:

I had to write a teacher evaluation of a teacher who was a long-time teacher and who was a very negative person. Now, if I were to tell her that she’s very negative, she was so negative that she really wouldn’t have handled that well. So, I just told her, ‘I noticed that you were positive at some point,’ and that went so far, and, you know, ‘I just want to encourage you to always be positive.’ And [Former Head of School] said to me, ‘You didn’t tell her that she’s negative.’ And I said, ‘She’s been teaching here for 50 years, and if you didn’t succeed in telling her that she’s negative, and getting success out of that, what do you want from me?’ You know, so I actually started pushing back when the administration told me I wasn’t doing enough to make the people who I had then better than they were before. It’s like, I wasn’t really dealing with people who you could, I could, it was a big challenge to have them act in a different way than they were used to acting for a very long time.

In this story, Jackie shared her challenge of evaluating a teacher who she felt was “very negative” in a way that would support her. Unlike Alex’s example, it didn’t seem like Jackie felt the Former Head of School supported her with that challenge.

Jackie shared another example with me where she turned to the Former Head of School for support but did not feel supported:

[Former Head of School] asked me... if I wanted to fire one, which one would I fire? And I said which one I wanted to fire. Because there was only one I wanted to fire. Okay? Then one passed away, one said she’s quitting, and we didn’t stop her, you know, that was basically what happened. But, I said, ‘Yeah. You want to know who I want to fire? I want to fire that one.’ And I gave them several reasons why. And they said, ‘You never wrote anything in his file that made it clear that he needs to be fired.’ So, you know what I did? I wrote a nasty letter about him. And I had to give him a copy of that. And then they didn’t fire him. I wrote all the things he did wrong, and I said, ‘Could you sign it with me?’ and they go, ‘No, it’s from you.’ So, I’m a team player. I don’t think they were being on the team with me at the time, and, later on when I kind of processed what happened, I said to them... ‘You know, you asked me to clean up the school, the department, I started, and I felt that you threw me under the bus.’
Jackie’s Supports to Help Manage her Challenge of Conflicts with Colleagues When First Becoming Chair. When I asked Jackie how she managed this challenge of having teachers in her department who she did not feel belonged there, and without the backing from the Former Head of School to fire them, she explained that it was important for her to find certain personality types as new teachers in her department when she could:

Over time, different people left [the department] for different reasons. And, I made sure to hire people. My number one thing that I’m looking for when I’m hiring people, I call it ‘the yummy factor.’ Somebody who’s going to love the kids, love the material, be energetic about it, give it over in a fun way, be receptive… So, the Associate Principal who is not in the school anymore, we used to hire together. We used to interview people, and we made up with each other, we will always critique something, because we wanted to see the reaction of the teacher, of how she takes the critique, like, ‘You know you could have done such and such better, can I show you how?’ And they go, ‘Please show me,’ or ‘No, that’s what I did.’ If she’s the, ‘No that’s what I did,’ wrong answer.

Influence of Early Challenge on Jackie’s Practice as Department Chair. In the quote above, Jackie shared with me how, like Alex, she learned from the challenges she faced in the start of her role. It became so important to Jackie to find the teachers who “love the kids, love the material,” and also respond positively to criticism. Jackie seemed to have found support by being involved in the hiring process, as she says she “made sure to hire people.” She also found support in this hiring process with the Former Associate Principal who worked with Jackie on identifying the types of teachers Jackie wanted on her team.

Jackie, who has been in the role as math chair at Zahov for 12 years, told me that this is no longer a challenge for her. In fact, when I asked Jackie what she is most satisfied with about the department, Jackie answered, “I’m most satisfied with the fact that everybody’s a team player. Everybody’s a team player and everybody knows that’s what they have to be, and that’s so important to me that they’re team players.” Jackie also shared an example of what that means to her to be a team player:
I would tell somebody, ‘Okay, you’re going to write the final for January’ and they’d say to me, ‘No, I already wrote it last year.’ As opposed to now, where I’ll put on a [What’s App] chat, ‘I need help with such-and-such and it’s like, everybody jumps in right away. It’s like, ‘Me, me, me.’ And that’s what I consider a big success.

Jackie explained in this example how important to her it is that she feels everyone in her department is now willing to work together and help, which is not how it used to be. She also shared another example where she describes the types of teachers she has brought together in her department:

We were one time having a workshop, and we brought in somebody who was going to teach [the math department] how to do certain things, and in, I think Excel or something like that, and I missed a step, and I go, ‘Oh, wait a second, I, I missed something.’ Next thing I know, one of my teachers is next to me, right over here, she goes, ‘We got this. Where are you lost?’ I just looked at her, and I said to her, ‘No wonder the kids love you!’ Right? She saw that I had gotten lost for a minute, and she was there, next to me, like crouched down next to me, and she says to me, ‘We’ve got this.’ So, I feel supported. Like, how could you not love a teacher if you feel supported? You feel loved. And here I am, I’m acing it, and I even love my teacher, because, because she has my back. She wants me to succeed.

Just as Alex took her early experiences and challenges with her as she formed her department, Jackie learned from her challenging experiences and built a team that she feels love the students, love math, are willing to work together, and grow.

7.3 Challenge 2: Time to Teach While Chairing the Department

Of the nine chairs, five [Alex, Jackie, Sam, Pat, Ricky] described their challenges with time in regards to teaching as chair, explaining that they felt they didn’t have time to teach a full course-load and chair the department in the ways in which they would like, while the other four chairs did not mention this. However, it might not have been a top-of-mind challenge for the other four chairs, and I recognize that it might still be a challenge, but they did not mention it during our interviews. The five department chairs who did bring up this challenge of teaching a full course
load while leading the department also have nine or more teachers in their departments, which might be a link to understand why these chairs expressed this challenge but the other four participants in this study did not (Table 15). In this section, I first discuss the department chairs who shared their challenges with finding the time to teach a full course-load as chair. I then discuss the challenges with chairing during the fall semester, or specifically the month of November.

**Teaching as Chair: “I feel like a spinning top.” —Alex, English Chair, Zahov**

In Table 15 below, I alphabetically list the nine department chairs and the number of classes they each teach as department chairs in their discipline, and the number of teachers in their departments, which might provide more insight into the challenge. Importantly, I shaded the 5 department chairs who described their challenges with teaching as chair: Alex, Jackie, Pat, Ricky, and Sam.

Interestingly, all of these chairs who expressed to me their challenge of teaching while chairing their departments teach 4 or 5 classes, which is considered a full teaching load in a high-school classroom. However, aside from Andy, the science chair at Catom who has other roles in her school (i.e., technology department chair, Director of General Studies) and therefore has a very light teaching load, the other three chairs who did not describe this as a challenge also teach 4 or 5 classes. This means that in all three schools, chairs are required to teach a full teaching load in addition to their responsibilities of chairing the department. Yet, aside from Ricky, who is also new to the role of chair and therefore might be learning how to navigate the dual role of teacher and chair, the other four chairs who described this challenge have nine or more teachers in their departments. The four chairs who did not describe this challenge [Andy, Charlie, Jamie, Ruby] all have fewer than nine teachers in their departments. This leads me to wonder if it’s not
necessarily the full course load that led to these chairs describing their challenge with teaching as chair, but perhaps teaching a full course load with a large (nine teachers or greater) department. I explore what these chairs shared about this challenge in the narrative that follows.

Table 15

*Number of Classes Department Chairs Teach and Number of Teachers in their Departments*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chair</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number of Classes Chair Teaches</th>
<th>Number of Teachers in the Department</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Zahov</td>
<td>5 (at the time of interview one, during the 2021-2022 school year)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 (at the time of interview two, during the 2022-2023 school year)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Catom</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlie</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Varod</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Zahov</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Catom</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Varod</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ricky</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Zahov</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruby</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Catom</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Varod</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teaching as Chair in Zahov High School**

Alex, the English chair at Zahov who manages a team of 11 teachers while teaching four or five classes, described her challenges with teaching as chair in great detail during both of our interviews, and so I begin this section by going in-depth with what Alex shared. Alex shared that she “feels like an octopus sometimes” because of how challenging it is for her to find the time to do everything. At the time of the first interview, in August after the 2021-2022 school year, Alex had taught five classes the previous school year. She shared during that interview that:
So, what happened was to be department chair, you were department chair, but I was still teaching five classes, four preps. And I have seven or eight, this year, it’ll be ten or eleven teachers in my department. So, the work was just like, it felt like I’m a teacher, and I’m a department chair.

As Alex’s department grew to include more teachers, she was still teaching a full course load. Alex shared that as department chair, she “straddle[s] admin and teaching. So, it’s a very difficult place to be.” Alex expressed this challenge to the Head of School and Associate Principal by explaining, “For years we’ve been saying that, a number of us, we just couldn’t cope like that. It just wasn’t feasible.”

In fact, all three chairs from Zahov High School (Alex, Jackie, and Ricky) brought up this challenge during their interviews. In our second interview, Jackie, the math chair at Zahov, shared that:

Here I am with more classes to teach, a different level of responsibility because of the material and the rigor of the subject, and the emotions and tensions that go with the subject, and I’m in the classrooms all the time because that’s something I find to be so important because if you’re trying to get certain results, the only way to get the results is not by wishing them, but by being proactive and helping them be created, needed.

Jackie explained to me in the above quote that she is teaching five, high-level courses and also getting “in the classrooms all the time” to observe the ten teachers in her department. Similarly, Ricky, the science chair at Zahov, who teaches four classes and has six teachers in her department, told me in our first interview that, “Another hard part of the job that I didn’t mention before is teaching as well.” It is important to Ricky as department chair to be a “really great teacher,” and so she explained to me that she has to “invest a tremendous amount into my lessons and they constantly have to be updated” and therefore she “spend[s] a lot of time working on that” because she “want[s] to be there for [her] students.”
As Alex described during the first interview, many of the chairs told the administration at Zahov that it “just wasn’t feasible.” Alex explained that the administration made changes for the department chairs to each teach one fewer class the following September for the 2022-2023 school year. Alex gave more insight to this decision during our second interview, which took place in December of the 2022-2023 school year.

So, one of the things [Head of School] and [Associate Principal] were really good at, they’re really good at a lot of things, and one of the things, [is] last year they took a lot of the department chairs out to visit other schools. So, I went to spend the day at [Prestigious Private NYC school] and… we’d then discussed what we liked, what we didn’t like, what department chairs were doing. And when we saw department chairs were doing, they actually came and made the change for us. Not enough, but at least some thing. So, I think we’re a work in progress.

In the above quote, when Alex says the administration “made the change” for the chairs, she is describing the support for chairs to teach four classes instead of five. However, Alex is still managing a group of eleven teachers and there was a new change in schedule for chairs to meet with multiple members of their departments weekly. In our second interview Alex shared how she feels:

I’m teaching four classes instead of five, and the amount of work that I have to do now as department chair because they’ve given me all these meetings, I have 12 scheduled meetings a week. Which is insane. And I’m still teaching 20 periods. Okay, so I feel like, I feel like a spinning top.

Alex explained that she “doesn’t know what the right balance is,” but felt, “The truth is, I think if [the Zahov administration] said to me you’re teaching three classes, or two classes, I would be much happier.” She further explained, “At this stage, I would be happy teaching three [classes], and if they want me to run the department the way they want me to run it, I need that space.”

Although Ricky and Jackie brought up the same challenge, they did not share as many details as
Alex. I also interviewed Ricky and Jackie in May and June of 2022, before this new support was in place.

**Teaching as Chair in Varod High School**

Pat and Sam, who are the retired math and current English chairs at Varod respectively, also both brought up this challenge. When I asked Pat what supports would have helped her in her role when she was chair, she explained that:

The other piece that probably would have helped a lot I felt at the time, it was a very, very, very busy job. And I was teaching four classes. I had been teaching four classes the whole time. And I know it’s also something, most of my colleagues in other schools also teach, either full-time or very close to full-time, it’s 80% time. And, it doesn’t give a lot of time to really do that job very well.

In the quote above, Pat explained how busy the job was in and of itself, and therefore how difficult it was to also teach a full-time work load. She went into further detail during our second interview when I asked for her top three challenges while chairing the department:

Second one I think would be time, just managing my time and all the various constituencies and responsibilities, and demands on my time that was always needing to be filled, and along those lines also navigating my own four classes, teaching four classes, and doing everything else. Just figuring out how to do that, practically and not getting burned out is also part of that.

In the above quote, Pat explained how challenging it was for her to manage her time, juggling the responsibilities of chair with her own classes.

Sam, in our first interview, described how much grading she has as an English teacher and said “the workload is tough.” She elaborated by saying, how “sometimes it’s like, okay, I need to listen to this teacher, but I also have so much I need to do on my own.” In other words, it would be challenging for Sam to find the time to give her teachers attention while also getting the work done she needs for her own classes. Pat reiterated what Sam shared when she explained
in our second interview that she felt she didn’t give as much attention to department meetings as
she wanted to, because “I feel like the biggest concerns were just teaching four classes and trying
to juggle all these things I wanted to do.” As Ricky had shared earlier about the importance of
being a “great teacher” as a role model for the teachers in her department, Pat shared a similar
sentiment:

It’s also that, I think it helps that my reputation as a teacher was well-solidified. Over the
years, I think I did have good relationships with students, and I’d feel uncomfortable
sharing that advice if my own reputation was not good and I wasn’t respected as a
teacher, so I think that helped.

In other words, these department chairs prioritize their own teaching practice because it’s
important to them as leaders of their department to be seen as strong teachers.

7.4 Challenge 3: Chairing in the Fall Semester

While four of the chairs [Andy, Charlie, Jamie, Ruby] did not bring up teaching as chair
as a challenge in regard to time, they did bring up the “crazy season” of chairing as a challenge,
which they described is November, also the time I conducted the second interviews. It is
important to note that I collected data for these five chairs during the month of November, so I
wonder if this challenge was top of mind for them since they were experiencing the challenge at
the time of the interviews. The two chairs I interviewed during May and June of the previous
spring [Jackie, Ricky] did not bring up the month of November as a challenge. This leads me to
believe that although they did not bring up this challenge, it does not mean they do not face this
challenge. Instead, it might not have been top of mind for Jackie and Ricky in the way it was for
the chairs I interviewed in November. It is also important to note that aside from Jamie, the math
chair at Catom, the chairs did not go into great detail with this challenge during our interviews,
but expressed the challenge usually when beginning the interviews by describing to me how
hectic they felt because of the added responsibilities they had during this season. I explain what they meant by this in more detail in the narrative that follows. For this reason, this section is not as in-depth as the previous sections with the other challenges the chairs described. However, as more than half of the chairs did mention this challenge, I felt it was important to bring to the surface in this dissertation.

During the November interviews, five chairs (Andy, Charlie, Jamie, Ruby) discussed reviewing report cards (2/5), Open House (2/5), submitting grades (1/5), parent teacher conferences (2/5), grading assessments (1/5), college applications (2/5), student programming (1/5). In Table 16 below, I alphabetically list the five chairs who shared these challenges. I also included their disciplines and schools to identify any patterns between this challenge, discipline, and the school culture. It is interesting that a department chair from each discipline and from each school brought this up, demonstrating that it seems to be a challenge that is not tied to a specific discipline and that all three schools in the study have a very busy November. Even more so, it is especially interesting that all three chairs from Catom brought this up as a challenge, which makes me wonder if Catom’s culture is especially demanding in November. Additionally, it seems that reviewing or helping with students’ college essays is something that only Alex, the English chair in Zahov, described which might be because it falls under her the English discipline. In the narrative that follows, I describe what the department chairs shared in their voice and my interpretations.

Table 16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chairs</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Challenges in November</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Zahov</td>
<td>• College essays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• College recommendation letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Catom</td>
<td>• Reviewing teachers’ report cards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Jamie, the math chair at Catom who has been chairing for three years, spoke the most about her challenges as chair with the November period. Jamie wondered during our first interview if this “cramming culture” is “not really related to [her] position as chair but more about the school culture.” Jamie explained what she meant by “cramming culture”:

I feel like we are starting to subscribe to this cramming culture that many companies have these days, where you have a period where work is somewhat lighter, and then all of a sudden everything happens in one week. And you just have to make things happen in one week. And I feel like our duties could be spread out a little better in a slightly more balanced manner. I feel like there are a few months, especially November, that are extremely, extremely intense.

Jamie explained that it is usually “around report cards” and described “a lot of stuff… in November,” such as “parent-teacher conference, report cards, Open House, and then you have to grade assessments and read assessments, teaching, and everything collides in one month and gets very, very compressed.” During our second interview, at the end of November, Jamie said that soon “things should start going back to normal” because she “finished the report cards,” and “seniors have applied early decision.” She said that “things should be alright” within “the next couple of weeks,” but that “it’s been very hectic this last month” because “November is terrible.” Additionally, during that interview when I asked Jamie to describe the biggest challenge she faces as chair, Jamie responded:
I’m not sure what would qualify as a challenge. The thing that I do find the most challenging about the job, and not specifically about the first year but about the job in general is that there are times of the year that are extremely hectic and the workday is like almost frantic, and that is I think the only thing I would count as a challenge, just being able to make it through some very gruesome week during the year. But I don’t think there is any specific task that would be exceptionally challenging, it’s really just sometimes the quantity and the fact that they happen all at the same time. So, you have to juggle a variety of things. That I think is the biggest challenge.

In the above quote, Jamie explained that it’s not necessarily the tasks themselves that are challenging, but it’s more about having to do it all at the same time that is challenging. Andy and Ruby, who respectively chair the science and English departments at the same school, shared similar sentiments. Although Ruby did not speak as much about this challenge as Jamie, she described the time of our second interview as “the crazy season,” and wanted to get our second interview in before the “conferences all day” that she has with students.

Similarly, when I asked Andy what “the most time consuming” part of her job is, Andy answered that it’s “going through all of the paragraphs that teachers write about the kids.” Andy described the anecdotal, or the short paragraphs that teachers write on students’ report cards. She explained that “It’s just very time consuming to read all of it,” especially because “it’s always at the same time of the Open House, and the quarter’s ending so we have to get grades in, it’s just all at once.” Similar to Jamie, Andy described the feeling of being challenged by “doing all of that at the same time” and said it is “hard.” Andy finds it supportive that she “only teach[es] the one class,” and although she has “a lot of meetings in [her] schedule,” she finds “a lot of time in school” where she will “hideout” in her office “to get that work done.” Otherwise, Andy explained, she “work[s] most nights.” All three of those chairs are in Catom, and they all described this month as a very busy time of year that they found challenging to get through.
At Varod, Charlie, the science chair, was the only chair who brought up the challenges in November, and at Zahov, Alex, the English chair, was the only chair who brought it up as well. Charlie briefly described the challenges with school programming and all of the events the students had in November and will have in December as well:

Over Chanukah there are going to be three days, kids don’t know it, it’s confidential, but they’re going to have Color War, and we’re not allowed to give homework over Chanukah. So, to keep a rigorous curriculum to maintain continuity for the kids when they have Freshmen day, and Freshmen Shabbaton, and this and that, it’s a real challenge.

In the above quote, Charlie explained that the students just had Freshmen day and a spiritual religious retreat called Shabbaton, and the school was planning a Color War event for December to celebrate Chanukah. Charlie was challenged by not being able to “maintain continuity” during this hectic time with so many missed classes. Charlie also brought up “PTA meetings” and said that she was “hearing from a lot of teachers, November and then December [are] intense.” However, Charlie added that “other times have other challenges,” because of “the chagim” or Jewish holidays, and, so explained that “it’s not easy in a Jewish day school to keep the rigor, to keep the continuity,” because “it’s a long school day,” and “kids have to enjoy also, like life can’t be a drudge.” Therefore, Charlie mainly attributes the hectic season of November and December to par for the course of being a yeshiva and trying to fit in a dual curriculum with Jewish holidays and fun student events.

Lastly, Alex, the English chair at Zahov, is the only chair to have brought up college recommendation letters and college essays, although Jamie did mention being relieved that the college applications were out. Alex explained what her schedule looks like during November:

Last night I got home, I got a frantic [email] from a kid, ‘I have to cut 25 words out [of her college essay]’. I spent twenty-five minutes, went over it, with a pencil as a scalpel and took out, it’s just never ending. And I wrote 22 college recommendations as well, so
In the above quote, Alex uses the phrase “a spinning top” a second time to describe how overwhelmed she sometimes feels as chair. In this example, it is because of the college application process and her involvement in students’ college essays and letters of recommendations that she feels so challenged with time. Alex explained:

> It takes up so much time. Second semester, I’m the happiest person alive. Really, because college essays are basically done, I can sit and have lunch, I can teach, whatever, and there isn’t, like it is a crazy time.

Alex shared with me how different she feels during the second semester when she is no longer involved in the college application process. Alex did try to step away from her involvement in this process, and recently scheduled a meeting with “the new head of college guidance” to “see where [the English department] can support her and even disappear.” However, Alex is worried that if the English department “back[s] off,” they will “get complaints from kids” because “a kid will come to me and say, ‘Alex, you taught me AP Lang last year, you taught me whatever, but I really want you to look at my essay,’” and she wonders, “How do I say no?” However, Alex shared that she feels she “[has] to say no,” and that “it’s something [she and the Head of School] are still working on and thinking about how to put into practice for next year.”

### 7.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I shared two findings regarding the challenges the chairs described: first, how all nine department chairs spoke of challenges when they first took on the role as chair and second, their challenges with time (9/9). Within the first finding, I shared that four of the chairs, Sam, Pat, Andy, and Ricky, all felt unprepared when they first became department chairs, and that they had all been teaching for a short period of time before they became promoted to the
role. Two of the chairs, Alex and Jackie, who both had decades-long teaching experience, felt prepared for the role but struggled with conflicts they had with teachers in the department who had been former colleagues. The second finding was the challenges the nine department chairs in this study described with time. I shared that five of the nine chairs described the challenges that come with teaching as chair, and another five of the nine chairs describing the challenges that come with what they describe as busy season, or November.

Throughout the chapter, I also described my findings on the supports the department chairs described as they managed these challenges. I found that some of the chairs turned to an individual on the school’s leadership team (3/9) or other department chairs (2/9) for support when they first took on the role. Other chairs turned to the teachers in their departments (2/9), outside mentoring programs (1/9), or their partners (1/9) for support. Lastly, I explored these findings of challenges and supports through the lens of the four pillar practices (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2012) to identify how the nine chairs might employ the pillar practices. I found that the department chairs in this study described the pillar practice of teaming by viewing the department itself as a team (2/9), viewing the department chairs within a school as a team (2/9), and co-chairing the department as a team (2/9). I also found that some of the chairs described being mentored by the former chairs of their departments before they took on the role (2/9) or from an outside organization (1/9). Those same chairs also described ways that they employ mentoring themselves as chairs of their departments to the teachers within their departments (3/9). In the next chapter, (Chapter VIII), I present and describe a visual model that is grounded in my research to display what I learned about these nine department chairs’ responsibilities, leadership roles, and employment of the pillar practices.
Chapter 8: Introduction to a Model of Department Chairs’ Work:

Responsibilities, Practices, and Capacity Building

In Chapters VI and VII, I presented what I learned from the nine department chairs who form the heart of my qualitative study by analyzing what they shared as their role and responsibilities, challenges and supports, and leadership practice. In my analysis, I discovered a close link between the responsibilities these nine chairs identified with the ways in which they can lead and support the teachers in their departments. For example, the three English department chairs, Alex, Ruby, and Sam, unify their departments through discussions on curriculum, and employ pillar practices to do so, which I discussed in Chapter VI. Additionally, there seems to be a close link between the ways in which the department chairs took on their roles as chair, which I discussed in Chapter VII, and the ways in which they interpret the role, which I discuss in this chapter. In other words, in this chapter, I extend my findings from my previous chapters by identifying ways in which the nine chairs’ interpretations of their roles seem to have been influenced by three factors when they first took on the role: the preceding chair, the leadership team at the time, and the chairs’ own values.

I first begin the chapter with an overview of the current leadership literature, drawn mainly from research on principals and teacher leadership, because to my knowledge there are no leadership models drawn specifically from research on department chairs. Next, I introduce each layer of the model to bring in the voices of the nine department chairs and demonstrate how I built this visual to explain the responsibilities and leadership practices of these nine chairs using the two lenses from this study, Learning Forward’s 10 roles for teacher leaders and Drago-Severson’s pillar practices. At the end of this chapter, I present a model that is drawn from my research on the nine department chairs and grounded in this research. I created this model in the
form of a pyramid, with each layer building upon the layers that come before. Just as the layers of a pyramid become narrower, the explanations narrow with each layer, building on the explanation of the layers that come before. The full model displays and extends my findings from Chapters V, VI, and VII to demonstrate that:

- The nine chairs’ espoused beliefs on chairing their departments formed when taking on the role.
- Through the responsibilities of writing and/or setting curriculum, holding department meetings, and recommending personnel changes, the nine chairs can unify their departments. At this level, the chairs can act as Resource Provider, Curriculum Specialist, and Instructional Specialist (Killion & Harrison, 2017).
- Through the responsibilities of observing lessons and holding other meetings (i.e., formal, informal, one-on-one, and/or grade-level meetings), the nine department chairs can grow their teachers’ practice. At this level, the chairs can act as Data Coach, Classroom Supporter, Learner, and Learning Facilitator (Killion & Harrison, 2017).
- The nine chairs expressed a desire to act as visionaries for their departments and enact leadership for their schools. At this level, the chairs can act as School Leader, Catalyst for Change, and Mentor (Killion & Harrison, 2017).
- When department chairs are supported by the school’s leadership team through the pillar practices, the nine department chairs can support their own teachers through the pillar practices throughout each level.
8.1 My Model in Relation to Leadership Literature

In this section, I discuss my model and where it sits in relation to the current literature within the field of education leadership. In Daniëls, Hondeghem, and Dochy’s article “Review on Leadership and Leadership Development in Educational Settings” (2019), the authors cite Bush and Glover’s (2003) definition of leadership as follows:

Leadership can be understood as a process of influence based on clear values and beliefs leading to a ‘vision’ for the school. The vision is articulated by leaders who seek to gain the commitment of staff and stakeholders to the dream of a better future for the school, its students, and stakeholders (Bush & Glover, 2003, p. 31).

In this definition of principal leadership, the authors demonstrate the importance of the school leaders’ values and beliefs when setting a vision for the school. In this study, it seems the same can be true for the nine department chairs’ espoused beliefs when setting a vision for their departments within the larger school. What I interpreted to be the nine department chairs’ beliefs seemed to influence many of the decisions they made as they enacted their responsibilities, which I discuss in more detail in the next section.

Daniëls and colleagues further cite Grissom and Loeb (2011), to describe “effective school leaders” as “leaders who manage to combine and understand the instructional needs of the school, have the ability to allocate resources where they are needed, and hire and manage qualitative personnel and keep the school running” (2019, p. 111). The nine chairs in my study fit into this definition of “effective school leaders” by describing the ways in which they enact the responsibilities of writing and revising curriculum, observing teachers, and other “instructional needs of the school” (Daniëls et al., 2019, p. 111). They also described ordering supplies, organizing workshops or finding other “resources” for the teachers in their departments, and building their own team to “hire and manage qualitative personnel” (Daniëls et al., 2019, p. 111).
In other words, the nine department chairs in this study seem to align with this definition of instructional leaders within their schools.

**Principal Leadership Theories**

Daniëls and colleagues (2019) continue to discuss the evolvement of school leadership theories with a focus on principals’ potential in creating learning environments for teachers and students. In particular, they summarize the decades-long research on instructional leadership, situational leadership, transformational leadership, and distributed leadership. Instructional leadership, or the focus on the impact of teaching and learning (Daniëls et al., 2019), differs from transformational leadership mainly in regard to two major aspects. First, instructional leadership focuses on instructional aspects of a school environment such as curriculum and assessment, while transformational leadership does not (Daniëls et al., 2019). Second, transformational leadership is shared to include collaboration, and is more of a bottom-up approach while instructional leadership is more of a top-down approach (Daniëls et al., 2019).

While all nine of the department chairs in this study shared with me some aspect of collaboration, thus demonstrating important aspects of transformational leadership, all nine also shared a heavy emphasis on curriculum, instruction, and assessments, an important quality of instructional leadership. Therefore, as subject-content leaders, these nine department chairs are in a unique position to “extend instructional leadership with other theories,” such as transformational leadership (Daniëls et al., 2019, p. 115). I interpret the nine department chairs in this study to be instructional leaders that extend the instructional leadership framework by taking on more of a bottom-up approach with the teachers in their departments by employing the pillar practices (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2008, 2009, 2012). This is because during my interviews with the nine chairs in this study, they largely shared their instructional responsibilities such as setting
curriculum (9/9), conducting teacher observations (9/9), and creating assessments (9/9), and yet also emphasized the ways in which they enact these instructional responsibilities by collaborating with their teachers (9/9), providing leadership roles (5/9), engaging in collegial inquiry (3/9), and collaborating by teaming (9/9), which I discuss in more detail later in this chapter. Similarly, in the survey, the 24 chairs reported instructional responsibilities such as writing or setting curriculum (M=3.04) and observing lessons (M=3.08), while also reporting collaborative responsibilities such as creating a sense of camaraderie (M=3.3) In other words, the nine department chairs at the heart of my study and 24 department chairs in the piloted survey described ways in which they include their teachers in their decision making rather than enacting a top-down approach that is more typical of instructional leadership (Daniëls et al., 2019). These findings further support prior research describing instructional leadership as being integrated with transformational leadership in a multi-dimensional way (Bowers, 2020; Kwan, 2020; Marks & Printy, 2003; Printy, Marks, & Bowers, 2009; Urick & Bowers, 2014).

**Leadership for Learning (LfL)**

In this section, I describe where the model sits in relation to the Leadership for Learning (LfL) framework. More recently, LfL emerged in school leadership research to integrate these different aspects of previous theories (Bowers, Blitz, Modeste, Salisbury, & Halverson, 2017; Daniëls et al., 2019). Interestingly, Murphy, Elliott, Goldring, and Porter (2007) state that LfL is especially visible in high-performing schools, which is the context of all three schools in this study as I shared in Chapter IV. However, there is no solid definition of LfL and it is often understood as “the process in which the whole school community actively participates in the improvement of learning” (Daniëls et al., 2019, p.116). Hallinger (2011) extended this definition to emphasize the actions of school leaders to achieve school outcomes, specifically regarding
student learning. LfL integrates aspects of instructional leadership, transformational leadership, distributed leadership, and situational leadership (Murphy et al., 2007, as cited in Daniëls et al., 2019). While LfL seems to be used as more of a wide-lens leadership approach, focusing on the school, teachers, and stakeholders as a community, these nine department chairs might fit into this model as one aspect within that wide-lens, because they integrate aspects of the various leadership approaches with their own disciplines within the larger school context. Additionally, studies show that department chairs are involved at both organizational and departmental levels, focusing on leading their teams with a sense of mission and direction, demonstrating how they might fit into the larger school mission (Tang, Bryant, & Walker, 2022).

Therefore, my model which I present in this chapter demonstrates aspects of LfL by showing how the nine department chairs lead their individual teams with this sense of mission and direction, integrating aspects of instructional leadership, transformational leadership, distributed leadership, and situational leadership. The various leadership roles the nine department chairs discussed during my interviews with them, which I interpreted through Learning Forward’s 10 roles for teacher leadership, and the ways in which the chairs enact these leadership roles through their responsibilities by supporting their teachers through the pillar practices, offer a perspective that can extend the current literature on LfL by showing how and why the nine department chairs in this study enact leadership.

**Department Chair Leadership Qualities**

To further situate my model in the current leadership theory, in Table 17, I present the qualities of instructional leadership, transformational leadership, distributed leadership, situational leadership, and LfL that Daniels and colleagues (2019) describe in their article. I also include which of the qualities from these four principal leadership theories I identified in my
analysis of the leadership of the nine chairs in this study. I do this to demonstrate how my model includes aspects of these leadership theories and extends the current research by also including the pillar practices and Learning Forward’s 10 roles for teacher leaders to show how and why the nine department chairs in this study enact leadership. It is important to note that I collected data during one season of the school year, and therefore if I did not identify a particular leadership quality in any or all of the nine department chairs, it might be because at that moment there were other qualities the department chairs were more focused on sharing. In other words, this study is a snapshot into a department chair’s leadership. For example, during the second interview, three of the department chairs shared responsibilities that they “forgot” to mention during the first interview. That leads me to wonder how many responsibilities, challenges, supports, or leadership qualities were not top of mind for the department chairs during data collection that might have come out had I conducted more interviews with the chairs throughout the academic year.

As I discussed in prior chapters, the department chairs in my study all described ways in which they enact elements of instructional leadership, such as thinking about the instructional program, the curriculum, and ways to assess students and/or teachers’ implementation of the instruction through observations and evaluations. Additionally, they each discussed the mission or visions of their departments, and they each mentioned the school learning climate and the particular context of a Modern Orthodox yeshiva during our interviews. However, what the department chairs shared goes beyond instructional leadership in many ways as a result of the process in which the department chairs described leading their departments, with all of the chairs leading as teams, and all of the chairs leading through collaboration with teachers in their departments. Yet, despite the collaboration in the role, I would not say that the chairs in my study
mainly described their decision making as bottom-up, a characteristic of transformational leadership. Instead, these chairs included their teachers in decision making, but ultimately made the key decisions for their departments.

As the context of being in a Modern Orthodox yeshiva with high standards and a dual, intensive curriculum drives the decisions many of the chairs shared they make with and for their departments, there are elements of situational leadership that I identify. Lastly, although there are many elements of LfL, which draws upon each of the prior principal leadership theories, the department chairs’ leadership is focused on their own departments within the school whereby LfL is a “process in which the whole school community actively engages in purposeful interactions that nurture relationships focused on improving learning” (Daniëls et al., 2019 p.117). Because my study was limited to only the math, science, and English departments within each school, and included only the perspectives of the department chairs of those three departments, it is outside of the scope of my study to understand if the chairs are enacting leadership as part of the school’s LfL framework.

**Table 17**

*Department Chairs’ Leadership in Relation to Principal Leadership Theories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Qualities (Daniels et al., 2019)</th>
<th>Aspects of the Leadership Qualities I Identified with the Department Chairs in this study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Leadership</td>
<td>• Instructional program • Mission • School learning climate • Organizational conditions</td>
<td>• Instructional program (9/9) • Mission (9/9) • School learning climate (9/9) • Organizational conditions (9/9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformational Leadership</td>
<td>• Vision and goals</td>
<td>• Vision and goals (9/9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Just as there are many approaches to principal leadership, I believe the same could be true for the department chairs’ leadership in this study. The ways in which the chairs in this study practice leadership also may depend greatly on how the principals in the three schools enact leadership themselves. However, my study is limited to the department chairs’ own descriptions and understandings, and therefore I am limited in the way I can communicate how the administrators enact leadership within their school. My research was focused on the voices and stories of the nine department chairs at the heart of my study, and therefore I am not certain that

| Distributed Leadership | | Distributed Leadership |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| • Staff motivation and direction of goals | • Staff motivation and direction of goals (2/9) |
| • Shared leadership, bottom up | • Shared leadership, bottom up (2/9) |
| Distributed Leadership | | Distributed Leadership |
| • Leadership by teams and groups | • Leadership by teams and groups (9/9) |
| • Collaboration and organizational learning | • Collaboration and organizational learning (9/9) |
| • Responsive to the context | • Responsive to the context (2/9) |

| Situational Leadership | | Situational Leadership |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| • Context influences leadership | • Context influences leadership (9/9) |
| • Characteristics of the organization | • Characteristics of the organization (5/9) |

| Leadership for Learning (LfL) | | Leadership for Learning (LfL) |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| • Instructional program | • Instructional program (9/9) |
| • Curricular program | • Curricular program (9/9) |
| • Assessment program | • Assessment program (7/9) |
| • Vision for learning | • Vision for learning (9/9) |
| • Communities of learning | • Communities of learning (3/9) |
| • Team-oriented, wide range of leadership sources | • Team-oriented, wide range of leadership sources (5/9) |
| • Resource acquisition and use | • Resource acquisition and use (9/9) |
| • Organizational culture | • Organizational culture (9/9) |
| • Advocacy | • Advocacy (2/9) |
what I interpreted as the department chairs’ beliefs are truly their own beliefs, or whether they are the beliefs of the school or the leadership team.

Additionally, conducting a subject-object interview, a developmental assessment that pinpoints an individual’s meaning making system to learn the developmental capacity of the nine department chairs was outside of the scope of this study, and therefore I am not aware if any of the nine chairs adopted the beliefs of someone else as their own. For example, within the WOK, if one of the department chairs is more self-authoring, she might have the internal capacity to build her own standard and benchmark of judgment (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Additionally, because the 40-minute observations offered only a snapshot into the department chairs’ practice and was mostly used to inform questions for the second interview, I was not able to determine how, if at all, the department chairs enacted beliefs were theories-in-use (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004).

For this reason, in my model I refer to these beliefs as the department chairs’ espoused beliefs on chairing, or their beliefs that develop through conscious and intentional thought, because I interpreted these beliefs to guide what these department chairs shared about their practice (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). From what I was able to learn from the nine chairs descriptions of their roles and responsibilities, challenges, and supports from what they shared with me during the two interviews, it seemed that the beliefs the department chairs described did influence important decisions they made for and with their departments, as well as who they recommended to bring on to teach in their departments. Below, I present my full Model of Department Chairs’ Work: Responsibilities, Practices, and Capacity Building (Figure 7) to show how I understood the ways in which the nine chairs in my study lead their departments through their responsibilities while employing the pillar practices and enacting Learning Forward’s
leadership roles. In the narrative that follows, I discuss each level of the model in detail before presenting the full model again at the end of the chapter. First, I begin the discussion with the first level, what I refer to as the foundation because this is when the chairs first described taking on their roles and where I discuss my interpretations for the nine department chairs’ espoused beliefs in the next section.

Figure 7

*Model of Department Chairs Work: Responsibilities, Practices, and Capacity Building*

8.2 Forming Espoused Beliefs: Level One

My model begins by examining what I interpreted as the nine department chairs’ espoused beliefs. As I explained in the previous section, by espoused beliefs I am referring to
their beliefs that develop through conscious and intentional thought because I interpreted these beliefs to guide what these department chairs shared about their practice (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004).

I interpreted the espoused beliefs of the nine chairs about what it means to lead a department in a Modern Orthodox NYC high school, and what they shared that led me to these interpretations. In Figure 8 below, I present what I interpreted as the foundation for the department chairs and the aspects that influenced their beliefs on chairing based on what the nine chairs shared with me: how the former department chair interpreted and enacted the role; what the school’s leadership team shared in terms of their hopes and goals for the position; and the chairs’ internal values and/or beliefs they shared with me. These three aspects, along with the supports of the pillar practices (teaming, mentoring, leadership roles, collegial inquiry), seemed to have served as the foundation for the nine department chairs, leading them to form their espoused beliefs on chairing a department. It is important to emphasize that I created this model based on what I learned from what the nine department chairs shared during my interviews with each of them.

In this first section of my model (Figure 8), I display the text Level 1: Espoused Beliefs on Chairing to the left to demonstrate that this is the foundation, and first level, of my model. Next to this text are the foundations of the four pillar practices: teaming, mentoring, leadership roles, and collegial inquiry, because these pillar practices seemed to have served as the foundation for these department chairs when they first took on the role, which I displayed in the text to the right of the model. Specifically, these chairs’ beliefs seemed to be influenced by the former department chair, the school’s leadership team, and the chairs’ internal values, three aspects I display to the right of this level. I describe this in detail in the next section.
In this section, I highlight the voices of three of the nine department chairs in this study (Jackie, the math chair in Zahov; Jamie, the math chair in Catom; Pat, the math chair in Varod) to demonstrate how I interpreted the chairs’ espoused beliefs based on what they shared during their interviews (Table 18). I chose to highlight the three math chairs to identify any patterns between the three chairs from this discipline when it came to espoused beliefs on chairing the department. I found that the three math chairs shared different espoused beliefs. Jackie, the math chair at Zahov, shared her beliefs that she is a teacher first and her belief in supporting teachers. Jamie, the math chair at Catom, shared her belief that there should be a strict meritocracy in her department. Pat, the math chair at Varod, shared her beliefs that students should be challenged, teachers should help students find the beauty in math, and teachers should speak respectfully about students. It is important to note that the interviews were only a snapshot into the roles and responsibilities of the chairs, and if the chairs did not share a particular belief with me, it might be that the chair did not share it with me during the interviews but might still hold other beliefs.

In Table 18 I focused on the espoused beliefs of these three math chairs, such as Jackie, the math chair at Zahov’s beliefs in being a teacher first and that chairs should support teachers, Jamie, the math chair at Catom’s beliefs in a strict meritocracy, and Pat, the math chair at Varod’s beliefs that students should be challenged and see the beauty in math. I include my
interpretations of the other six chairs’ espoused beliefs and what they shared that led me to these interpretations in Appendix J. However, for purposes of clarity, and to identify a possible pattern, I chose to highlight only the three math chairs in this section. In both Table 18 and in Appendix J, I also included what each of the nine chairs shared about the former department chairs when they first took on the role, and what the chairs believed was the leadership team’s goals or hopes for the chairs when they first took on the role, which together I interpreted to form these chairs’ espoused beliefs that they shared with me during our interviews. I describe these beliefs in more detail in the sections that follow as I highlight the three math chairs’ voices, one from each school, to demonstrate how I interpreted their espoused beliefs on chairing.

Overview of the Math Department Chairs’ Espoused Beliefs

In Table 18 below, I interpreted different beliefs for the three math chairs based on what they shared with me during my interviews with the nine chairs. However, it is important to note that I was limited to two interviews in this study and therefore the math chairs might hold similar beliefs, or other beliefs, that they did not share with me during the time of our interviews. It is interesting that the three math chairs had shared such different espoused beliefs with me during the interviews, which led me to wonder about how much of these beliefs were their own and how much of what they shared were the beliefs of the school’s leadership team. For this reason, I also thought about what these chairs shared with me during our interviews about the leadership team in their schools and how the leadership team or former department chair might have influenced these chairs’ beliefs.

I found that both Jackie, the math chair at Zahov, and Jamie, the math chair at Catom, shared experiences of when they first took on the role where the leadership team was explicit about what they expected of them as chairs. In Jackie’s case, the leadership team shared that
Jackie should lead differently than the former chair because they were looking for a “change.” Therefore, Jackie also learned what not to do from her former chair. However, Jamie did not have a former chair to guide her beliefs on her department. Instead, the former Head of School shared that Jamie should fill a void in the math department because there was no “proper chairperson” and so they “needed a single person leading the department with an idea of where the department was going.” I wonder, then, if this could be why the beliefs Jamie shared seem to be more action-oriented than the beliefs that Jackie shared, which are more about caring for her teachers and students. It is also interesting to note that Jamie became department chair at the start of the pandemic, which was a time that quick decisions needed to be made.

Unlike Jackie and Jamie, Pat did not share what the leadership team set as an expectation when she first became chair. Instead, it seems that Pat formed her beliefs on chairing with other chairs in her school, which she explained was her “biggest support system” because they were “winging it” together. Additionally, unlike Jackie’s and Jamie’s schools, Varod was a brand-new school when Pat became chair and so this might contribute to her forming beliefs together with the other new chairs in the new school.

Table 18

Math Department Chairs’ Espoused Beliefs on Chairing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chair and School</th>
<th>Espoused Beliefs</th>
<th>Beliefs Influenced by Former Department Chair and School’s Leadership Team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jackie, Zahov</td>
<td>• Teacher before department chair</td>
<td>• Influenced by former chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I have no interest in administration— I have an interest in teaching.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I would rather just teach.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamie</td>
<td>Chairs supporting teachers</td>
<td>Leadership shared their goals for chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I’m kid-oriented.”</td>
<td>“I decided that if I run a department, a) I’ll be able to teach what I want to teach, and b) everybody who reports to me will be able to teach what they want to teach too.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I’ll fight for the babysitting sooner than I’ll fight for my own raise.”</td>
<td>“I have an extremely different style of the person I reported to before.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I consider myself a mommy wherever I go.”</td>
<td>“He wasn’t kid-oriented. He was job-oriented. I’m kid-oriented.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I really am more like a mommy in that situation.”</td>
<td>“When [leadership] hired me they told me right away we’ve been looking for a change in the math department.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I’m like a big sister.”</td>
<td>“[Leadership] said, please help us in changing [the department].”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamie</td>
<td>Strict meritocracy</td>
<td>“There was this idea that okay we didn’t have like a proper chairperson in the math department and we needed to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I’m trying to shape the department into something that aligns with my core beliefs. Overall, I want to make sure to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership shared their goals for chair</td>
<td>ensure”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
that a kid who gets out of the school with a really high GPA is really a high-quality candidate for college."

“At that point I knew that if I pick any two A+s, those students are not equivalent. One is a genuine A+ and the other is probably not. So I don’t think it’s fair, especially to the students who really invested a lot in their education. So that was one of my priorities as chairman. Still is.”

“Fighting a little bit against grade inflation.”

“More than that, you want students to be challenged at the right level.”

“Kids change, and kids grow, and there’s some late bloomers as we call it, so how could we figure out how to do that?”

Pat • Students should be challenged

“Formed concept of chairing with other chairs in the school”

“My biggest support system at the time were other department chairs who were also, I think, winging it just like I was at the time.”

fill this position at some point.”

“So, even the fact that we were splitting the responsibilities between two people was not ideal. It was one of the things that concerned [former head of upper school] the most, I think. From what he shared with me.”

“The idea of having a single person leading the department and with an idea of where the department was going.”
• Seeing the beauty in math

[During Covid]
“We’re going to hold kids accountable, and there’s going to be homework, and kids need to be paying attention.”

“My big thing was trying to move away from thinking of math as just solving for x, thinking of math as a set of processes and procedures, and seeing the beauty of math.”

“We want kids to appreciate math, see its power, see its poetry in some ways.”
“If they won’t appreciate it or understand it, why are we teaching it?”

• Respect towards students

“The way we talk about kids.”

“If I had a boss who didn’t speak respectfully about students, I wouldn’t want to be in that school.”
“When we had a conversation about kids it was done in a very non [evil tongue] kind of way.”

**Espoused Beliefs of the Three Math Chairs**

Jackie, the math chair at Zahov high school who has been chairing the department for 12 years, seemed to share an emphasis on putting the students first. For example, Jackie shared that her “interest” is not in “administration,” but in “teaching.” She also described herself as “kid-oriented” and shared that she would “rather just teach.” Jackie also compared herself to a “mommy” or “big sister” to the teachers in her department, showing how important it seems for Jackie to support or care for her teachers in a maternal way.

Jamie, however, who has been chairing the math department for three years, did not emphasize these beliefs during her two interviews with me. Instead, Jamie described her “core beliefs” to be mitigating “grade inflation” and creating a “strict meritocracy” so that students with a “high GPA” are “really high-quality candidate[s] for college." Jamie described this belief as a "core priority” for her as “chairman,” both when she first took on the role and during the time of the interview.

Pat, who recently retired as math chair after leading her department for 19 years, shared what I interpreted to be her beliefs on challenging students, helping students see the beauty of math, and creating a culture of respect towards students. Pat explained that it was important students were “challenged at the right level” while also emphasizing that “kids change, and kids grow, and there’s some late bloomers.” In fact, during Covid, Pat shared that it was important to her for the math department to still “hold kids accountable, and there’s going to be homework,
and kids need to be paying attention.” In other words, Pat’s beliefs that students should be challenged drove some of her decision making during the pandemic to maintain their standards and expectations for students during that difficult time. Pat also shared her beliefs that teachers in her department should speak about students “respectfully” and thought a lot about “the way we talk about kids” in her department.

**Pillar Practices when Taking on the Role**

In Figure 8, I presented a model of the foundation for the department chairs in this study that is built on the pillar practices. The pillar practices (teaming, collegial inquiry, mentoring, and providing leadership roles), together with my interpretations of the chairs’ espoused beliefs I highlighted in the previous section, seemed to lay the foundation for all nine chairs as they described ways in which they enact their responsibilities and the pillar practices with their own departments. In the sections that follow, as I continue to develop my model in this chapter, I describe ways in which the chairs’ espoused beliefs I identified forming during the foundational experience of taking on the role seemed to influence the ways in which they described enacting their responsibilities. In this section, I highlight some examples the department chairs shared about the ways in which the administration supported them with the pillar practices when they first took on the role. This is because I found a connection between the ways in which the chairs described feeling supported by the pillar practices when they first took on the role and the ways in which the chairs described supporting their teachers with the pillar practices while enacting their responsibilities. I speak more about this finding later in the chapter when I present the next levels of my model.
It seems that there were two big ways the administration in two of the schools, Zahov and Varod, supported some of the department chairs (Alex, the English chair at Zahov; Pat, the math chair at Varod; Sam, the English chair at Varod; Charlie, the science chair at Varod) through teaming and collegial inquiry when these chairs first took on the role. First, two of the chairs (Alex, the English chair at Zahov; Pat, the math chair at Varod) described ways in which the administration was able to create a team among the department chairs within the school through department meetings, where they could engage in collegial inquiry together. Second, the administration at Varod supported two of the chairs with a co-chair for their departments, enabling them to act as a team and engage in collegial inquiry by making decisions together for their departments (Sam, the English chair and Charlie, the science chair). It is important to note that the third chair at Varod, Pat, explained that two years ago the leadership team at Varod did offer for someone to co-chair with Pat to help her manage the role. Pat shared that it would have been helpful to her as her duties became more complex. However, Pat was planning to retire from the role at the time and therefore decided not to co-chair her department in the same ways that Sam and Charlie had.

When Alex, the English chair at Zahov first became chair, the administration set up regular meetings with chairs, thus creating a culture of teaming where the chairs saw themselves as a team, working together, and where they would engage in collegial inquiry as they discussed policy and other topics that would help the teachers in their departments and students grow. Pat, the math chair at Varod, also shared the support she felt with the other department chairs in the building as she engaged in collegial inquiry by talking through and “figuring out” things like:
How would you handle this situation, what would you do about this teacher, how do you handle when teachers in the office complain about things in the school when you’re there, you’re in this middle management position, what do you do?

Another type of teaming is what Sam, the English chair at Varod, shared when she first became chair by asking the administration if she could “co-chair” the department. The administration agreed; they recognized Sam’s apprehension, and Sam’s idea to co-chair helped her build collaborative structures to share and exchange ideas and decision-making responsibilities within the department (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). As I discussed in earlier chapters, Sam and her co-chair practice collegial inquiry as a team by “discussing” and “processing” together what they will talk about with their departments. Charlie, the science chair at Varod, also experienced teaming when first taking on the role. Charlie asked to co-chair the department with her husband a few years into the role after hiring him to teach Advanced Placement Biology. Uncomfortable with the idea of being “chair over him,” or him being a “chair over [her],” she asked the Head of School if they could “co-chair it.” Therefore, Alex, Pat, Sam, and Charlie each experienced the pillar practice of teaming when they first took on their roles as chair.

**Mentoring**

Six of the nine chairs in the study from across all three schools described mentoring in some aspect when they first took on the role as chair. I found that these six chairs shared that mentoring when first taking on the role seemed to be a big support they had, or a support they wished they had. While the other three chairs did not bring up mentoring during my interviews with them when they first became chair, I recognize that this might be because it was not top of mind for these three chairs during the brief interview period.
**Chairs with an Early Mentor.** Two of the chairs, Andy, the science chair at Catom, and Jamie, the math chair at Catom, felt they had some type of mentorship in place when they first became chairs and they shared feeling very supported by the school for putting some type of mentorship in place. Others, such as Alex, the English chair at Zahov, Pat, the math chair at Varod, Ricky, the science chair at Zahov, and Sam, the English chair at Varod, shared that they wished they had a mentor when they first became department chairs. This is because there were areas where they felt they needed more guidance and support, which I describe in more detail below.

In my first interview with Andy, Andy initially described having a “mentor” when she first started. She shared that another department chair in the school, the former math chair, was an early “mentor” for Andy. During my second interview with Andy, I asked Andy what she meant when she described the former chair as a “mentor.” I include this longer quote which illustrates Andy’s interpretation of the word “mentor”:

[Former math chair] didn’t act as a mentor in the sense of what a real mentor does. We didn’t meet all the time… she didn’t observe me at all, it was more kind of because my department chair left. There wasn’t anyone to pass everything along to me. So, it was more that she showed me how she organizes, how she keeps data for every student in every grade, and what level they’re in, this amazing spreadsheet that I still copy and paste over year to year, you know their placement test scores, what middle school they came from.

So, although Andy and the math chair at the time did not meet regularly and Andy was not observed, she helped Andy with parts of the job Andy needed help with. Andy could not go to the former science chair because the former science chair had left abruptly, and so Andy really relied on this support she received from the math chair at the time. Andy also sought outside mentorship in an area she felt she needed more help with, observing teachers. Similarly, Jamie, the current math chair at Catom, shared that she “felt supported” when she first began because
she received a lot of one-on-one help throughout the summer before her first academic year as chair from the former Head of School and a senior colleague in the math department.

**Chairs Without an Early Mentor.** However, four of the nine chairs (Alex, the English chair at Zahov; Ricky, the science chair at Zahov; Pat, the science chair at Varod; Sam, the English chair at Varod) shared that they wished they had a mentor when I asked during the first interview, “Was there anything you wish you had in terms of supports when you first took on the role?” Alex, the English chair at Zahov, shared that “in a perfect world [she] would’ve liked to have had a year of [chairing] while [former chair] came and mentored me once a week or something like that. That would’ve been ideal.” Although Alex learned a great deal from her former chair, Alex shared that it would’ve been “ideal” had the former chair been able to come in to mentor her during the first year. Similarly, Ricky said she would have liked “a real, true, mentor, like someone who had been in the position would have been amazing, like let’s say [former chair] would have been perfect.” Like Alex, Ricky felt she would have benefited from the mentorship of the former chair who she so greatly admired.

Pat, the retired math chair at Varod, shared “if there had been somebody who had been doing this for a while in another school, that probably would have been helpful.” Pat explained that she would have found it helpful to speak with someone who had been chairing for “a while” in another school to help her during her first year. Lastly, Sam shared that she believes “if there was a person outside of school who was that type of mentor, or not someone who was sort of directly our boss, to mentor… that would have made a big difference, especially in the early stages.” Sam, like Pat, would have appreciated someone from outside of the school coming to mentor her during her early years as chair.
Providing Leadership Roles

It might seem that all nine department chairs were placed in a leadership role simply by becoming department chairs. However, three of the chairs (Pat, math chair at Varod; Ricky, science chair at Zahov; Sam, English chair at Varod) described insecurities with this leadership position. For example, Pat shared her sense of “imposter syndrome” and Ricky was unsure if she was “ready for it.” Two other department chairs (Alex, English chair at Zahov; Charlie, science chair at Varod) shared how important it was for the administration to support them in this leadership position during this time. These two chairs described this by sharing examples of when they made a decision as chair in their early years and then felt supported by the administration when someone else challenged their decision making. While only two of the nine chairs described this feeling of being supported through their leadership roles when they first began chairing, I highlight these two voices in this section to demonstrate how the school’s leadership team employed the pillar practice of providing leadership roles for these two chairs when they first took on the role.

As I described in the previous chapter, Alex, the English chair at Zahov, shared examples of when the former Head of School supported her when two teachers in the department were unhappy that Alex was promoted to chair instead of them. Additionally, as I described in Chapter VI, the Founding Principal of Varod really leaned on Charlie, the now retired science chair, to help him establish Varod as a new school and bringing in her expertise and prior experiences when needed. However, Sam, who began chairing the English department at Varod a few years into the school’s establishment, did not feel the same support as Charlie in that way. As I discussed in Chapter VI, this might be because Charlie had already been teaching for three decades before starting the science department while Sam was still a beginning teacher. Sam
shared that she wishes “as a middle-management role” there “could be more weight” to her “decision-making power.” She also shared that she feels she “could be more empowered by the [Founding Principal and Principal] and [the role] could feel like an important place in the school more than it does.

Summary of Level One: Forming Espoused Beliefs

In this section, I introduced the foundational level to my model by examining how I interpreted the espoused beliefs of the nine department chairs, with a specific focus on the three math chairs in my study. I found that each of the three math chairs shared different beliefs, which I interpreted could be a result of the school context, years of experience, and perhaps the Covid pandemic. Next, I described how the schools' leadership teams across the three schools employing some, or all, of pillar practices through teaming and collegial inquiry, mentoring, and providing leadership roles when the nine chairs first became department chairs. I explored this because I found that it seemed to set the foundation for the ways in which the department chairs described employing the pillar practices themselves with the teachers in their own departments. I describe this in more detail as I discuss the next levels of my model in the sections that follow.

I found that the heads of school and/or principals at the three schools were able to support the chairs with two types of teaming. First, the administration was able to create a team among the department chairs within the school through department meetings, where the chairs could engage in collegial inquiry together. Second, the administration at Varod supported two of the chairs with a co-chair for their departments, enabling them to act as a team and engage in collegial inquiry by making decisions together for their departments. While only two of the nine chairs described feeling mentored when they first took on the role, four chairs shared that they wished they had a mentor during this time in their careers. Lastly, two of the nine chairs
described ways in which the administration supported them in their leadership roles when they first began making decisions for their departments. In the next section, I introduce the second level of my model which builds upon this foundation.

8.3 Unifying the Department: Level Two

In the previous section, I discussed my interpretations of the nine chairs’ espoused beliefs, and what led to those beliefs when the chairs first took on the role, by introducing the foundation of a model (Figure 8). In this section, I examine how the nine department chairs in this study seemed to unify their departments through their responsibilities of personnel, writing and/or setting curriculum, and holding department meetings. In Figure 9 below, I show the second level of the model, which illustrates the ways in which I interpreted how the chairs in this study unify their departments by laying the groundwork for their departments by enacting these three responsibilities. This level comes after the foundation because I interpreted a connection between the chairs’ espoused beliefs and the ways they enact these three responsibilities.

In other words, it seems the chairs’ espoused beliefs drive the ways in which these department chairs decide who to bring onto their department, how they set or write curriculum, and what they discuss during department meetings. These three responsibilities, along with the ways in which the chairs support their teachers with the pillar practices, serve as the second level for the nine department chairs. These responsibilities and pillar practices were also supported by the results of the survey which I presented in Chapter V, that showed department chairs (N=24) identified meetings with teachers and instructional leadership responsibilities, such as writing or setting curriculum, as top responsibilities of chairing. The chairs in the survey also identified ways in which they create a holding environment with their teachers, mainly through the pillar practices of teaming and collegial inquiry. I also interpreted the chairs to hold three of the
Learning Forward Leadership Roles in this level: Resource Provider, Curriculum Specialist, and Instructional Specialist, which I discussed in previous chapters and will describe in the narrative that follows.

In this second level of my model (Figure 9), I display the text Level 2: Unify Department to the left to demonstrate that this is the second level of my model, where department chairs seem to build on the foundational level to unify their departments by enacting three responsibilities: personnel, curriculum, and department meetings. I display these three responsibilities within the pyramid in blue, to symbolize unity. It is within this level that I interpreted the chairs to lay the groundwork for their departments by also enacting the Learning Forward Leadership Roles of Resource Provider, Curriculum Specialist, and Instructional Specialist, which I placed in the text to the right of the model. I used dashes to outline the permeability of the responsibilities because while I interpreted these three responsibilities to inform the ways in which the department chairs in this study to unify their departments, the chairs can enact these responsibilities throughout the model and at any level. The pillar practices are in the background of this model to demonstrate how the department chairs carry the pillar practices to support their own teachers in their departments in a similar way to how the chairs themselves described feeling supported by the school leadership teams. I describe each of these aspects in detail in the sections that follow.
In this section, I highlight the voices of three of the nine department chairs in this study (Alex, the English chair in Zahov; Ruby, the English chair in Catom; Sam, the English chair in Varod) to demonstrate how I interpreted these chairs’ espoused beliefs to inform the ways in which they unify their departments through curriculum and department meetings. I chose to highlight the English chairs in this because in Chapter VI, I described ways in which I interpreted these English chairs to discuss how they unify their departments through their curricular responsibilities. Additionally, they each seem to enact Learning Forward’s leadership role of Curriculum Specialist, as they help their teachers become sophisticated users of the curriculum and developers of their own classroom curriculum (2022). In this section, I will add a new layer to this analysis by examining how these three chairs’ espoused beliefs (Table 19) might influence the ways in which they enact these responsibilities.

While in Appendix J I present a more complete picture of these chairs’ espoused beliefs, in Table 19 below I highlight some of what I interpreted to be the three English chairs’ espoused beliefs based on what they shared with me during our two interviews. Alex, the English chair
from Zahov, shared with me her beliefs that students come first. Alex explained that she is “a teacher before anything” and that “the kids are [her] first priority.” Alex also emphasized how "important” it is for her “that the department works as a well-oiled, friendly machine,” which I interpreted as Alex’s belief in collaboration within her department. Ruby, the English chair at Catom, shared what I interpreted to be different beliefs than Alex. Ruby shared that it is important for her to continue to grow professionally, and “always looked to expand [her] interests and goals as a teacher.” Additionally, Ruby shared her belief that teaching is a “collegial job.” Sam, the English chair at Varod, emphasized during our interviews that she tries to find the middle ground for her department by being careful not to “ruffle too many feathers.” She also shared that she does not like to be seen as an expert figure.

Table 19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chair</th>
<th>Espoused Beliefs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alex, Zahov</td>
<td>• Students come first&lt;br&gt;  “I’m a teacher before anything.”&lt;br&gt;  “The kids are my first priority.”&lt;br&gt;  “Your students in the classroom come first.”&lt;br&gt;  “My priority is that, that kid needed me, I sat there, because she’s my priority.”&lt;br&gt;  “We have a duty of care, emotionally, academically, spiritually, for every child who walks into our building.”&lt;br&gt;  “It was very important to me that the department works as a well-oiled, friendly machine.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Collaboration in the department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruby, Catom</td>
<td>• Chair’s growth&lt;br&gt;  “I’ve always looked to expand my interests and goals as a teacher.”&lt;br&gt;  “Teaching is a very social job, it’s a very collegial job.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Collegiality in the field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam, Varod</td>
<td>• Finding the middle ground with the department.&lt;br&gt;  “My personality tends to be more like, both of these are good options.”&lt;br&gt;  “I’m not going to fight to the death on a lot of these issues.”&lt;br&gt;  “We don’t want to ruffle too many feathers.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

310
• Not being seen as an expert figure
  “I also don’t walk around like the ‘department chair.’”
  “We didn’t want it to feel like, oh, the two of us know everything there is to know about teaching English.”
  “I could learn from everyone here regardless of how long I’ve been teaching here, or teaching in general.”

Ways in Which the English Chairs’ Espoused Beliefs Inform Decisions on Curricular Meetings to Unify their Departments

In Chapter VI, I described how Alex unifies her department through her curricular responsibilities by holding a 2-3-hour department meeting at the end of each year to design the curriculum and “teach the whole four years of the child.” In this meeting, the teachers collaborate by thinking together on what they will teach at each grade level, beginning with the twelfth grade, and working backwards until they have the curriculum written for 9-12. Alex explained that she has the teachers in her department share materials on the spot with one another by creating a shared Google drive. As I described in the section above, Alex shared her beliefs in collaboration within her department and putting students first (Table 19). During this yearly curricular meeting that Alex described during our interviews, Alex explained how she places the student at the center of the discussion by emphasizing the purpose that each teacher is “responsible for every child.” In other words, Alex’s decision-making about curriculum is influenced by her belief that the students are at the heart of her role as department chair as I described in the previous section. Additionally, just as Alex has a belief in the power of collaboration within her department, she prioritizes inviting teachers to collaborate and work together on setting the curriculum. In this example, Alex demonstrates her roles as Resource Provider and Curriculum Specialist as she helps teachers access and use resources (i.e., unit...
plans, digital resources) for planning and instruction and creates a shift from teachers as consumers of curriculum guides to developers of them (Killion & Harrison, 2017).

Similarly, the espoused beliefs of Ruby, the English chair at Catom, influence the way she unifies her department through curricular conversations. As I discussed in the section above, I interpreted Ruby to have a strong belief in collegiality within the field of education (Table 19). As a result, it seems that Ruby brings a sense of collegiality to her own department as they engage in conversations about curriculum and Ruby gives the teachers in her department a lot of decision-making power when setting the curriculum. Ruby describes the process as “democratic” and emphasizes to her department that they “function as a collective.” Therefore, although Ruby wants a unified curriculum for her department, she invites her teachers to make the decisions together, building collegiality.

Lastly, I identified ways in which Sam’s espoused beliefs which I identified to be finding the middle-ground with the teachers in her department and not being seen as the “expert” in her role as department chair (Table 19) to inform decisions she makes about curriculum and meetings with her department. For example, Sam shared that she “tiptoes around people’s sensitivities” when she discusses curriculum, and because she believes in finding the middle-ground between her teachers, Sam puts her own desire for a more unified curriculum aside to keep the peace within her department. Similarly, Sam does not want to be seen as the “expert,” and so she does not mandate the curriculum or make these decisions for her department. Instead, Sam gives her teachers a lot of independence by requiring the primary texts and skills to be uniform but encouraging her teachers to choose their own supplementary texts within the curriculum.
In this section, to explore Level 2 of my model and how the department chairs can unify their departments through their responsibilities, I highlighted the ways in which I interpreted the three English chairs’ espoused beliefs informed their decision-making with the ways in which they meet with the teachers in their departments to enact their curricular responsibilities. In the next section, I highlight the ways in which the chairs’ espoused beliefs drive decisions they make about who they bring into their departments as another way to unify their departments.

**Espoused Beliefs Informing Unifying the Department through Hiring Personnel**

In this section, I highlight the voices of the three department chairs in this study, Jackie, the math chair at Zahov, Andy, the science chair at Catom, and Charlie, the retired science chair at Varod to further describe Level 2 of my model and the ways in which these chairs unify their departments through their responsibilities with hiring personnel. While all nine chairs brought up the importance of hiring in our interviews, I chose these three chairs to highlight their voices and share one chair from each of the schools that strongly demonstrate how their beliefs inform the decisions they make on hiring personnel to unify their departments.

**Ways in Which These Chairs’ Espoused Beliefs Informed Decisions on Hiring Personnel to Unify their Departments**

As I described earlier (Table 18), I interpreted Jackie’s espoused beliefs to be that she is a teacher first and the importance of supporting teachers in her departments. As I shared in Chapter IV, Jackie, the math chair at Zahov, described the “yummy factor” she looks for when bringing teachers into her department. To Jackie, this means “somebody who’s going to love the kids, love the material, be energetic about it, give it over in a fun way, [and] be receptive.” This connects with Jackie’s own beliefs about what it means to chair the department, which were heavily influenced by the former chair and what the Head of School shared with her about his
goals for the department (Table 18). Jackie shared that the Head of School gave her a “mandate” to “clone yourself and get a whole bunch of you’s in the department.” Jackie also explained to me that while the former chair was “job-oriented,” Jackie is “kid-oriented.” Jackie explained that her department looks very differently now than it did when she first took on the role: “Now, I have a lot of dynamic teachers, a lot of teachers have a lot of personality in front of the classroom,” or, what Jackie considers to be a lot of teachers with a similar teaching style to Jackie. One of Jackie’s first responsibilities as chair was “cleaning up the department” and it is something she shared she is “most proud of.” Therefore, as demonstrated in Level 2 of my model, Jackie unified her department by hiring teachers who she knew shared the same beliefs as she did about dynamic instruction.

Similar to Jackie, I identified ways in which Andy, the science chair at Catom, makes decisions on hiring personnel based on my interpretations of Andy’s espoused beliefs. Andy shared with me that “it’s really hard to find science teachers” and that she is “very picky in the hiring process.” Andy also shared that this year she hired two teachers for her department and believes “they’re great.” Her priority with them is now “a matter of retention, trying to keep them here, making them happy.” This connects with what I interpreted to be Andy’s espoused beliefs that her role is mainly about supporting the teachers in her department. While a fuller picture of Andy’s espoused beliefs is in Appendix J, I interpreted this as her belief because Andy shared that she thinks “it’s good for teachers to see that like, people [in the school] care.” Andy also learned from her former chair that it’s important for her to “really try to make sure all the teachers feel comfortable coming to me with anything.” Therefore, it would make sense that Andy’s first thoughts after hiring this year were turned to supporting her teachers by “making
them happy.” When I asked Andy what she meant by “making them happy,” she shared how she supports them with opportunities to earn more through other leadership roles:

I think that money talks, and so I always… advocate for them in terms of if they want to take on another role. Like one of our teachers did the book room, one is in charge of textbooks, one does final exams. Just like, trying to find them extra jobs to get them more money, and also just making it, like a good place to work.

Here, Andy seems to support her teachers by finding opportunities where they can take on leadership roles and increase their salaries, which is a way that Andy believes she makes the environment a “good place to work” for her teachers. It seems to be important for Andy to make sure her teachers are ”happy” so that she can retain these “great” teachers year after year. Therefore, Andy’s espoused beliefs on what makes a school a “good place to work” guide the ways in which she hires and retains personnel to unify her science department, as demonstrated on Level 2 of my model.

While Andy only spoke briefly about the hiring process, Charlie, the retired science at Varod, spoke at length about the importance of the hiring process as department chair. Charlie shared that she “takes hiring very seriously” and “only wants to get great teachers.” What Charlie means by that is someone who “buys into teaching” science Socratically. Charlie shared that “when [she] was hiring people” that was “something [she] looked for.” Charlie further explained:

So, when I was hiring people, that’s also something I looked for, and it’s also something I would emphasize in the interview, ‘and this is what we expect, we don’t just lecture, and the importance of Socratic method, and also making the subject relevant to their lives,’ so it was sort of selecting that way.

Just as Charlie believes in teaching science as real-world and setting high expectations for science education, Charlie looked for teachers who shared a similar pedagogy of science education. It was so important to Charlie to find teachers who share this style of teaching that Charlie shared one of her biggest challenges as “finding good science teachers.” In other words,
finding teachers who have the same beliefs about teaching science as she does was always a top priority when Charlie chaired the department. Charlie’s attention to the instructional practices of her teachers during the hiring process I interpret as the role of Instructional Specialist by acting as someone who ensures all students experience high-quality, effective instruction (Killion & Harrison, 2017). Therefore, just as Level 2 of my model shows how the chairs’ beliefs influence the decisions they make on hiring as a way to unify their departments while enacting some of the Learning Forward Leadership Roles, Charlie’s beliefs on science education influences who she hires as a science teacher and the attention she places to their instructional practice, thus enacting the role of Instructional Specialist as demonstrated on my model.

**Pillar Practices**

*Teaming and Collegial Inquiry*

As I shared in Chapters VI and VII, all nine chairs in this study described their departments as a team and engage in collegial inquiry as a team. They described this by showing how they meet as a team to discuss ideas. Additionally, the results of the survey showed that the department chairs (n=24) support the teachers in their department by creating a holding environment and employing the pillar practices, mainly of teaming and collegial inquiry, with the teachers in their departments. In this section, I chose to highlight two of the chairs (Jamie, the math chair of Catom; Andy, the science chair of Catom) who shared how they view their department as a team specifically through the responsibilities of hiring, curriculum, and department meetings as they unify their departments through these three responsibilities, which is demonstrated in Level 2 of my model.

I chose to highlight these two chairs because of the ways in which they described teaming and collegial inquiry specifically with these three responsibilities on Level 2 of my model.
While the other six chairs also described teaming and collegial inquiry at different points during our interviews, they did not provide as much detail about the ways in which they engage in these pillar practices regarding these three responsibilities (hiring, curriculum, and department meetings) in the same ways that Jamie and Alex did. Although in the previous sections I discussed ways in which the chairs’ espoused beliefs influence the ways in which they enact these three responsibilities, in this section I describe the ways in which the chairs employ the pillar practices of teaming and collegial inquiry when enacting these three responsibilities. Jamie, the math chair of Catom, thinks about who she hires and how they might fit into her team of teachers. Andy, the science chair of Catom, creates smaller teams within her department to meet and discuss the curriculum for the various subjects within science, like biology, chemistry, and physics.

Jamie, the math chair in Catom, shared that when she hires someone new, she wants the “candidate to meet everybody in the department.” Then, Jamie and the math teachers “have a conversation about it” as a department. Jamie shared that this is because:

It’s important to me not just to pick somebody who can teach math, but who is also a good fit for the school and a good fit for the department. The last thing I want is a person who’s not going to get along with the rest of the team.

In the above quote, Jamie explains that when hiring, she calls her department a team and explains that it is important to her that any new hires fit within her team. Jamie further shared that her department is “a very tight group” and that they “collaborate a lot.” Jamie shared that she looks for someone who “would fit culturally within the department.” Further, Jamie shared what happens when there are teachers who do not fit well onto her team: “we had in the past people who were not cooperative, like individuals, and then that leads to a lot of tension, conflict, so on so forth, and I’m definitely not looking for that.” She also said that if she has teachers on her
department who don’t collaborate, it is “a catastrophe, and that has happened.” In other words, the hiring process is especially important for Jamie because she wants for her department to be able to work together, and think together, as a team. This is demonstrated in Level 2 of the model as teaming and collegial inquiry are two pillars that extend from the first level, or the foundation, up to the second level.

Another type of teaming within the department is when the chairs have grade-level teams within their larger department. Andy, the science chair at Catom, described this type of teaming within her department as she has the teachers of each subject engage in collegial inquiry when discussing curriculum. Andy shared that “there’s a lot of collaboration” between the different subjects, “like the bio teachers, the chem teachers, the physics teachers” where they “make sure they’re on the same page” and “make sure the levels are where should be” when they are discussing “curriculum and content, and labs.” She explained that “there’s just a lot of communication” between these teachers as they “work together” to “figure out the best way to do this.” In other words, Andy has the teachers in her department team up for each subject where they engage in a collaborative reflective process as they improve their teaching and build relationships with each other (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Andy also shared how important it was for her to build “a team who really care” and with “no egos” so that “everyone is comfortable sharing their opinions.” She explained that have the same “goal,” which is to “make it better for students,” another important benefit of teaming and collegial inquiry (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). For this reason, I included the two pillars of teaming and collegial inquiry in Level 2 of my model to demonstrate how the department chairs support their teachers with these pillar practices.
Mentoring

In this section, I highlight ways that Charlie, the recently retired science chair of Varod, shared some best practices when it comes to mentoring while enacting the responsibilities of meetings and setting curriculum. I highlight Charlie’s voice again here because Charlie is the only chair who described mentoring her teachers specifically through the responsibilities of meetings and curriculum setting, two of the three responsibilities in Level 2 of my model. For this reason, this section is a little shorter because I am only focusing on one chair, Charlie. Additionally, as a Curriculum and Instructional Specialist, two of the Learning Forward roles on level 2, Charlie integrates the supports and challenges of her teachers’ instructional practices through mentoring (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012).

Charlie especially spends time mentoring “new teachers,” and she meets “with them weekly to go over curriculum, how to teach it, and then troubleshoot when issues come up.” By issues, Charlie means “classroom management, stuff like that.” Charlie shared that she believes it’s “worth the investment” to “work with [new teachers].” This might be “issues that come up with kids, between teachers and kids” or even “troubleshooting for class management.” To Charlie, it could be helping new teachers think about “how do we deal with this thing?” Charlie gave some examples of issues that might come up, such as “a kid comes from Israel, knows no English, what do you require of them?” or “a parent wants special accommodation” for a child who “should get three periods to take a test.” As a mentor, Charlie helps new teachers work through these challenges. Charlie demonstrates a way that department chairs can mentor their teachers while enacting these responsibilities, and so I included the pillar practice of mentoring in Level 2 of my model to demonstrate how the department chairs might support their teachers with this pillar practice.
Providing Leadership Roles

Two of the department chairs (Alex, English chair at Zahov; Ricky, science chair at Zahov) described ways in which they provide leadership roles to the teachers in their departments when they discuss curriculum during their meetings. For this reason, in this section I briefly describe ways in which these two chairs described providing leadership roles through curriculum discussions during their meetings. As I described in Chapter VI, Alex, the English chair at Zahov, provides leadership roles to the teachers in her department by giving them a say in the curriculum during that big meeting she has with her full department at the end of the year. She explained to me that she “puts different teachers in charge of different sections” in that meeting.

Similarly, during a department meeting that I observed, Ricky, the science chair at Zahov, divided the teachers in her department by subject and asked one teacher from each subject to lead the smaller conversations. When I asked Ricky about her intentions behind this, she shared that she respects the experience of the teachers in her department and feels they “should have a loud voice, and they should be acknowledged. They’ve been working on this for way longer than I have. I really value their opinion.” She also shared that she “can’t do anything on [her] own” because she doesn’t “see [herself] as just an individual.” To Ricky, her own “leadership role is only as strong as [her] department” and so she spends time “empowering others” which she believes is “absolutely crucial” to running her department. Ricky shared with me that she believes “investing in everyone else is really an investment in [her] position.” In other words, by valuing and empowering the teachers in her department, she feels she is making her department stronger.
Therefore, both Alex and Ricky demonstrate ways that department chairs can provide leadership roles to their teachers while discussing curriculum during department meetings, and so I included the pillar practice of providing leadership roles in Level 2 of my model to demonstrate how the department chairs might support their teachers with this pillar practice.

### 8.4 Growing Teachers: Level Three

In the previous section, I examined how the department chairs in this study unify their departments through the responsibilities of hiring personnel, writing and/or setting curriculum, and holding department meetings. In Figure 10 below, I present a third level of the model: the ways in which I interpreted the chairs in this study do grow their teachers by developing their practices through observations and meetings. Once the department chairs lay the groundwork by building a unified team through department meetings, curriculum conversations, and personnel, they all shared they have time to observe their teachers and provide feedback through meetings. For this reason, these two responsibilities, along with the ways in which the chairs support their teachers with the pillar practices, serve as the next level of my Model of Department Chairs’ Work: Responsibilities, Practices, and Capacity Building for the nine department chairs. I also interpreted all the chairs to hold four of the Learning Forward Leadership Roles in this level: Learning and Learning Facilitator, Classroom Supporter, and Data Coach, which I discussed in previous chapters and will describe in the narrative that follows.

In this third level of my model (Figure 10), I display the text Level 3: Grow Teachers to the left to demonstrate that this is the third level of my model, where department chairs seem to build on the foundational and second levels to grow the teachers in their departments by enacting two responsibilities: observations and meetings with their teachers. I display these two responsibilities within the pyramid in green, to symbolize growth. It is within this level that I
interpreted the chairs develop their teachers’ practices by also enacting the Learning Forward Leadership Roles of Learner, Learning Facilitator, Classroom Supporter, and Data Coach, which I placed in the text to the right of the model. I used dashes to outline the permeability of the responsibilities because while I interpreted these two responsibilities to inform the ways in which the department chairs in this study grow their teachers, the chairs can enact these responsibilities throughout the model and at any level. The pillar practices continue up through this third level to demonstrate how the department chairs continue to employ the pillar practices to support the teachers in their departments as they enact these responsibilities to grow their teachers. I describe each of these aspects in detail in the sections that follow.

**Figure 10**

*Level 3: Growing Teachers*

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**Developing Teachers’ Practices through Observations and Meetings**

In this section, I highlight the ways in which Pat, the math chair at Varod described developing her teachers’ practices and growing their teachers through the responsibilities of observations and meetings with teachers. While all nine chairs described ways in which they
develop their teachers’ practices, I chose to provide an in-depth analysis of Pat to explain Level 3 of my model because Pat shared more than the other chairs when it comes to developing her teachers’ practices and growing her teachers. For example, Ruby, the English chair at Catom, and Charlie, the retired science in Varod, shared how they conduct observations of their teachers and provide feedback afterwards to help their teachers grow in their practice. However, in the section that follows, I highlight Pat, the retired math chair at Varod, who described working with her teachers by bringing in professional development opportunities to grow the ways in which the teachers in her department thought about math education.

In-Depth Analysis of Pat’s Development of Her Teachers’ Practices

Pat shared with me that over time, her role grew to include “training teachers” and “working with teachers.” Pat shared that she felt “helping teachers grow” was a “really meaningful” part of her position. She explained that “to help teachers and to mentor them, watch them become great, felt really great.” However, she also shared she felt she could have given this aspect of the position more “time” and “attention.” Pat explained she felt it was “at the bottom of [her] priority list.” It is interesting that Pat felt this aspect of her position would “fall by the wayside” when “things got busy” or when the “school got bigger.” I interpreted this to be because the other responsibilities of the department chair, like the administrative duties I discussed in Chapter VI, and the other responsibilities that come before teacher growth on the model, must all be in place and running smoothly for the department chairs to have the time and energy to focus on how they might develop their teachers’ practices. In a way, it is almost a luxury for department chairs to have the time and resources to focus on this aspect of the position, as they seem to be able to do so only when everything else is in place.
Pat shared some examples of ways she was able to “open” the teachers in her department to new ways of thinking about math “education” as math started “shifting.” She shared that she would think of “ways [she] could push the department’s thinking” or take her teachers to math “conferences.” Pat would think about things like “advanced technology” with the teachers in her department, and she shared once her classrooms got “Smartboards,” she wondered how to “take advantage of that” with her department. Pat would spend time during her department meetings working with her teachers on “moving away from that sort of inertia, ‘Well this is my lesson plan, I’ve been doing this for twenty years, thirty years, etc. etc.’” Pat would motivate her teachers to think of how they could “make [their lessons] even better” and “inspire” them to grow.

Pat did this by spending time during her department meetings “sharing tips and strategies, as needed” and discussing things like “a new directive on Covid” or something specifically related to “teacher growth, like think about homework, what’s the purpose of homework? Why do we give it, how can we revamp and shape our future homework to make them more effective?” Pat enacted the Learning Forward role of Learner as she would do “research on [her] own” and Learning Facilitator as she would give “some sessions” on “articles” or “a video” to develop her teachers’ practices during department meetings. Other topics Pat mentioned were “talking about the calculator, how do we use it?” or “thinking about tests, writing tests that are thoughtful and effective.” Pat also once “spearheaded a survey for the school on student workload and time management” and “gave a presentation on that for faculty.”

During our second interview, I asked Pat for more examples she could provide of ways she felt she would grow her teachers by developing their practices. During this interview, Pat went into detail on the “professional development part of [the role].” When I asked if she felt that
professional development was an expectation, or if it was something she took upon herself, Pat responded:

I would say it was an expectation but not a high one as in, ‘Pat, why aren’t you doing more of this?’ kind of thing. It was a general awareness, the perception on my part was an awareness that there was a lot of things that I was juggling.

In other words, in the above quote, Pat shared with me that she was juggling so many things that she only felt she could get to these responsibilities if she was able to find the time between all the other responsibilities on her plate. For this reason, developing teacher practices is placed as Level 3 in my model to demonstrate how chairs seem to attend to the groundwork responsibilities first (Level 2) before being able to spend time growing their teachers’ practices.

**Pillar Practices**

In this section, I first highlight the ways in which Pat employed the pillar practices teaming and collegial inquiry to support her teachers as she enacted these responsibilities to grow the teachers in their departments. I then highlight other chairs, such as Sam, the English chair at Varod, Ruby, the English chair at Catom, and Charlie, the science chair at Varod, to offer other examples of how the chairs described supporting their teachers with the pillar practices while developing their instructional practices to grow the teachers in their departments.

**Teaming and Collegial Inquiry**

In this section, I highlight ways that Pat demonstrated examples of teaming and collegial inquiry with her department when she would think through new practices, ask questions, and push the thinking of her department *with* her department during meetings. As I mentioned in the previous section, Pat shared some examples of ways she was able to “open” the teachers in her department to new ways of thinking about math “education” as math started “shifting.” By meeting as a team to engage in these discussions, Pat employed the pillar practices of teaming...
and collegial inquiry with the teachers in her department and she helped them grow their practice. Pat also described her department as a “team” many times during the interviews, and as I mentioned in Chapter VI, she used the “we” voice often when describing the policies that Pat created together with the teachers in her department.

To shed light on other ways in which the chairs shared employing these practices in Level 3 of my model, I also wanted to highlight in this section a way that Sam, the English chair at Varod, used the support of teaming when enacting the responsibility of observations. Sam shared that she and her co-chair, another great example of a team, “did this thing once where we were doing sort of peer observations to try to make it more, just even, like not just [co-chair] and I going in [to observe].” Here, Sam and her co-chair asked the teachers in her department to observe one another and provide feedback afterwards on what they learned from the observations. It is also interesting to note that, as I explained earlier, one of Sam’s espoused beliefs is not to come across as an “expert” to the teachers within her department. I interpreted this to be an example of how that espoused belief influences Sam’s decision to “try to make it even” by having all the chairs observe one another, not only the department chairs conducting observations. Therefore, both Pat and Sam demonstrate ways that department chairs can engage in teaming and collegial inquiry with their teachers during meetings and through observations, and so I included these pillar practices in Level 3: Grow Teachers to demonstrate how the department chairs might support their teachers with this pillar practice.

**Mentoring**

In this section, I highlight ways that Ruby, the English chair at Catom, is very intentional about how she mentors the new teachers in her department to develop their teaching practices. Just as I provided an in-depth analysis with Pat in the prior section, here I do the same for Ruby
because she shared very specific ways that she “tailors” the mentoring “to the person,” which I interpreted as mentoring with a developmental intentionality to create a context that enables adults to examine, learn from, and broaden their own and other people’s perspectives (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). I share this in-depth analysis because I consider what Ruby described as a best practice for mentoring to grow the teachers in her department. Ruby shared a specific example of this:

I mean [name omitted]… this is his second year… and he came to us never having taught high school, but he had taught university. They just described him as the most amazing teacher, which you know, in graduate school they don’t, a lot of places don’t teach you how to teach. They just think, ‘Okay, you’re getting your doctorate in Shakespeare, go in and teach Shakespeare.’

Here, Ruby is describing the ways in which she thought about the prior experiences of this new teacher to determine how she can support him as he adapts to high school. Ruby continued:

I have been just amazed because I knew he would know content. That would never be an issue with him, I mean he’s just so amazing… and, so it’s more the kind of things you would get, if you’re lucky, in a teaching program like classroom management, time management, and how to handle just inappropriate adolescent behavior.

In other words, Ruby shared that she recognizes the strengths he brings, such as his vast content knowledge, and supports him in the areas he needs help, like classroom management techniques. Ruby then explained how she does this:

Last year, I went into a class and it’s very hard if you start in the beginning and you don’t have control of the class. It’s really hard to gain it. It’s like, ten times as hard. So, I went in and I worked with him, and we made a seating chart specifically designed so this kid can’t sit next to this kid, and we talked a lot about consistency and following through, and I said, ‘If there are consequences for the things they’re doing that they’re not supposed to be doing, like coming in late, wandering out of class, don’t let them leave in the middle of class… make sure their phones stay on their desk. Because you see a kid walking to go to the bathroom with his phone in his hand, he’s going to meet his girlfriend. He’s not going to the bathroom.’ You know what I mean? So, it was just, I think, helping him kind of think like a teenager.
Through observations and one-on-one conversations, Ruby explained how she mentored the new teacher and show him how to adapt his teaching practice to be more suitable to a high school classroom. Ruby also spoke about ways she would help him with his grading:

I mean, there were times when I looked through his papers to see how he was grading them, because he had nothing to gauge them by. Like, ‘Am I too hard? Am I too easy?’ So, I would go through his papers. Now, I mean I pretty much trust the grades that he’s giving. And if he has a question, he’ll just ask me. So, those were the kinds of things that we do.

In the above example, Ruby shared how she would support him with his grading at the beginning, but now trusts his judgment and knows that he trusts her as well to feel comfortable asking a question. Ruby slowly released dependence to help him grow as an educator.

In this section, I described ways that Ruby shared engaging in mentoring with new teachers to develop their teaching practices, and so I included this pillar practice in Level 3: Grow Teachers to demonstrate how department chairs might support their teachers with this pillar practice.

**Providing Leadership Roles**

In this section, I describe in-depth how Charlie, the retired science chair of Varod, shared some ways in which she provided leadership roles to teachers in her department to support their practice. I focus on Charlie here to provide a rich example of how a department chair might provide leadership roles to grow the teaching practice of educators in their departments.

In one example, Charlie asked the physics teacher, who she described as “a master teacher,” to write the textbooks for the physics courses in the school. Charlie explained the physics teacher “did not love any of the books out there. So, he started putting together sheets of problems that he wanted the kids to do.” Soon after, Charlie had them bound “into a book, and that’s what [they use] for mathematical physics.”
Charlie also asked this teacher to “mentor [a new] teacher” by “going into his classes weekly.” The new teacher also observes the “master” physics teacher. Charlie explained that “we all had a stake in this. We want this to be the best. We want teachers to give kids the best education they can get.” Here, Charlie demonstrated how her espoused belief that students should get a top-notch science education drove her decision to have the “master” physics teacher mentor the newer physics teacher. The type of mentoring he does is “not supervisory,” but instead related to the pedagogy of physics education, because Charlie explained “it’s much more valuable to a teacher if you have a mentor in your subject area.” In other words, Charlie recognized the talents and leadership of the physics teacher in her department and provided him with a leadership role she believed he could fill in a more meaningful way. As a result, Charlie was able to grow the teaching practices of both physics teachers in her department. For this reason, the pillar practice of providing leadership roles is in Level 3 of my model to demonstrate how the department chairs might support and develop their teachers with this pillar practice.

8.5 Enacting Leadership: Level Four

In the previous section, I examined how the department chairs in this study grow the teaching practice of teachers in their departments through the responsibilities of observations and meetings. In Figure 11 below, I present the fourth, and last, level of my model: the ways in which the chairs in this study enacted school leadership as they become visionaries for their departments and schools. After laying the groundwork of their departments by building a unified team through department meetings, curriculum conversations, and personnel, and growing their teachers by observing them and developing their practices, some of the department chairs shared ways in which they hope to act as a Catalyst for Change and/or School Leader (Killion & Harrison, 2017).
In this fourth, and last, level of my model (Figure 11), I display the text Level 4: Enact Leadership to the left to demonstrate that this is the fourth level of my model, where department chairs seem to build on the foundational, second, and third levels as they enact leadership by acting as visionaries for their departments and schools. I display this responsibility within the pyramid in yellow, to symbolize leadership. It is within this level that I interpreted the chairs larger goals and visions by also enacting the Learning Forward Leadership Roles of Mentor, Catalyst for Change, and School Leader, which I placed in the text to the right of the model. I used dashes to outline the permeability of the responsibility because while I interpreted being a visionary to inform the ways in which the department chairs in this study enact leadership, the chairs can enact this responsibilities throughout the model and at any level. The pillar practices continue up through this fourth level to demonstrate how the department chairs continue to employ the pillar practices to support the teachers in their departments. I describe each of these aspects in detail in the sections that follow.
Enacting Leadership as a Visionary for the Department and School

In this section, I highlight some of the ways in which six of the nine department chairs in this study described their hopes to be visionaries beyond their own departments. It didn’t seem as though the department chairs felt they were already doing this work, but instead shared ways in which they hoped they might be able to. While I interpreted each of the nine the chairs as instructional leaders from Level 2 of my model as they enacted Learning Forward Leadership Roles, the leadership I describe at this point in the model extends beyond their departments to the entire school. During our interviews, six of the chairs described their dreams of larger ideas for their departments or for the school. It seems they might not have the time to implement these dreams or visions because of all the other duties for which they are responsible, which I
discussed as a challenge in Chapter VII. While they did not say this explicitly, I interpreted this because of the challenges the chairs expressed with time. At first glance, it seems these visions mean something different to each chair. However, at the heart of what each of the department chairs shared is their desire to make the school better for students.

To Ricky, the science chair at Zahov, being a visionary is focused on the students. For Ricky it means “being the person to tell [students] you can be a scientist. And just envision yourself a future where science might be something real.” Ricky further shared her beliefs that:

It's probably important for leaders, in the educational role in general, to have some sort of vision, some sort of inspiration, something, you know, a bigger picture that they see and can inspire others to see. That’s what I want to be like.

Here, Ricky is explaining that she believes all leaders should have a larger vision for the schools that can inspire others, and that she hopes for that.

Similarly, Sam, the English chair at Varod, shared with me her hopes to act as a visionary and make real change in her school. Yet, Sam also shared that she feels “making real change is really hard.” While Sam did not elaborate what about it is hard, I interpreted this challenge to be moving beyond her influence on her department and making change for the greater school or community. This concept is further illustrated when Sam also shared her dreams that:

Sometimes I wonder when I leave this position what someone would say that I did in the raw. And whether or not I did do a lot. I find that a little bit frustrating. I was there was a way to make a bigger change.

Sam described her wish for a way she could make a bigger change or leave more of an impact on the school that would stay even after she leaves her position one day. I interpreted this as Sam sharing her hopes to act as a School Leader or Catalyst for Change, which I placed in the fourth level of my pyramid to demonstrate the larger leadership influence the department chair can have within a school.
To further illustrate this concept of broadening the leadership within a school, Pat, the retired math chair at Varod, described her “idea that the vision leads from an aspirational standpoint.” In other words, department chairs can vision as a way hope to achieve something great for their departments or beyond. To Pat, that meant first “setting the vision” when she took on the role by “setting the tone, in many ways, both mathematic and in terms of values” because a department chair “sets the vision for what education should look like.” Here, Pat did not seem to move beyond her math department to speak about education and values in general. However, Pat brought it back to the math department when she explained that:

Trying to move away from thinking of math as just solving for x, thinking of math as a set of processes and procedures, and seeing the beauty of math. We want kids to appreciate math, see its power, see its poetry in some ways.

In other words, Pat shared her desire to have students and teachers think about math differently than ways they may have been taught, and to see the beauty of math. Here, Pat is describing ways in which she acted as a Catalyst for Change by “seeking to influence improvement” by “introducing new ideas, but also by shifting interpretations and assumptions” (Killion & Harrison, 2017). This is because Pat described her desire to move beyond content and instruction to shift interpretations and assumptions, or the ways in which her teachers and students think about math.

Just as Pat placed students at the center of her vision, Jackie, the math chair at Zahov, described a similar vision. To Jackie, being a department chair means making the math department “a happy place. A happy school to learn math in. The teachers all get together and try to make it the best for the kids.” Like Pat, Jackie explained her belief that teachers in her department need to work collaboratively to think about how to set the right learning environment for the students in the school.
Similarly, Alex, the English chair at Zahov, described her vision for a department that is “never complacent or comfortable” because it is about the students. Alex explained:

“It’s hard not to be complacent or comfortable, but so what. You’ve got to make changes even if you sometimes don’t like them, right? Because it’s sometimes not in the best interest of the kid.

Here, Alex shared her vision to keep the students at the heart of everything she does with and for her department, even if it can get uncomfortable to let go of complacency.

In all these examples, the department chairs shared their common visions for a school that reaches students through the instruction of each of their disciplines. Learning Forward (2022) presents their standard for leadership:

Professional learning results in equitable and excellent outcomes for all students when educators establish a compelling and inclusive vision for professional learning, sustain coherent support to build educator capacity, and advocate for professional learning by sharing the importance and evidence of impact of professional learning.

Six of the nine department chairs in this study each demonstrated ways in which they enact leadership as they establish their visions for learning, build the capacity of the educators within their departments, and advocate for professional learning as they became change agents within their schools, inspiring the teachers, students, and administrators as they lead. I present Figure 7 again to show the full model of the department chairs’ leadership that was drawn from the research on the nine department chairs in this study. When placed together, these levels demonstrate the ways in which the nine department chairs meet Learning Forward’s (2022) standard for leadership through their roles and responsibilities and by supporting their teachers’ growth with the pillar practices (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012).
8.6 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented a model that is drawn from my research on the nine department chairs and grounded in this research. I first began the chapter by situating this model within the current literature on leadership. Next, I introduced each layer of the model to bring in the voices of the nine department chairs and demonstrate how I built this visual to explain the responsibilities and leadership practices of these nine chairs using the two lenses from this study, Learning Forward’s 10 roles for teacher leaders and Drago-Severson’s pillar practices. In the next chapter, I explore the implications of the findings from my analytical chapters and offer some conclusions and suggestions for future research.
Chapter 9: Conclusions, Recommendations, and Implications

In this chapter, I revisit the purpose for this research and consider how the role of the high school department chair can help teachers and administrators meet the complex demands of a post-pandemic educational landscape. I then summarize the survey findings I presented in Chapter V, followed by the three larger findings (i.e., how the administrative and curricular responsibilities of department chairs vary by discipline and years of experience, how the chairs described their challenges and supports within the role, and how the chairs’ espoused beliefs drive decision-making as they employ the pillar practices to support teachers in their departments) that I presented in detail in Chapters VI-VIII. I discuss these conclusions, recommendations, and implications for school leaders, education leadership preparation programs, and researchers. I then review the limitations of my study and suggestions for further research. I conclude by summarizing the leadership model grounded in the research of this study before closing this chapter with my final thoughts.

9.1 A Review of My Dissertation

In this section, I review the purpose and goals of my study, my research questions, the context, and sample of my study before I discuss the findings, implications and recommendations drawn from these conclusions in subsequent sections of the chapter.

Purpose

The purpose of my study was to explore with a group of nine NYC high school department chairs from three different Modern Orthodox yeshivas, their perceptions of their role and responsibilities, their perceptions on how they manage any challenges they might face, and how, if at all, they support professional growth through any of the four pillar practices (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016, 2018, 2020). I also hoped to learn how, if at all, their...
descriptions of their role as department chair connected to Learning Forward’s 10 roles for teacher leadership (2017). I developed a survey as well and administered it to all the department chairs within the three schools (n=24) in my study to learn even more about the role within this context. This, to the best of my knowledge, is an unexplored area in the literature.

Goals

Department chairs are in a unique position of influence within secondary schools (Brent, et al., 2014; Melville et al., 2016; Peacock & Melville, 2019). Therefore, the overarching goal of my study was to learn from the experiences of nine department chairs in Modern Orthodox yeshiva high schools to inform school leaders and researchers who might give more attention to the potential for leadership within the position. Furthermore, I hoped to shed light on potential challenges and supports in the position, which might help school leaders learn more about possible ways to support department chairs. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic increased the complexity and ambiguity within the field of education as there is more reliance on leadership practices to navigate the challenges teachers, students, and parents are faced with because of the pandemic (Drago-Severson, et al., 2020; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2019). For that reason, it is even more important for educators, researchers, and policy makers to learn about the role of department chairs and how they might lead the teachers in their departments during this challenging, complex period.

Research Questions

To carry out this study, I used the following research questions:

1. How do nine department chairs from NYC yeshiva high schools describe and understand their own role and responsibilities as a department chair?
2. How, if at all, do their descriptions and understandings of their role as a department chair connect to Learning Forward’s 10 roles for teacher leadership?

3. What challenges, if any, do department chairs face in their roles as department chairs and how do they manage them?

4. How, if at all, do all department chairs from these yeshiva high schools perceive their roles and responsibilities, challenges, collaboration, leadership practice, and possible employment of the pillar practices with teachers in their departments?

5. How, if at all, do all department chairs from these yeshiva high schools perceive their roles and responsibilities, challenges, collaboration, leadership practice, and possible employment of the pillar practices with teachers in their departments?

Next, I provide a review of the context in this study and the selection criterion I used to identify the three schools and nine participants whom I learned from in this study.

**Context of the Modern Orthodox High School**

This study took place in a Modern Orthodox Jewish day school. I chose this location because as a member of the Modern Orthodox Jewish community, I was interested in learning about the role of department chair in this unique context. The Avi Chai Foundation defines a Jewish day school, or yeshiva, as an educational institution with a dual curriculum, religious and academic. Within the Jewish day school system, Modern Orthodox schools are a denomination distinguished by a number of characteristics. First, these schools are generally coeducational. There is a strong emphasis on both the Judaic and general studies programs, and the curriculum tends to include subject matter that is not included in the curricula of typical yeshivas (Avi Chai Foundation, 2020). To my knowledge, there are currently no studies that exist on the role of high school department chair within a Modern Orthodox Jewish day school.
Research Sites

The selection criteria were practically driven as I sought to study department chairs within the context of Modern Orthodox yeshivas. My first selection criterion was to select high schools that met the description of a Modern Orthodox Jewish day school yeshiva based on the definition provided by the Avi Chai foundation (2020). The Avi Chai Foundation (2020) reported that between a 20-year census period, Modern Orthodox day school enrollment has increased 21.5% in the New York City region. Therefore, a second selection criterion was that the schools chosen for my study will also be located within the five boroughs of New York City. In the 2018-2019 census, the Avi Chai Foundation (2020) reported 290 Jewish day schools in New York City: 4 in the Bronx, 226 in Brooklyn, 18 in Manhattan, 35 in Queens, and 7 in Staten Island. Of these 290 schools, the foundation identified 15 as Modern Orthodox, with 9,685 students enrolled (Avi Chai, 2020). In Chapter III, I provided more information on the process for inviting schools.

After reaching out to all of the schools that met the selection criteria, and speaking with the Heads of School at ten of these schools, I decided on three schools that I call Zahov, Catom, and Varod in this study. These schools met the selection criteria by identifying as Modern Orthodox yeshivas and being located within the five boroughs of New York City. I discussed the characteristics of each of the three schools in Chapter IV.

Study Participants

I used the following selection criteria for the participants in this study, which I described in more detail in Chapters I and III.

1. The Heads of School identified the educators who are department chairs in their schools.
2. The chairs held that position for at least two years.

3. Chairs held a minimum of three years' teaching experience.

4. The department chairs managed a team of at least two other teachers within their departments.

5. The chairs from each school would chair the math, English, or science departments.

6. For the survey, the only selection criterion was for the Head of School to identify the educator as a department chair.

The participants in my study were nine department chairs who each met the above criteria, which I described in more detail in Chapter IV.

9.2 Summary of Findings

In this section, I summarize the findings from Chapter V, the survey, and from the analytical chapters, Chapters VI-VII, to answer my research questions. In the narrative that follows, I synthesize the findings from the survey and across my analytical chapters to make broader connections across findings.

Survey Findings

I administered the survey to all department chairs in the three Modern Orthodox schools, of which 24 participants completed the full survey (Appendix E). The chairs self-identified their characteristics, and what they identified to be the responsibilities, roles, challenges, supports of department chairs, and how the chairs might support their teachers through the pillar practices.

The main responsibility the 24 chairs who responded to the survey identified was meeting with teachers in their departments. Additionally, department chairs (n=24) reported believing that chairs should mentor teachers, provide feedback, and model strong teaching. These are all ways that department chairs in the survey reported they can support the instructional practice of
teachers in their departments. The survey results also showed that these department chairs (n=24) believe responsibilities of chairs should include supporting teachers with parent and/or student issues and creating a sense of camaraderie within the department, two responsibilities I interpreted as a way chairs can create a holding environment for the teachers in their departments.

In addition, I found that the chairs who responded to the survey (n=24) did report creating a holding environment for the teachers in their departments through the pillar practices teaming and collegial inquiry to further support the teachers’ practices within their departments. The most common way the 24 department chairs who responded to the survey reported supporting their teachers with the pillar practices is having teachers in their departments share ideas, sharing decision making with their teachers, reflecting with teachers on their practice, and engaging in meaningful conversations with their teachers about teaching and learning. These actions connect with the department chairs’ beliefs that the primary role of chair is central to improving the instruction (teaching and learning) in their departments.

Findings on the Department Chairs’ Role and Responsibilities

In this section, I provide an overview of the findings from the two interviews and one observation of a department meeting with each of the nine department chairs on their role and responsibilities that I discussed in detail in Chapter VI to answer my first research question. First, I found that all nine department chairs had difficulty differentiating between the terms “role” and “responsibilities” which I interpreted because of the ambiguity within the role. Second, I found that while all nine chairs described administrative responsibilities in their roles, these responsibilities varied by discipline and by years of experience. Third, I found that while all the department chairs described being responsible for setting the curriculum, the three English
chairs (Alex, Ruby, Sam) seemed to unify their departments through their curricular responsibilities.

**First, I found all nine chairs had trouble differentiating between the terms “role” and “responsibilities” during the interviews.** In our interviews, I defined the word “role” as the overall purpose of the position, and “responsibilities” as what’s required of the position, more like the day-to-day. However, when I asked the nine chairs to identify their role they mostly listed their responsibilities. I interpreted this to be because the role is so ambiguous from their perspectives, and so the department chairs had difficulty discerning between the overall purpose of their position and the responsibilities they are held accountable for during the interviews with me. The literature on department chairs consistently lists ambiguity in the role, supporting this conclusion (Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021; Kelley & Salisbury, 2013; Klar, 2013; Klar, 2012; Peacock, 2014).

**Second, I found that all nine chairs discussed administrative responsibilities.** However, these responsibilities varied by discipline in the three schools. The three science chairs (Andy, Charlie, and Ricky) described the most administrative responsibilities, and these duties were mainly related to labs, which is unique to science. The three math chairs (Jackie, Jamie, and Pat), on the other hand, described administrative responsibilities relating to testing and placement exams, which might be because math is a tracked subject in two of the three schools. Still, the three English chairs (Alex, Ruby, and Sam) discussed administrative responsibilities related to scheduling and the testing calendar.

**Third, I found that while all nine chairs discussed curriculum, the English chairs (Alex, Ruby, and Sam) discussed the ways in which they unify their departments through their curricular responsibilities by providing leadership roles to teachers in their**
departments. This happened in regard to curricular decision-making and engaging in collegial inquiry as they discuss and reflect on curriculum as a department within the three schools.

**Findings on the Department Chairs’ Challenges and Supports**

In this section, I provide an overview of the findings from the two interviews and one observation of a department meeting with each of the nine department chairs on their challenges and supports that I discussed in detail in Chapter VII to answer my third research question.

**First, I found that the nine department chairs all faced challenges when they first took on their roles as chair,** and I highlighted four of the chairs (Sam, the English chair at Varod; Pat, the math chair at Varod; Andy, the science chair at Catom; and Ricky, the science chair at Zahov) who shared feeling ill-prepared and two of the chairs (as Alex, the English chair at Zahov, and Jackie, the math chair at Zahov) who shared facing conflicts with teachers in their departments.

**Second, I found that five of the nine department chairs (Alex, the English chair at Zahov; Jackie, the math chair at Zahov; Pat, the math chair at Varod; Ricky, the science chair at Zahov; and Sam, the English chair at Varod) shared challenges with teaching a full course load as chair with large departments.** Four of the nine chairs (Andy, the science chair at Catom; Charlie, the science chair at Varod; Jamie, the math chair at Catom; and Ruby, the English chair at Catom) shared their challenges with chairing during the month of November, “the crazy season,” as a challenge, also the time I conducted the second interviews. In terms of supports, I found that the chairs turned to various supports when facing challenges during their early years as chair, such as support from an individual on the school’s leadership team, other department chairs, the teachers in their departments, outside mentoring programs, or their partners.
First, while all nine of the chairs described their experiences taking on the role as department chairs, I highlighted those who described feeling unprepared and those who described facing conflicts within their departments. Four of the chairs, Sam, the English chair at Varod, Pat, the math chair at Varod, Andy, the science chair at Catom, and Ricky, the science chair at Zahov, shared during their interviews that they did not feel completely prepared when they first became department chairs. These four chairs, were also within their first ten years of teaching before they were promoted to department chair. These four chairs also all described feeling young, and were in their twenties, when they first became chair and felt unprepared. This aligns with previous literature on department chairs that shows department chairs can feel ill-prepared as a result of not receiving any formal training for the position (DeAngelis, 2013; Kelley & Salisbury, 2013).

Other chairs, such as Alex, the English chair at Zahov, and Jackie, the math chair at Zahov, did feel prepared for the position but they each faced a different challenge when they first took on the role, such as challenges with the faculty in their inherited departments when they first became chair. While these two chairs did not describe feeling young, they did share that they were younger (early forties) than the teachers in their departments with whom they faced conflict when they first took on the role.

Second, all three chairs from Zahov High School (Alex, Jackie, and Ricky) described their challenges with teaching a full course load while chairing the department, and two of the three chairs at Varod High School (Charlie and Pat) described this challenge, all in similar ways, by sharing they felt there is not enough time to teach a full course load chair a large department. Additionally, four of the five chairs who described this challenge (Alex, Charlie, Jackie, and Pat) also have nine or more teachers in their departments,
leading to my interpretation that the size of the department is a potential reason for this challenge. The single department chair who identified this challenge with six teachers in her department, Ricky, is also a new department chair, in her second year, and I interpreted this to be why she found it challenging to teach a full course load while chairing her department.

When it comes to supports, I found that all the chairs described various ways they found support when first becoming chair. Some chairs (Alex, English chair at Zahov; Pat, math chair at Varod; Sam, English chair at Varod) turned to members of the school’s leadership team or other department chairs to support them to learn new responsibilities, like how to observe teachers or manage spreadsheets with student data. Other chairs (Andy; science chair at Catom; Ricky, science chair at Zahov) sought outside help, such as turning to their partners for emotional support or learning how to observe through outside mentoring programs.

**Connecting Chairs’ Leadership Practice to Learning Forward Roles**

In this section, I provide an overview on what I found to be the connections between what the nine department chairs shared about their roles to Learning Forward’s 10 roles for teacher leadership. I described these connections throughout Chapters VI, VII, and VIII to answer my second research question. First, I found that all nine of the department chairs shared responsibilities related to those of what Learning Forward describes as Resource Provider, Curriculum Specialist, and/or Instructional Specialist, when they meet with their teachers during department meetings and discuss curriculum for each grade level. Second, I found all of the department chairs shared responsibilities related to those of what Learning Forward describes as Learner, Learning Facilitator, Classroom Supporter, and/or Data Coach, when they carry out responsibilities such as observing their teachers and meeting with their teachers to facilitate professional development or discuss student data. Third, all nine of the department chairs shared
responsibilities related to those of what Learning Forward describes as Mentor, Catalyst for Change, and/or School Leader as they enact leadership among the teachers in their departments and the school to improve student learning.

**Findings on Chairs’ Supports with the Pillar Practices**

In this section, I provide an overview on what I found to be the ways in which the nine department chairs perceived about their roles and responsibilities, challenges, collaboration, and leadership practice to the pillar practices (teaming, collegial inquiry, mentoring, and providing leadership roles), which I described in Chapters VI, VII, and VIII to answer my fourth research question. I identified three big findings. First, the department chairs who described feeling supported by the school leadership team employing the pillar practices when they took on the role (Alex, the English chair at Zahov; Andy, the science chair at Catom; Jamie, the math chair at Catom; Pat, the math chair at Varod; Ricky, the science chair at Zahov) used these supports, which I discuss below, in their own practice with teachers in their departments. Second, all nine chairs described viewing their departments as a team and described ways they engage in collegial inquiry with their team as a means of support for the teachers in their departments. Third, I highlighted the ways two of the department chairs (Alex, the English chair at Zahov; Charlie, the science chair at Varod) described providing leadership roles to teachers in their departments and/or mentor the teachers in their departments as ways to support their growth as educators.

**First, just as the Heads of School in two of the schools, Zahov and Varod, were able to create a team among the department chairs when they first took on the roles through department meetings where the chairs could engage in collegial inquiry together, the chairs at these schools used these supports in their own departments by creating a team among the teachers in their departments through meetings where the teachers could engage in**
collegial inquiry together. Also, just as the administration at Varod allowed two of the chairs (Sam, English chair and Charlie, science chair) to have a co-chair for their departments, to lead their departments as teams, these two chairs used this support by offering many opportunities for teaming with the teachers in their departments, such as grade or subject-level teams.

Additionally, six of the nine chairs described mentoring in some aspect when they first took on the role as chair, with chairs like Andy, science chair at Catom and Jamie, math chair at Catom, feeling as though they had mentorship when they first took on the role but chairs like Alex, English chair at Zahov; Pat, math chair at Varod; Ricky, science chair at Zahov; and Sam, English chair at Varod, sharing that they wished had a mentor when they first became department chairs. As a result, three of those chairs, Alex, Pat, and Ricky, seemed to give that support they felt they were lacking to the teachers in their departments.

My second finding is that all nine chairs view their departments as a team and engage in collegial inquiry with their team as a means of support for the teachers in their departments. In this dissertation, I identified various ways in which the different chairs employed this practice of teaming and collegial inquiry with the teachers in their departments. For example, some chairs, such as Jamie and Jackie, both math chairs at Catom and Zahov respectively, think about who they hire and whether or not the new hires will fit with her current team of teachers. Three other chairs, Andy, Charlie, and Ricky, the science chairs at Catom, Varod, and Zahov, respectively, create subject-level teams within their departments to discuss curriculum during department meetings related to biology, chemistry, and physics. Alex, the English chair at Zahov, does something similar when discussing 9th – 12th grade curriculum with the teachers in her department, which she does as a full team during one large year-end meeting.

I also highlighted Pat, the math chair at Varod, and Ruby, the English chair at Catom, who push
the thinking of the teachers in their departments by engaging in collegial inquiry as a team to discuss ways in which they can develop their teaching practices through professional development. In still another way of teaming, Sam, the English chair at Varod, and her co-chair have teachers in their department pair up to observe one another and provide feedback.

Third, I found that all of the department chairs shared ways in which they provide leadership roles to teachers in their departments and/or mentor the teachers in their departments as ways to support their growth as educators. For example, Charlie, the science chair at Varod, mentored teachers in her department, and also asked a “master” physics teacher in her department to mentor a beginning physics teacher. Similarly, Pat, the math chair at Varod, mentored her teachers to “help them grow” and “become great.” I also highlighted Alex and Ricky, who chair the English and science departments at Zahov respectively and provided leadership roles to the teachers in their departments by giving them a say in curriculum and putting different teachers “in charge” during meetings.

Synthesis of Findings: Model of Department Chairs’ Work: Responsibilities, Practices, and Capacity Building

While throughout Chapters VI and VII and in the narrative above I presented the findings as separate claims, I also presented a synthesis of these findings and how they all connect in Chapter VIII. I present Figure 7 again below to show my model that is drawn from my research on the nine department chairs. In my model, I display four levels of the department chairs’ leadership that is grounded in the research and what the nine chairs shared with me during our interviews. I name each of these levels on the left of my model. In the first level, I display my findings that the chairs’ espoused beliefs on chairing their departments formed when taking on the role. In the second level, I display my findings that through the responsibilities of writing
and/or setting curriculum, holding department meetings, and recommending personnel changes, the nine department chairs can unify their departments. In the third level, I display my findings that through the responsibilities of observing lessons and holding other meetings (i.e., formal, informal, one-on-one, and/or grade-level meetings), the nine department chairs can grow their teachers’ practice. Throughout these levels, I integrate the pillar practices to show how the leadership team can support department chairs as they employ the pillar practices with the teachers in their own departments to enact leadership in the fourth level, as they act as visionaries for their departments and the school. Throughout these levels, I also displayed the Learning Forward 10 roles for teacher leadership on the right to show the responsibilities I identified as connecting to each of these roles.

**Figure 7**

*Model of Department Chairs’ Work: Responsibilities, Practices, and Capacity Building*
9.3 Limitations of the Study

In this section, I acknowledge and describe the limitations in my study. First, qualitative case studies present findings that are only internally generalizable to this sample of participants and in this unique context of Modern Orthodox yeshivas (Maxwell, 2013). Another limitation is that the participants were in varying moments within their careers as department chairs, and therefore there might have varying interpretations of the role and responsibilities of department chairs depending on past experiences. A third limitation is the small sample in my survey (n=24) that was meant to pilot a potential survey for department chairs, which to my knowledge does not exist. With a small sample size of 24 respondents, the power of the statistical tests to measure reliability were limited. Additionally, with the small sample size, I was not able to transform the data to be normally distributed which was a further limitation in my t-test analysis.

A final limitation might be my relationship to this research as a member of the Modern Orthodox community. While being a member of this community might have granted me entrée into this research setting which is usually closed and private, I recognize that being a member of this community might also have influenced my own perceptions and interpretations as well as what the department chairs might have shared with me. To address this limitation, I triangulated my data, wrote analytical memos throughout the process, and cross-checked my findings with fellow doctoral students in research courses at Teachers College, and continued to revisit this issue with my sponsor at Teachers College (Maxwell, 2013). This helped me see and learn any assumptions I might have been holding that I was unaware of, to do my best to mitigate any blind spots when I interpreted the participants’ responses.
9.4 Implications and Recommendations

In this section, I build on the findings of my research to discuss the implications that led to my recommendations following these conclusions. In Table 18, I summarize the recommendations for school leadership, education leadership preparation programs, and education leadership theory and research. I then discuss each of these in more detail in the narrative that follows.

Table 18

Recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendations for School Leadership</th>
<th>Recommendations for Education Leadership Preparation Programs</th>
<th>Recommendations for Education Leadership Theory and Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I recommend school leaders…</td>
<td>I recommend education leadership preparation programs…</td>
<td>I recommend education leadership researchers…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Provide intentional support (i.e., employing the pillar practices) for department chairs when they first take on the role. This could include co-chairing departments as teams, providing a mentor for chairs, supporting chairs’ decision making, and/or giving chairs space to talk with one another as a team to think through issues and challenges.</td>
<td>1. Include a department or program specifically for department chairs or aspiring department chairs to better prepare them for the role.</td>
<td>1. Consider paying more attention to the important role of department chair and to include department chairs within the definition of school leadership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Support department chairs with ongoing opportunities to develop their instructional leadership practices such as mentoring, observing, and providing feedback to</td>
<td>2. Require department chairs to learn adult development leadership theories within their program that attend to developmental diversity so department chairs can support the growth of the teachers they lead in their departments with developmental intentionality.</td>
<td>2. Build upon the four pillar practices by expanding our understanding of these supports for leaders and teachers within schools.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
teachers in their departments.

3. Consider ways to support chairs’ dual roles of teacher and department chair by giving a course release for chairs that teach.

Implications and Recommendations for School Leadership

In this section, I describe the implications of my research to provide recommendations for school leaders, which I identified in Table 18. This research has implications in the field of educational leadership research, educational leadership programs, and school leadership. First, I recommend school leaders intentionally provide support for department chairs when they first take on the role by employing the pillar practices. Second, I recommend school leaders continue to support department chairs with ongoing opportunities to develop their instructional leadership practices such as mentoring, observing, and providing feedback to teachers in their departments. Third, I recommend school leaders consider ways to support chairs’ dual roles of teacher and department chair by minimizing the number of classes a chair teaches and/or the number of teachers in a department. I discuss each of these in the sections that follow.

First Recommendation: School Leaders Should Provide Support for Department Chairs when They First Take on the Role by Employing the Pillar Practices

I discovered that all nine department chairs shared their challenges when first taking on their roles as chair and ways in which they were supported during that time. In Chapter VII, I highlighted the experiences of four of the chairs (Andy, Pat, Ricky, Sam) who shared their challenges with feeling unprepared when they first took on the role, and two of the chairs (Alex,
Jackie) who felt prepared but faced conflicts with teachers in their departments when the administration promoted them to the role. I identified that of the nine chairs, the four chairs who shared they felt unprepared were also teaching for fewer than ten years when they first took on the role as department chair, unlike the other participants in this study who had been teaching for more than ten years when they became chair and did not share feeling unprepared. There is one exception to this, Jamie, which I discussed in detail in Chapter VII and attributed to Jamie taking on the role during the early pandemic.

For this reason, I recommend that school leaders consider specific supports when promoting a teacher who has been teaching for fewer than ten years to the role of department chairs as a way to mitigate some of the challenges these four chairs shared. I also recommend school leaders consider these supports when promoting chairs regardless of the number of years they have been chairing as a way to mitigate other challenges they shared, such as conflicts with colleagues in their departments. I understood the supports these department chairs shared through the lens of the pillar practices, and I interpreted them to include:

- Providing the new department chair with a mentor (current or former department chair) from within the school or outside of the school.
- Supporting the new department chair with a co-chair to chair the department as a team, reflecting and discussing decision-making together.
- Giving many opportunities and space for all the department chairs in the school to act as a team and engage in collegial inquiry and professional development during department chair meetings with and without an administrator present.
• Introducing beginning chairs to a network of department chairs in other schools for their particular discipline so they can act as a team and engage in collegial inquiry.

• Supporting the leadership roles of department chairs by validating key decisions during the first years should conflicts arise with teachers in their departments.

• Encouraging department chairs to view their departments as a team by providing them with the leadership role to hire the teachers in their departments who they believe would fit in with the culture and vision they have for their departments.

As I discussed in Chapter II, while many schools place formal distributed leadership positions in the American high school, they are often underutilized for instructional leadership purposes (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013). The high school department chair is one such position; department chairs can help principals as content experts and instructional leaders within schools (Donitsa-Schmidt & Zuzovsky, 2020; Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021; Peacock & Melville, 2019). Yet, despite their tremendous influence, researchers repeatedly refer to high school department chairs as the most underutilized leadership position over the past twenty years (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013; Klar, 2012; Peacock & Melville, 2019; Weiler, 2001). While the role is ubiquitous, and department chairs as instructional leaders have great promise, principals rarely position chairs to influence instruction and student learning (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013).

Research over the last two decades demonstrate that there is much potential to expand the role of department chair to take on the role of instructional leader as an opportunity to influence curriculum and instruction within their own departments as well as to promote ideas for school-wide improvement (Feeney, 2009; Klar, 2013; Peacock & Melville, 2019; Wettersten, 1992). This is especially important today, given the increasing demands and challenges that educational
leaders face as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Drago-Severson et al., 2020). Therefore, I recommend school leaders support their department chairs with the pillar practices in the ways I outlined above when they first take on the role to create a holding environment for department chairs so they can feel supported and, in turn, support the teachers in their own departments with these same practices.

Second Recommendation: School Leaders Should Support Department Chairs with Ongoing Opportunities to Develop their Instructional Leadership Practices (i.e., mentoring, observing, providing feedback to teachers in their departments).

I discovered that all nine department chairs shared responsibilities related to developing the instructional leadership practices of the teachers in their departments. In Chapter VI, I highlighted the experiences of the three English chairs (Alex, Ruby, Sam) who shared the ways in which they unify their departments through their curricular responsibilities and during department meetings. I identified ways these three chairs enacted the Learning Forward leadership roles of resource provider, curriculum specialist, and instructional leader through these responsibilities. In Chapter VIII, I highlighted other ways Ruby develops the instructional practices of her teachers, along with ways Pat and Charlie grew the instructional practices of the teachers in their departments when they had chaired. As a result of what they shared with me, I identified ways they enacted the Learning Forward roles of learner, learning facilitator, classroom supporter, and data coach.

As a result of the many roles the department chairs enact through their various responsibilities, I recommend that school leaders consider specific supports to help their department chairs manage these multiple, important roles. I analyzed these supports through the lens of the pillar practices, and I interpreted them to include an extension of the ongoing support
I outlined in the previous section. In other words, while the supports such as leadership roles, mentoring, teaming, and collegial inquiry are especially important when the department chairs first take on the roles, school leaders should sustain these opportunities throughout the chairs’ practice to support the instructional leadership practices of the chairs with the teachers in their departments. For example, this could look like professional development opportunities for chairs they can then bring to the teachers in their departments as they enact the roles of learner and learning facilitator. Or, the school leadership could bring in an individual to mentor department chairs on ways they can analyze student data with the teachers in their departments as they enact the role of data coach. School leaders also might encourage their chairs to speak with chairs in other schools to discuss curriculum and instruction or observe exemplar teachers to support their practice as curriculum specialist, instructional leader, and classroom supporter.

In Chapter II, I discussed how the roles and responsibilities of the high school department chair became ambiguous at the start of the twentieth century and remain ambiguous in the most current research (Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021; Peacock & Melville, 2019). The literature supports a newfound emphasis on department chairs as instructional leaders (Brent et. al, 2014; Melville, et al., 2016; Volonnino & Matthews, 2019; Peacock & Melville, 2019; Wong & Dillon, 2020). While some authors describe the tedious and mundane duties often given to department chairs, such as distributing and ordering textbooks, assisting in course placement, ordering supplies, and checking grade submissions, which the department in this study shared with me as well and I describe as administrative responsibilities in Chapter VI (Volonnino & Matthews, 2019), the literature also supports department chairs play a key role in providing mentorship to a new teacher, supporting struggling teachers, and becoming change agents within the school, improving the academic program of the school (Peacock & Melville, 2019; Volonnino &
Matthews, 2019). The nine department chairs in this study demonstrated these key roles which I described in detail in Chapters VI, VII, and VIII. As this study further supports the literature stating that department chairs can be instructional leaders, I therefore recommend school leaders support department chairs through the employment of the pillar practices as they lead their departments.

**Third Recommendation: School Leaders Should Consider Ways to Support Chairs’ Dual Roles of Teacher and Department Chair by Offering a Course Release for Department Chairs Who Teach.**

This third recommendation for school leaders comes from what I discovered about the challenges five department chairs shared about teaching as department chair. In Chapter VII, I highlighted these experiences of five chairs (Alex, Jackie, Pat, Ricky, and Sam). These five chairs each shared teaching between four or five classes and also manage a team of nine or more teachers in their departments. As all three disciplines from this study (math, science, and English) are represented by these five chairs, I did not come to the conclusion that any one subject is more challenging to navigate as chair than a different subject. Instead, I examined the full-time teaching status of the department chairs and the large number (nine or more) of teachers in these departments.

As I explained in Chapter VII, these five chairs also shared their beliefs that the department chair should be seen as an excellent teacher because they are modeling instruction for the teachers in their departments. As a result, the department chairs shared feeling challenged by the time they give to their own classes and the time they give to developing the instructional practices of the teachers in their departments. As a result, I recommend school leaders keep department chairs teaching within their disciplines so they can model exemplar teaching
practices, but limit the number of classes the department chair teaches to be less than a full teaching load. This way, the department chairs can feel supported to give their own classes the full attention and time they need while also having the time to support their teachers develop their teaching practices.

School leaders might also take special consideration to the teachers who manage a team of nine or more teachers in their departments, because as the department chairs shared and I explained in Chapter VII, more teachers in a department requires for chairs to conduct more observations, provide more individuals with feedback, and therefore spend more time in meetings and classrooms. Therefore, perhaps department chairs with larger departments might teach even fewer classes so they can have the time to fully support the teaching practices of the large number of teachers in their departments.

**Implications and Recommendations for Education Leadership Preparation Programs**

In this section, I describe the implications of my research for education leadership preparation programs, which I identified in Table 18. First, I recommend education leadership preparation programs include a department or program specifically for department chairs or aspiring department chairs to better prepare them for the role. Second, I recommend education leadership preparation programs require department chairs to learn adult development leadership theories within their program that attend to developmental diversity so department chairs can support the growth of the teachers they lead in their departments with developmental intentionality. I discuss each of these in the sections that follow.
First Recommendation: Include a Department or Program Specifically for Department Chairs to Better Prepare Them for the Role.

As I shared in Chapter VII, one of the greatest challenges the department chairs in this study faced was feeling ill-prepared when they first took on the role. Although there are many ways school leaders can support new chairs during this time, which I outlined in the section above, I also believe that department chairs would benefit from a preparation program that is specifically meant for this position. Some of the department chairs in this study (i.e., Andy and Sam) shared that they still struggle with some aspects of the position like running department meetings because they are unsure what to discuss during these meetings. These two chairs also sought guidance on how to observe their teachers because they had never had that experience before becoming department chair. Based on Learning Forward’s 10 roles for teacher leaders, which the research in this study supports as roles the nine department chairs enact, a program for department chairs that helps them better prepare for each of these roles can be very valuable to beginning chairs and school leaders who might not have the internal resources I outlined in the section above to develop the practices of beginning department chairs.

In Chapter II, I described the ambiguities and inconsistencies researchers identified within the role of department chair from as early as 1910 that continued until today (Peacock & Melville, 2019). The research described chairs as expected to lead instructional improvement while also juggling clerical, administrative, managerial, and curricular tasks, leading to a sense of ambiguity and multiplicity in the role (Peacock & Melville, 2019). Therefore, with a lack of formal leadership training or skills, a lack of time, and a lack of authority, there was limited ability for the department chairs to provide instructional leadership in their roles (Peacock & Melville, 2019). This demonstrates that the roles and responsibilities of the high school
department chair became ambiguous at the start of the twentieth century and remain ambiguous in the most current research (Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021; Peacock & Melville, 2019). While some schools see the role of department chair as purely administrative, others see the role as more of a link between senior administrators and teachers; this perception of the role varies across schools (Bassett, 2016; DeAngelis, 2013; Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021; Kelley & Salisbury, 2013; Peacock & Melville, 2019). Therefore, the research supports this recommendation that including a department or program specifically for department chairs within education leadership preparation programs might clarify these ambiguities by identifying a set of skills and responsibilities for department chairs.

**Second Recommendation: Require Department Chairs to Learn Adult Development Leadership Theories within their Program that Attend to Developmental Diversity**

As I described in detail in Chapter VIII, each of the chairs in this study described supporting the teachers in their departments by employing aspects of the pillar practices. For example, all nine of the department chairs describe the ways in which they view their departments as a team and offer opportunities for the teachers in their departments to engage in collegial inquiry. Other department chairs, such as Charlie and Ruby, mentor teachers in their departments. I also highlighted ways department chairs like Alex, Jackie, and Ricky provided leadership roles to teachers in their departments as a way to support their teachers’ growth.

In Chapter II, I described the ways in which the pillar practices are informed by Constructive-Developmental Theory (CDT) to help educators understand ways they can support their own and each other’s growth by employing the pillar practices with developmental intentionality (Drago-Severson, 2009). Doing so helps educators and leaders to meet the multiple, complex, demands of today (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2016). Supporting authentic adult
learning has been proven to increase student achievement and improve schools so they can be true learning centers where all can grow (Guskey, 1999, 2000). The literature on department chairs shows the potential for high school department chairs to be in a position of leadership (Brent et al., 2016; Donitsa-Schmidt & Zuzovsky, 2020; Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2021; Peacock & Melville, 2019). This study further supported the literature with the ways the nine department chairs shared supporting their teachers by employing the pillar practices. While exploring, and identifying, the nine department chairs’ ways of knowing (WOK) was outside the scope of my study, I recommend that department chairs learn adult development leadership theories in education leadership preparation programs so they can support their teachers through the pillar practices with developmental intentionality to support authentic adult learning within their departments.

Implications and Recommendations for Education Leadership Theory and Research

In this section, I describe the implications of my research for education leadership theory and research, which I identified in Table 18. First, I recommend education leadership theorists and researchers consider paying more attention to the important role of department chair and include department chairs within the definition of school leadership. Second, I recommend education leadership education leadership theorists and researchers build upon the four pillar practices by expanding our understanding of these supports for leaders and teachers within schools. I discuss each of these in the sections that follow.

First Recommendation: Consider Paying More Attention to the Important Role of Department Chairs and Include Department Chairs Within the Definition of School Leadership.

Earlier in this chapter, and in Chapter I, I identified the problem that is at the heart of this dissertation. While the growing research on educational leadership emphasizes the positive
influence of leadership on student achievement and within the organization when it distributed among multiple agents, and the high school department chair is in a unique position to play an important role within the school system, there is very little research on the role of the ways in which the department chair enacts leadership in high schools (DeAngelis, 2013; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010; Melville, Campbell, & Jones, 2016). There is much ambiguity about the role and responsibilities of a department chair (Feeney 2009; Melville et al., 2016; Peacock 2014; Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007). Much of the literature within the field of educational leadership focuses on the different responsibilities of principals and assistant principals, and yet the number of department chairs likely exceeds the number of principals and assistant principals combined, making this group the most prevalent formal leadership within secondary schools (Brent, DeAngelis, & Surash, 2014; Peacock & Melville, 2019).

As this study supports the limited research that the department chair is in a position to improve the instruction within a school building by developing the teaching practices of the teachers in their departments, I recommend that education leadership researchers extend education leadership theories by focusing on the role of the department chair and the ways in which high school department chairs enact leadership within schools.

Second Recommendation: Build Upon the Four Pillar Practices by Expanding our Understanding of These Supports for Leaders and Teachers Within Schools.

The ways in which the department chairs in this study described feeling supported by the leadership in the schools, and the ways in which the department chairs in this study described supporting the teachers within their departments, mirrored one another. For example, the department chairs described being supported or wishing for support through the pillar practices
of mentorship, collegial inquiry, teaming, and leadership roles, which I described in detail in Chapter VIII. Furthermore, the department chairs in this study shared supporting the teachers in their departments through the pillar practices of mentoring, collegial inquiry, teaming, and leadership roles, which I described in Chapters VI and VIII. For these reasons, I recommend that education leadership researchers build upon the four pillar practices to expand our understanding of how leaders support other leaders and/or teachers in their schools and, in turn, how leaders and/or teachers feel supported by the pillar practices.

9.5 Suggestions for Further Research

In addition to the recommendations I described for school leaders, professors who oversee education leadership programs, and education leadership theories, I also have suggestions for further research which I describe in the narrative that follows.

1. Expand the limited research on department chairs by extending this study to other settings as they consider the ways in which department chairs might lead in other diverse contexts.

2. Extend this study by exploring CDT Theory with department chairs and the teachers in their departments by conducting Subject-Object Interviews to learn how department chairs’ WOK informs the ways in which they support the teachers in their departments through the pillar practices.

3. Extend this study by focusing on the teachers’ views of department chair leadership to learn from their perspectives how department chairs might support their growth and develop their teaching practices.
How, if at all, Do Department Chairs Support Teachers and Enact Leadership in Other Contexts?

As I discussed in detail in Chapters I, II, III, IV, and throughout the dissertation, this study was set in the unique context of the Modern Orthodox yeshiva setting in New York City. This is important to address because Jewish day schools have characteristics that are unique from public schools, such as being privately funded, and a strong emphasis on Judaic studies and religious programming (Avi Chai, 2020; Menachem, 2017). I explored this setting because I am a member of the Modern Orthodox community and I was at one time a department chair in this setting, and I wished to learn more about the role of the department chair in this unique context. Also, to my knowledge, while there is some research on Jewish day schools, the research largely pertains to principals and teachers and I wanted to draw attention to the role of the department chair in the Jewish day school setting. I also did not do a gender analysis in this setting, which could be valuable.

I recommend future researchers investigate how department chairs might enact leadership and support the growth of the teachers in their departments in other settings. This could include private and public schools across the United States, as well as international school settings. This could expand the limited research by learning about department chairs in other diverse settings.

Do Department Chairs Support the Teachers in their Departments with Developmental Intentionality?

As I discussed in Chapter II, learning the developmental capacities of the nine department chairs by performing Subject-Object Interviews (SOI), a developmental assessment that has high reliability in ascertaining a person’s Way of Knowing (developmental level), to identify their WOK, the ways we interpret and respond to the world around us, or the lens through which all
experience is filtered (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012, 2016), was outside the scope of this study. However, I wonder how, if at all, a department chair’s WOK might inform the ways in which they support the teachers in their departments through the pillar practices. Therefore, I recommend future researchers extend this study by conducting SOIs to learn how, if at all, the department chairs might be approaching the pillar practices with the teachers in their departments with developmental intentionality. Also, how their own WOK influences their experience of the role, the challenges and the kinds of support and challenges that will assist them, as well as their internal capacities for supporting teachers in their departments.

**How, if at all, do Teachers Describe and Understand Ways in Which Department Chairs Might Support Their Growth and Develop Their Teaching Practices?**

As I shared in Chapters I, II, and III, I intentionally focused on the perspectives of department chairs because to my knowledge, high school department chairs have not been directly asked about their roles and responsibilities within the past five years. However, I wonder how, if at all, the teachers in high schools might describe the ways in which they interpret the roles of the department chair and how they might support or differ from the ways in which the nine chairs in this study interpreted their roles. I also wonder how, if at all, high school teachers might describe the ways in which their department chairs could support their growth as educators and develop their teaching practices. This could further extend the literature and the implications of this study by offering another perspective on this important role and further shedding light on department chair leadership in high schools.

**9.6 Chapter Summary and Final Note**

In this chapter, I summarized my conclusions about the role and responsibilities, challenges, supports, and leadership practices of the nine department chairs from three different
Modern Orthodox yeshivas in New York City. I then described the limitations to my research before making recommendations for school leaders, education leadership preparation programs, and education leadership researchers to support this important, and often overlooked, leadership role in high schools.

I close with a final note of gratitude and appreciation to the nine department chairs and three schools who so graciously welcomed me with open arms and hearts into their worlds as educational leaders in Modern Orthodox settings. In my earliest conversations with the three heads of school, and throughout my conversations with all nine chairs, it is clear that the students are at the forefront of everything they do. They agreed to this study during the busiest time of year and with a never-ending list of responsibilities and with the students in mind, emphasizing their hopes that they could better the field of education in whatever ways they can. I began this journey feeling inspired by my own experiences as an English Language Arts teacher under the guidance of multiple department chairs, and an English department chair myself in a Modern Orthodox school setting. I end this journey feeling even more inspired by the important work of the nine department chairs who shared the ways in which they overcame their challenges by keeping the students and the teachers in their departments at the center of their practice.

In this final note, I close with an excerpt from a short poem:

So much depends
upon
a red wheel
barrow.

-William Carlos Williams

I ask school leaders to first recognize the department chairs in your schools as the silent leaders, the red wheelbarrows upon whom so much depends, and to support their leadership practice so
that they can, in turn, support and grow the practices of their teachers. I ask education leadership programs to create a space for these silent leaders to help principals, department chairs, and teachers as they turn to chairs for support when navigating the increasingly complex demands of a post-pandemic educational landscape. I ask education leadership researchers to consider paying more attention to this silent role within the field of education leadership theory. Most importantly, though, I hope we can all approach what we do with the same care and love Alex, Andy, Charlie, Jackie, Jamie, Ricky, Ruby, Pat, and Sam bring to their roles as department chairs.
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Appendix A: Timeline for Data Collection and Analysis

April 2022:

- Identify the sites that meet the selection criteria and send an invitation asking to participate in the study.
- Narrow down the high schools to the three that will be used in the study.
- Ask the principals of the three selected schools to identify the department chairs that meet the selection criteria, and invite the department chairs to participate in the study.
- Narrow down the participants to the nine that meet the selection criteria and volunteer to be in the study.

May-September 2022:

- Schedule and complete the first round of ninety-minute interviews with the nine participants, either on Zoom or in-person, depending on the context of COVID-19.
- Transcribe the interviews and send to participants to review.
- Begin to analyze the interviews by identifying themes through open, or descriptive codes.

October 2022:

- Schedule and complete one hour-long observation of a department meeting for each participant.
- Summarize the observation notes and documents collected during the observations.

November-December 2022:

- Schedule and complete the second round of ninety-minute interviews with the nine participants, either on Zoom or in-person, depending on the context of COVID-19.
- Transcribe the interviews through professional transcriber and send to participants to review.
- Begin to analyze the interviews by identifying themes through open, or descriptive codes.
- Write narrative profiles of the department chairs and descriptions of the three sites.
- Create data displays, tables, and concept maps to draw out themes.

January 2023:

- Distribute surveys to all department chairs in the three schools.
- Analyze the survey results to identify simple descriptive statistics.
Appendix B: Department Chair Interview 1 Protocol

Date: __________________
Start Time of Interview: _______________ End Time of Interview: _______________

Introduction to Interview: Context Setting (10 minutes)

My name is Rachel Harari and I will be interviewing to learn about your experience as a department chair in a Modern Orthodox yeshiva. I am conducting this research as part of my doctoral studies as a PhD student in Educational Leadership at Teachers College, Columbia University. In case helpful to know, I was also a department chair for six years in a Modern Orthodox yeshiva, and I attended a Modern Orthodox yeshiva for my elementary and secondary schooling. I want you to feel as comfortable as possible throughout the interview and for you to talk openly about your experiences as a department chair. There are no right or wrong answers, because the focus is on learning from your perspective, as a department chair. After our interview, you will be given the opportunity to review your responses to check for accuracy of the transcription.

1. Appreciation and Introduction

Thank you very much for agreeing to this interview. It is my hope that you will enjoy the opportunity to explore and reflect on your experiences as a department chair. Do you have any questions at this time about this or anything else? If not, please ask anything at anytime, ok? Thank you.

This interview will last for 90 minutes. I have shared this protocol with you already, so you know that we will use starter questions to reflect on your background as department chair and then to explore and reflect on your role and responsibilities as department chair. Along the way, you need not answer any question you do not wish to. Also, you may stop the interview at any time for any reason if you feel you need to. It is my highest duty as a researcher to ensure that you feel safe as a participant in my study and you should only share whatever you are comfortable sharing.

2. Audio Recording

I plan to create a digital audio recording of our conversation in order to ensure that I don’t miss anything you share during the interview and I can work with what you share exactly as you say it. The audio recording will be transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber, and only me and the transcriber will have access to the recording. The recordings will be held in a secure, locked drawer in my home office and will be destroyed following the end of the study. They will be held confidentially, with no identifying information included. Thank you for signing and returning the consent form and for giving your permission to audio-record this interview. Can we please reconfirm if both of these are still okay? Do you have any questions about the consent form at this time?

3. Overview of Our Purpose and Goals

Before beginning, I want to remind you that the purpose of the interview is to learn about your experiences as Department Chair in a Modern Orthodox yeshiva. I am interested in learning about your experience, the roles and responsibilities of Department Chair, and if and how you collaborate within your department. There are no right or wrong answers; rather, I will be talking
with you to better understand your experiences as department chair. This interview will take about 60 minutes. Thank you very much, in advance, for your help and time.

4. Confidentiality
In any publications, I will disguise your name and honor confidentiality. I may quote things you say but I would never use your name. I’d also like to remind you that you do not have to answer any question that you choose not to answer.

Would you like to select an alias or would you like me to select an alias? ________________

5. Questions
Do you have any questions before we begin? If you have questions at any time, please let me know.

Section 1: Department Chair Background and Context (25 minutes)
I’d like to start by learning a little about you and how many years you’ve served in education and in your current role. Is that okay?

1) How many years have you been a teacher in a Modern Orthodox yeshiva? How many years have you been a teacher overall? How many years have you been department chair?
2) Why did you become a department chair?
3) How did that happen?

Probes:
• Can you share a story?

4) How did you feel about when you were first appointed?

Probes:
• Did you feel prepared? Why or why not?
• What helped you prepare for it?
• What do you wish you had in terms of supports to help you prepare when you first assumed the role?

5) How did you feel about the current state of your department, pre-COVID-19 pandemic?

Probes:
• What were you most satisfied with?
• How did you see the future of the department?

6) How do you feel about the current state of your department, post/mid-COVID-19 pandemic?

Probes:
• What are you most satisfied with?
• How do you see the future of the department?

7) What do you like best about the role?
8) What is hardest about the role?
9) If you could wish for one thing to be different, what would it be?

Section 2: Role and Responsibilities of Department Chair (50 minutes)

10) Can you tell me about how you would define your role or position as Department Chair?
11) Can you tell me about your responsibilities as Department Chair?
12) What were you told about the role and responsibilities before you took on the post?
13) Were you given a “job description”? If yes, do you remember what it said? Can you please share?

   **Probes:**
   - How did you feel when you saw it? What were you thinking?
   - What do you think and feel about it now?
   - What do you like about your responsibilities?
   - What do you wish you didn’t have to do?
   - Has it changed for you at all?

14) Do you do other work at the school, aside from your responsibilities as Department Chair?

   **Probes:**
   - If so, what?

15) How does that compare to the reality of the job?

   **Probes:**
   - Can you share a story or an example?
   - What is going well?
   - What’s hard?
   - Is there anything that is especially surprising to you, especially after COVID?

16) In your position as department chair, what do you spend the most time on?

   **Probes:**
   - Why?
   - What aspects of the job are the most time consuming?
   - How much time per week do you spend on ____ (what they listed)
   - What’s that like for you?
   - What, if anything, is the most gratifying part?

17) Are there any things you do as department chair that might fall outside the typical responsibilities?

   **Probes:**
   - Can you share a story or example?
   - How often does this happen?

18) Do the responsibilities of department chair vary across departments?

   **Probes:**
   - How so?
   - Can you share a story or an example?

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**Section 3: Closing (10 minutes)**

19) Is there anything else you want to tell me about any of the questions I’ve asked?
20) Do you have any questions for me?
21) If I have any further questions, would you be willing to talk with me?

I would like to send you a copy of our transcript of this interview for you to review for accuracy. Will that be okay?

_________________YES  _______________NO
Please confirm which email address you’d like me to use for sending your transcript and communications about this work.

Best Email: _________________________

Thank you very much!
Appendix C: Department Chair Interview 2 Protocol

Date: __________________
Start Time of Interview: _______________   End Time of Interview: _______________

1. Appreciation and Introduction
   Thank you very much for agreeing to this second interview, and for your time today. I hope you have been well since our last talk. Thank you for sharing documents from your department meeting a few weeks ago. I look forward to talking with you about these and the meeting later today. This interview is intended to be a 90-minute follow up interview regarding your experiences as Department Chair in a Modern Orthodox yeshiva. It is my hope that you will enjoy the opportunity to explore and reflect on your experiences as a department chair. Do you have any questions at this time about this or anything else? If not, please ask anything at anytime, okay? Thank you.

   This interview will last for 90 minutes. I have shared this protocol with you already, so you know that we will use questions to explore any challenges you may have encountered as department chair and then to explore and reflect potential supports as department chair. Along the way, you need not answer any question you do not wish to. Also, I want to remind you that you may stop the interview at any time for any reason if you feel you need to. It is my highest duty as a researcher to ensure that you feel safe as a participant in my study and you should only share whatever you are comfortable sharing.

2. Audio Recording
   As with the first interview, I plan to create a digital audio recording of our conversation. To remind you, the recordings will be held in a secure, locked drawer in my home office and will be destroyed following the end of the study. They will be held confidentially, with no identifying information included. Can we please reconfirm if both of these are still okay? Do you have any questions about the consent form at this time?

3. Overview of Our Purpose and Goals
   Before beginning, I want to remind you that the purpose of the interview is to learn about your experiences as Department Chair in a Modern Orthodox yeshiva. I am interested in learning about your experience, if you face any challenges as a department chair, and what supports, if any, help you manage those challenges. There are no right or wrong answers; rather, I will be talking with you to better understand your experiences as department chair. This interview will take about 90 minutes. Thank you very much, in advance, for your help and time.

3. Confidentiality
   In any publications, I will disguise your name and honor confidentiality. I may quote things you say but I’d never use your name. I’d also like to remind you that you do not have to answer any question that you choose not to answer.

   Would you like to select an alias or would you like me to select an alias? __________________

4. Questions
Do you have any questions before we begin? If you have questions at any time, please let me know.

5. Review
For a quick review, last time we discussed what you consider to be the roles and responsibilities as department chair, and if and how you collaborate within your department. I know you are very busy. I am just wondering did you have a chance to review the transcript? The goal of today’s interview is to further discuss what challenges, if any, you face as department chair, and what supports, if any, help you manage those challenges. Before we begin do you have any questions?

Thank you, and let’s get started.

Section 1: Review (25 minutes)

Today I am excited to learn about your experiences with challenges and supports, if any, as a department chair. I would also like to take time to talk about what I noticed during my observation of your department meeting to ask you questions so I can learn more about what you said during the meeting. Before we talk about that, I wanted to pause and see if there was anything you wanted to elaborate on, revisit, or discuss from our first interview?

I also want to share with you a few things that stood out to me from the first interview to check interpretations. Did you bring the transcript from our first interview with you? Would it be okay if I review these highlights with you?

Section 2: Meeting Observation (10 minutes)

In this section, I will save 10 minutes to ask about why the department chairs chose the meeting they did for me to observe, whether or not the meeting was typical for the department, and what I noticed during the observation of a department meeting to ask questions so I can better understand the rationale behind the statements during the meeting. For example, I might ask why the department chair brought up certain topics or called on certain teachers during the meeting.

Section 3: Challenges in the Role of Department Chair (40 minutes)

1) When you think about it, what were the top three challenges, if any, that you faced in your leadership work as department chair during the first year?

Probes:
- Can you give an example or share a story?
- Have the challenges changed in any way over time? If so, how?
- Would you consider them major or minor, and why?
- How did you learn to manage it?
- What was the hardest part?
- What would have helped them more?
- Where did you go for support to manage these challenges?
2) What are the top three challenges you’ve faced as department chair since then, pre-COVID?
   **Probes:**
   - Can you give an example or share a story?
   - What is the most pressing each year?
   - Which challenges persist?
   - Would you consider them major or minor, and why?
   - What, if anything, do you feel you’ve gotten better at in terms of managing it?
   - Who or what do you turn to for support, if at all, for these challenges?

3) What are the top three challenges you’ve faced as a department chair post/mid-COVID?
   **Probes:**
   - Can you give an example or share a story?
   - How are you managing them?
   - What is it like?
   - Who or what do you turn to for support, if at all, for these challenges?
   - Do you have people you can to about it? If yes, who? If no, who would you like to be able to talk with?

4) How would you describe the differences between a major and minor challenge as department chair?

---

**Section 4: Closing (5 minutes)**

1) Is there anything else you want to tell me about any of the questions I’ve asked?
2) Do you have any questions for me?
3) If I have any further questions, would you be willing to talk with me?

I would like to send you a copy of the transcript of this interview for you to review for accuracy. Would that be okay?

_______ Yes  _________ No

Please confirm which email address you’d like me to use for sending your transcript and communications about this work.

Best e-mail: _______________

Thank you!
Appendix D: Observation Guide for Department Meeting

Observation Guide for Department Meeting

Observation Guide

Observer: ________________________  Location: __________________
Date: ______________  Start Time: ________  Stop Time: ________
Participants: ___________________________________________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Observation</th>
<th>Roles &amp; Responsibilities</th>
<th>Leadership in the Role</th>
<th>Challenges in the Role</th>
<th>Learning to Manage Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical Behavior (what, by whom, where)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Behavior (what, by whom, where)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context (what else is going on?)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General mood (what, how conveyed, by whom)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other areas of observation:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexive comments:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E: Survey for Department Chairs

Thank you so much for agreeing to take this twenty-minute survey so I can learn more about the roles, responsibilities, challenges, and supports of department chairs. Please answer each question.

Part I: Demographics:

1. How long have you been an educator? (Years).
   - 1-5 years
   - 6-10 years
   - 11-15 years
   - Over 16 years
2. What is your gender?
   - Male
   - Female
3. What is your age bracket?
   - 20-30
   - 31-40
   - 41-50
   - 51-60
   - 61-70
   - 71-80
4. How long have you been in this school?
   - 1-4 years
   - 5-10 years
   - 11-20 years
   - 21+ years
5. How long have you been a teacher?
   - 1-4 years
   - 5-10 years
   - 11-20 years
   - 21+ years
6. How long have you been a department chair?
   - 1-4 years
   - 5-10 years
   - 11-20 years
   - 21+ years
7. Within what department do you teach or lead? __________________
Part II: Roles and Responsibilities as Department Chair

Please circle how often **you** perform each of the following tasks as department chair on a scale of 1-4, with 1 representing never and 4 representing very regularly.

*Never* = I’ve never done that  
*Sometimes* = Around once or twice a year  
*Regularly* = Between three to five times a year  
*Very Regularly* = More than six times a year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Number</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Survey Scale (1= never, 2= sometimes, 3= regularly, 4= very regularly)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>As department chair, I carry out roles in writing and/or setting curriculum</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>As department chair, I relay important information from the administration to the teachers in the department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>As department chair, I make decisions for the department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>As department chair, I mentor teacher(s) in my department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>As department chair, I model strong teaching for teachers in my department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>As department chair, I model learning for teachers in the department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>As department chair, I review teachers’ lesson plans and/or unit plans</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>As department chair, I observe lessons of teachers in my department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>As department chair, I offer feedback to the teachers in my department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>As department chair, I write teacher evaluations for teachers in my department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>As department chair, I meet with teachers in my department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>As department chair, I support teachers when there are any issues with parents and/or students.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>As department chair, I order and/or approve supplies for teachers in my department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>As department chair, I approve programming and/or activities within the department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>As department chair, I keep up-to-date on the most current research regarding pedagogy.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As department chair, I create the schedules for the teachers in my department.

As department chair, I create a sense of camaraderie among the department.

Part III: Roles and Responsibilities of Department Chairs

Please circle how important you believe each of the following tasks are for department chairs to fulfill on a scale of 1-4, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 4 representing strongly agree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Number</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Survey Scale (1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= agree, 4= strongly agree)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Department chairs should carry out roles in writing and/or setting curriculum</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Department chairs should relay important information from the administration to the teachers in the department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Department chairs should make decisions for the department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Department chairs should mentor teacher(s) in my department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Department chairs should model strong teaching for teachers in my department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Department chairs should model learning for teachers in the department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Department chairs should review teachers’ lesson plans and/or unit plans</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Department chairs should observe lessons of teachers in my department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Department chairs should offer feedback to the teachers in my department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Department chairs should write teacher evaluations for teachers in my department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Department chairs should meet with teachers in my department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Department chairs should support teachers when there are any issues with parents and/or students.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Department chairs should order and/or approve supplies for teachers in my department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Department chairs should approve programming and/or activities within the department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Department chairs should keep up-to-date on the most current research regarding pedagogy.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part IV: Roles as Department Chairs

Please circle if you believe the following statements to be true about your role as department chair on a scale of 1-4, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 4 representing strongly agree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Number</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Survey Scale (1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= agree, 4= strongly agree)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>As department chair, I am the subject matter expert on my discipline for my high school.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>As department chair, I am central to improving the instruction (teaching and learning) in my department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>As department chair, my role is administrative.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>As department chair, I am the link between the principals and the teachers in my department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>As department chair, I am an advocate for change rather than a protector of the status quo.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part V: Roles of Department Chairs

Please circle how important you believe each of the following roles are for department chairs on a scale of 1-4, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 4 representing strongly agree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Number</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Survey Scale (1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= agree, 4= strongly agree)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Department chairs should be the subject matter expert on their discipline for their high school.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Department chairs should be central to improving the instruction (teaching and learning) in their department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The department chair’s role should be administrative.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Department chairs should be the link between the principals and the teachers in their departments.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part VI: Time Spent on Responsibilities as Department Chair

1. Please check the top THREE items you believe department chairs spend the most time on from the following list.
   - Relay important information from the administration to the teachers in the department
   - Make decisions for the department (test dates, etc.)
   - Mentor teachers in the department
   - Model teaching for the department
   - Model learning for the department
   - Review teachers’ lessons and unit plans
   - Observe teachers’ lessons
   - Support teachers with parent or student issues
   - Approve and/or order supplies for teachers
   - Approve extra programming and/or activities within the department
   - Remain up-to-date on most current research regarding pedagogy
   - Create teacher schedules
   - Create a sense of comradery among the department
   - Other: ___________________________________

2. Please check the top THREE items you believe department chairs spend the least time on from the following list.
   - Relay important information from the administration to the teachers in the department
   - Make decisions for the department (test dates, etc.)
   - Mentor teachers in the department
   - Model teaching for the department
   - Model learning for the department
   - Review teachers’ lessons and unit plans
   - Observe teachers’ lessons
   - Support teachers with parent or student issues
   - Approve and/or order supplies for teachers
   - Approve extra programming and/or activities within the department
   - Remain up-to-date on most current research regarding pedagogy
   - Create teacher schedules
   - Create a sense of comradery among the department
   - Other: ___________________________________

3. On average, how much time does the department meet during school hours? Please circle from 1 to 5.

   1- Never
2- Rarely (once every few months)
3- Sometimes (once a month)
4- Usually (more than once a month)
5- Very Often (once a week)

4. On average, how much time does the department meet outside of school hours?
   Please circle from 1 to 5.
   1- Never
   2- Rarely (once every few months)
   3- Sometimes (once a month)
   4- Usually (more than once a month)
   5- Very Often (once a week)

Part VII: Challenges within the role of Department Chair

Please circle if you believe the following statements to be true about the challenges you experience as department chair on a scale of 1-4, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 4 representing strongly agree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Number</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Survey Scale (1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= agree, 4= strongly agree)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>It is challenging that students enter high school below grade level.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>It is challenging when teachers in my department are struggling (i.e., classroom management, grading on time, following curriculum)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>It is challenging when teachers in my department have students who underperform at the end of the year, showing little growth.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The pressure to improve standardized test scores is a challenge as department chair.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>It is challenging when I do not have enough time to observe the teachers in my department as much as I should/ would like.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>It is challenging that my department has a high teacher turnover rate.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>It is challenging that there are a lot of teachers in my department to manage.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>It is challenging that there are too few teachers in my department to get all the work that is needed done.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is challenging that I receive a lot of pressure from parents as department chair.

It is challenging that I receive a lot of pressure from the administration as department chair.

It is challenging to navigate the dual role of teacher and department chair.

It is challenging to keep up with paperwork as department chair.

It is challenging to manage unexpected complexities (i.e., COVID-19 challenges, a teacher taking maternity leave).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Number</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Survey Scale</th>
<th>Part VIII: Supports within the role of Department Chair</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>It is helpful to subscribe to educational journals.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>Please circle if you believe the following statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>It is helpful to keep up-to-date with academic research.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>to be true about the supports you experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>It is helpful to speak with other department chairs in my school.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>as department chair on a scale of 1-4, with 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>It is helpful to speak with department chairs outside of my school.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>representing strongly disagree and 4 representing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>It is helpful to let go of small issues.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>It is helpful to practice self-care (i.e., exercise, take an occasional day off, practice yoga or meditation)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I feel supported when I ask the administration for help whenever I feel the need.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I feel supported when I ask the teachers in my department to help.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I feel supported when I ask any colleagues, even those outside my department, for help.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>It is helpful to delegate responsibilities to other teachers within my department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part IX: Supporting Adult Learning as Department Chair

Please circle how often you perform each of the following tasks as department chair on a scale of 1-4, with 1 representing never and 4 representing very regularly.

**Never** = I’ve never done that
**Sometimes** = Around once or twice a year
**Regularly** = Between three to five times a year
**Very Regularly** = More than six times a year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Number</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Survey Scale (1= never, 2= sometimes, 3= regularly, 4= very regularly)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>As department chair, I ask teachers in my department to team teach.</td>
<td>1    2    3    4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>As department chair, I have teachers in my department use strategy development to solve problems together.</td>
<td>1    2    3    4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>As department chair, I have teachers in my department use inquiry to ask each other questions and share ideas together.</td>
<td>1    2    3    4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>As department chair, I have teachers in my department collaborate using approaches such as critical friends.</td>
<td>1    2    3    4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>As department chair, I have teachers in my department participate in professional learning communities (PLCs).</td>
<td>1    2    3    4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>As department chair, I have teachers in my department share teaching and learning practices through professional development.</td>
<td>1    2    3    4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>As department chair, I have teachers in my department share and exchange ideas.</td>
<td>1    2    3    4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>As department chair, I share decision making with teachers in my department.</td>
<td>1    2    3    4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>As department chair, I distribute tasks and/or responsibilities to teachers in my department as a way to support their learning.</td>
<td>1    2    3    4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>As department chair, I provide supports and challenges appropriate to the teachers in my department, depending on their capabilities.</td>
<td>1    2    3    4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>As department chair, I engage in inquiry with teachers in my department to guide decisions and practice.</td>
<td>1    2    3    4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>As department chair, I reflect with teachers in my department on their practice.</td>
<td>1    2    3    4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>As department chair, I take teaching walks with teachers in my department to informally discuss their teaching practice.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>As department chair, I create study groups with the teachers in my department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>As department chair, I organize educational retreats (i.e., workshops) with the teachers in my department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>As department chair, I engage in meaningful conversations with teachers in my department about teaching and learning.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>As department chair, I explore firmly held convictions and/or beliefs about teaching with the teachers in my department.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>As department chair, I establish developmental relationships with teachers in my department that are embedded within their careers.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F: Department Chairs Informed Consent and Statement of Participants Rights

Study Title: High School Department Chairs’ Perceptions and Experiences of their Role in a Modern Orthodox Yeshiva.

Principal Investigator: Rachel R. Harari, Doctoral Student, Teachers College, Columbia University (tel: 646-752-1612)

IRB Protocol #:

Introduction
I would like to invite you to participate in this research study, High School Department Chairs’ Perceptions and Experiences of their Role in a Modern Orthodox Yeshiva. You are invited to take part in this research study because you work as a high school department chair in a Modern Orthodox yeshiva in New York City. Approximately nine people will participate in this study and it will take 3.5 hours of your time.

Why is this study being done?
This study seeks to understand i) the roles and responsibilities of department chairs and ii) the challenges department chairs face.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to take part in this study?
If you decide to participate, I will invite you to participate in two 90-minute audio-recorded interviews either face-to-face, Zoom (or teleconference), or by telephone. The first interview will be scheduled in May 2022, and the second interview will be scheduled in June or July of 2022. During the interviews, you will be asked to discuss your experiences and responsibilities as a department chair, and about the challenges and supports you might face in the role. In between the interviews, I will observe one hour-long department meeting, either face-to-face or on Zoom. You will also be asked to complete a short survey in July or August 2022 about the responsibilities, challenges, and supports you experience in the role of department chair.

What possible risks and/or discomforts can I expect from taking part in this study?
This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter in daily life while talking about experiences in your workplace. However, there are small risks to consider. You might feel discomfort responding to questions regarding any difficult workplace experiences that may have arisen for you. However, you may skip any question that you do not wish to answer and you do not have to divulge anything you do not want to address. You may stop participating in the study at any time without penalty.

You might also feel concerned that things you say might get back to people you work with. However, strict confidentiality will be maintained and nothing you say will be shared with other
interview participants. I am taking precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent anyone from discovering of guessing your identity, such as using a pseudonym instead of your name and keeping all information on a password protected computer and locked in a file drawer.

What possible benefits can I expect from taking part in this study?
There is not direct benefit to you for participating in this study.

Will I be paid for participating in this study?
After your interviews are concluded, you will receive a $25 gift certificate to Amazon via email. There are no costs to you for taking part in this study.

When will the study be over? May I leave before it ends?
The study is over when you have completed two ninety-minute interviews and responded to the survey. Any participant may seek to discontinue their participation at any time.

What protections are there for my confidentiality?
I will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in my home office. Any electronic or digital information will be stored on a computer that is password protected. Regulations require that research data be kept for at least three years, after which time the raw data will be destroyed. What is on the audio-recordings will be written down and the audio-recording will then be destroyed. There will be no record matching your real name with your pseudonym. Regulations require that research data be kept for at least three years.

For quality assurance, my study sponsor and/or members of the Teachers College Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review the data collected from you as part of this study. Otherwise, all information obtained from your participation in this study will be held strictly confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission as required by U.S. or State law.

How will the results be used?
The results of this study will be published in my doctoral dissertation, and may be further published in journals and conference presentations. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of Rachel R. Harari.

CONSENT FOR AUDIO AND OR VIDEO RECORDING
Audio recording is a part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you don’t wish to be recorded, you will not be able to participate in this research study.

________ I give me consent to be recorded ________________________

Signature

Who can answer questions about this study?
If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you may contact the principal investigator, Rachel R. Harari (tel: 646-752-1612. Email: rrh2128@tc.columbia.edu). You may also contact her faculty advisor, Prof. Eleanor Drago-Severson (tel: 212-678-4163).
If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board at Teachers College, Columbia University (tel: 212-678-4105. Email: IRB@tc.edu). Alternatively, you may write to:

IRB
Teachers College, Columbia University,
525 W. 120TH Street, New York, NY 10027

The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

Statement of Participants’ Rights

1) I have read and discussed the informed consent with the researcher. I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks, and benefits regarding this research study. I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks, and benefits regarding this research study.

2) I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty.

3) If, during the course of the study, significant new information develops or becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the investigator will provide this information to me.

4) Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law. De-identified data may be used for future research studies, or distributed to another researcher for future research without additional informed consent from you (the research participant or the research participant’s representative).

I have been given a copy of the informed consent document for my own records. My signature indicates that I agree to participate in this study.

Print Name: _____________________________________________
Signature: ___________________________________________ Date: ________________

Researcher’s Name: ___________Rachel R. Harari_________

Researcher’s Signature: ________Rachel R. Harari_________ Date: _____8/28/21_______
Appendix G: Validation of Content Relevance and Representativeness of Item Pool

Department Chairs’ Perceptions of their Roles and Responsibilities (DCRR)

Thank you very much for agreeing to review my Survey (DCRR) for content validation. The purpose of this instrument is to survey high school department chairs to learn about their perceptions of their roles and responsibilities.

I kindly invite you to examine the content and match of the domains, subdomains, and items, with attention to content relevance and content representativeness against theory and practice. This structured review has three validation parts:

1. Domains/Subdomains/Indicators
2. Item Validation Check List

1. Domain/Subdomains/Indicators
   a. Domain: Beliefs/Practices about Roles and Responsibilities
      i. Subdomains:
         1. Beliefs/practices about leadership responsibilities
         2. Beliefs/practices about leadership roles
         3. Beliefs/practices about time spent on responsibilities
         4. Beliefs about challenges in the role
         5. Beliefs about supports in the role
      ii. General/Specific Indicators by subdomain: See Table 1 attached to same email.
   b. Domain- Beliefs/Practices about Supporting Adult Learning through the Pillar Practices
      i. Subdomains:
         1. Beliefs/practices on supporting adult learning through teaming
         2. Beliefs/practices on supporting adult learning by providing leadership roles
         3. Beliefs/practices on supporting adult learning through collegial inquiry
         4. Beliefs/practices on supporting adult learning through mentoring
      ii. General/Specific Indicators by subdomain: See Table 1 attached to same email.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain/Subdomain/Indicators</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1= Strongly Disagree (major modifications needed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2= Disagree (some modifications needed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3= Agree (no modifications needed but could be improved with minor changes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4= Strongly agree (no modifications needed)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 1. The domain “beliefs/practices about roles and responsibilities” appropriately addresses the construct “Roles and Responsibilities of Department Chairs” |
| 2. The subdomains of: beliefs/practices about leadership responsibilities, beliefs/practices about leadership roles, beliefs/practices about time spent on responsibilities, beliefs about challenges in the role, and beliefs about supports in the role are appropriate for the area of “beliefs/practices about roles and responsibilities.” |
| 3. The specific indicators encompass all key elements of general indicators of these domain |
2. Item Validation Check List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items by Subdomain</th>
<th>Indicate 1-4, your judgment of quality of each item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relevance:</strong> 1) not relevant, 2) somewhat relevant, 3) quite relevant 4) highly relevant</td>
<td>Matches skill targeted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clarity:</strong> 1) not clear 2) item needs some revision 3) clear but needs minor revisions 4) very clear</td>
<td>Clear and easy to understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conciseness:</strong> 1) not concise 2) item needs some revision 3) concise but needs minor revisions 4) very concise</td>
<td>Concise - no unnecessary wording</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subdomain 1:
Beliefs/practices about leadership responsibility:

4. Overall, the domain seem appropriate to learn the department chairs’ perceptions of their roles and responsibilities.

Additional comments if needed:

1. Are there certain indicators that need to be addressed?

2. Please recommend any changes you would like to make to the domain, subdomains, and indicators
<p>| The department chair/leader reports carrying out responsibilities in writing or setting the curriculum. |  |
| The department chair conveys a perceived responsibility in writing/setting the curriculum |  |
| The department chair/leader reports carrying out responsibilities in relaying important information from the administration to the teachers in the department. |  |
| The department chair conveys a perceived responsibility of carrying out responsibilities in relaying important information from the administration to the teachers in the department. |  |
| The department chair/leader reports making the decision for the department. |  |
| The department chair conveys a perceived responsibility of making the decision for the department. |  |
| The department chair/leader reports mentoring teachers in the department. |  |
| The department chair conveys a perceived responsibility of mentoring teachers in the department. |  |
| The department chair/leader reports modeling strong teaching for teachers in the department. |  |
| The department chair conveys a perceived responsibility of modeling strong teaching for teachers in the department. |  |
| The department chair/leader reports modeling learning for teachers in the department. |  |
| The department chair conveys a perceived responsibility of modeling learning for teachers in the department. |  |
| The department chair/leader reports reviewing teachers’ lessons and/or unit plans. |  |
| The department chair conveys a perceived responsibility of reviewing teachers’ lessons and/or unit plans. |  |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The department chair/leader reports observing teachers’ lessons.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The department chair conveys a perceived responsibility of observing teachers’ lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports offering feedback to teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair conveys a perceived responsibility of offering feedback to teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports writing teacher evaluations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair conveys a perceived responsibility of writing teacher evaluations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports meeting with teachers in their department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair conveys a perceived responsibility of meeting with teachers in their department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports supporting teachers with parents and/or student issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair conveys a perceived responsibility of supporting teachers in their department with parents and/or students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports ordering or approving supplies for teachers in their department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair conveys a perceived responsibility of ordering or approving supplies for teachers in their department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports approving programming and/or activities within the department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair conveys a perceived responsibility of approving programming and/or activities within the department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports keeping up-to-date on the most current research regarding pedagogy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

408
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The department chair conveys a perceived responsibility of keeping up-to-date on the most current research regarding pedagogy</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports creating the schedules for the teachers in their department</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair conveys a perceived responsibility of creating the schedules for the teachers in their department.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports creating a sense of comradery among the department</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair conveys a perceived responsibility of creating a sense of comradery among the department.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Subdomain 2:**
Beliefs/practices about leadership role:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The department chair/leader reports their role as subject matter experts in the high school.</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The department chair conveys a perceived role as subject matter expert.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports their role as central to improving instruction (teaching and learning) in their department.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair conveys a perceived role as central to improving instruction (teaching and learning) in their department.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports their role as administrative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair conveys a perceived role as administrative.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports their role as a link between senior administrators and the teachers in their department.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair conveys a perceived role as a link between senior administrators and the teachers in their department.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The department chair/leader reports their role as a visionary (advocates of change rather than protectors of the status quo).

The department chair conveys a perceived role as a visionary (advocates of change rather than protectors of the status quo).

**Subdomain 3: Beliefs/Practices about Time Spent on Responsibilities**

The department chair/leader reports their time spent on various responsibilities.

The department chair conveys a perceived amount of time spent on various responsibilities.

The department chair/leader reports their least time spent on various responsibilities.

The department chair conveys a perceived amount of least time spent on various responsibilities.

The department chair/leader reports their time spent on meeting with their department during school hours.

The department chair/leader reports their time spent on meeting with their department during school hours.

The department chair/leader reports their time spent on meeting with their department after school hours.

**Subdomain 4: Beliefs about challenges in the role**

The department chair/leader reports their perceived challenge of students being below grade level.

The department chair/leader reports their perceived challenge of struggling teachers in their department.

The department chair/leader reports their perceived challenge of teachers whose students do not meet academic standards.

The department chair/leader reports their perceived challenge of the pressure to improve standardized test scores.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The department chair/leader reports their perceived challenge of lack of time to observe teachers in their department.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports their perceived challenge of high turnover rate with teachers in their department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports their perceived challenge of too many teachers to manage in their department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports their perceived challenge of too few teachers in their department to get the work done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports their perceived challenge of pressure from parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports their perceived challenge of pressure from the administration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports their perceived challenge of navigating the dual role of teacher and department chair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports their perceived challenge of keeping up with paperwork.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports their perceived challenge of managing unexpected complexities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Subdomain 5**  
**Beliefs about supports in the role**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The department chair/leader reports their perceived support of subscribing to educational journals.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports their perceived support of keeping up-to-date with current academic research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports their perceived support of speaking with other department chairs in their school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports their perceived support of speaking with department chairs outside of their school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports their perceived support of learning to let go of small issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports their perceived support of practicing self-care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports their perceived support of asking help from the administration when needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports their perceived support of asking for help from teachers within their department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports their perceived support of asking for help from others within the school when needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The department chair/leader reports their perceived support of delegating responsibilities to teachers within my department.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H: Correlation Matrix of Items Included for Each Construct to Determine Survey Reliability

1. Construct: Pillar Practices

a. Teaming and Collegial Inquiry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inter-Item Correlation Matrix</th>
<th>Item 9.3</th>
<th>Item 9.4</th>
<th>Item 9.5</th>
<th>Item 9.6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 9.3</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.376</td>
<td>.438</td>
<td>.288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 9.4</td>
<td>.376</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.396</td>
<td>.196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 9.5</td>
<td>.438</td>
<td>.396</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 9.6</td>
<td>.288</td>
<td>.196</td>
<td>.537</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b. Providing Leadership Roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inter-Item Correlation Matrix</th>
<th>Item 9.8</th>
<th>Item 9.8</th>
<th>Item 9.10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 9.8</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.381</td>
<td>.413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 9.9</td>
<td>.381</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 9.10</td>
<td>.413</td>
<td>.598</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

c. Mentoring

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inter-Item Correlation Matrix</th>
<th>Item 9.12</th>
<th>Item 9.13</th>
<th>Item 9.16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 9.12</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.576</td>
<td>.585</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 9.13</td>
<td>.578</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 9.16</td>
<td>.585</td>
<td>.341</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Construct: Unify Department

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inter-Item Correlation Matrix</th>
<th>Item 2.11</th>
<th>Item 2.17</th>
<th>Item 3.11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 2.11</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.538</td>
<td>0.504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 2.17</td>
<td>0.538</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 3.11</td>
<td>0.504</td>
<td>0.343</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Construct: Grow Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inter-Item Correlation Matrix</th>
<th>Item 2.4</th>
<th>Item 2.8</th>
<th>Item 2.9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 2.4</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.674</td>
<td>0.732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 2.8</td>
<td>0.674</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.705</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 2.9</td>
<td>0.732</td>
<td>0.705</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Construct: Instructional Leader

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inter-Item Correlation Matrix</th>
<th>Item 3.1</th>
<th>Item 3.7</th>
<th>Item 3.8</th>
<th>Item 5.2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 3.1</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.676</td>
<td>0.606</td>
<td>0.453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 3.7</td>
<td>0.676</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.574</td>
<td>0.339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 3.8</td>
<td>0.606</td>
<td>0.574</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 5.2</td>
<td>0.453</td>
<td>0.339</td>
<td>0.486</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix I: Percentage of Survey Responses to Each Item

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responsibilities: Currently Do</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I carry out roles in writing and/or setting curriculum</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I relay important information from the administration to the teachers in the department.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I make decisions for the department.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I mentor teacher(s) in my department.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I model strong teaching for teachers in my department.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I model learning for teachers in the department.</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I review teachers’ lesson plans and/or unit plans</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I observe lessons of teachers in my department.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I offer feedback to the teachers in my department.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I write teacher evaluations for teachers in my department.</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I meet with teachers in my department.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I support teachers when there are any issues with parents and/or students.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I order and/or approve supplies for teachers in my department.</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I approve programming and/or activities within the department.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I keep up-to-date on the most current research regarding pedagogy.</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I create the schedules for the teachers in my department.</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I create a sense of camaraderie among the department.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responsibilities: Should Do</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department chairs should carry out roles in writing and/or setting curriculum</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department Chairs’ Role: Currently</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>As department chair, I am the subject matter expert on my discipline for my high school.</td>
<td>0% 29% 46% 25%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I am central to improving the instruction (teaching and learning) in my department.</td>
<td>0% 17% 46% 38%</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, my role is administrative.</td>
<td>0% 17% 71% 13%</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I am the link between the principals and the teachers in my department.</td>
<td>0% 13% 63% 25%</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I am an advocate for change rather than a protector of the status quo.</td>
<td>0% 17% 58% 25%</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

```markdown
Department Chairs should relay important information from the administration to the teachers in the department. 0% 4% 38% 58%
Department chairs should make decisions for the department. 0% 13% 54% 33%
Department chairs should mentor teacher(s) in my department. 0% 0% 33% 67%
Department chairs should model strong teaching for teachers in my department. 0% 8% 25% 71%
Department chairs should model learning for teachers in the department. 0% 4% 42% 54%
Department chairs should review teachers’ lesson plans and/or unit plans 4% 4% 63% 29%
Department chairs should observe lessons of teachers in my department. 0% 0% 42% 58%
Department chairs should offer feedback to the teachers in my department. 0% 0% 33% 67%
Department chairs should write teacher evaluations for teachers in my department. 0% 0% 42% 58%
Department chairs should meet with teachers in my department. 0% 0% 29% 71%
Department chairs should support teachers when there are any issues with parents and/or students. 0% 0% 33% 67%
Department chairs should order and/or approve supplies for teachers in my department. 4% 17% 38% 42%
Department chairs should approve programming and/or activities within the department. 0% 4% 54% 42%
Department chairs should keep up-to-date on the most current research regarding pedagogy. 0% 8% 54% 38%
Department chairs should create the schedules for the teachers in my department. 33% 29% 29% 8%
Department chairs should create a sense of comradery among the department. 0% 0% 33% 67%
```
Department chairs should be the subject matter expert on their discipline for their high school. | 4%  | 33% | 33% | 29% |
Department chairs should be central to improving the instruction (teaching and learning) in their department. | 0%  | 8%  | 38% | 54% |
The department chair’s role should be administrative. | 0%  | 17% | 67% | 17% |
Department chairs should be the link between the principals and the teachers in their departments. | 0%  | 21% | 50% | 29% |
Department chairs should advocate for change rather than a protector of the status quo. | 0%  | 17% | 46% | 38% |

Department Chair’s Challenges

| It is challenging that students enter high school below grade level. | 0%  | 17% | 46% | 385 |
| It is challenging when teachers in my department are struggling (i.e., classroom management, grading on time, following curriculum) | 0%  | 13% | 33% | 54% |
| It is challenging when teachers in my department have students who underperform at the end of the year, showing little growth. | 0%  | 25% | 63% | 13% |
| The pressure to improve standardized test scores is a challenge as department chair. | 29% | 42% | 29% | 0% |
| It is challenging when I do not have enough time to observe the teachers in my department as much as I should/ would like. | 0%  | 21% | 21% | 58% |
| It is challenging that my department has a high teacher turnover rate. | 8%  | 58% | 21% | 13% |
| It is challenging that there are a lot of teachers in my department to manage. | 4%  | 46% | 33% | 17% |
| It is challenging that there are too few teachers in my department to get all the work that is needed done. | 13% | 58% | 25% | 4% |
| It is challenging that I receive a lot of pressure from parents as department chair. | 8%  | 50% | 33% | 8% |
| It is challenging that I receive a lot of pressure from the administration as department chair. | 8%  | 54% | 29% | 8% |
| It is challenging to navigate the dual role of teacher and department chair. | 4%  | 42% | 38% | 17% |
| It is challenging to keep up with paperwork as department chair. | 4%  | 50% | 33% | 13% |
| It is challenging to manage unexpected complexities (i.e., COVID-19 challenges, a teacher taking maternity leave) | 0%  | 29% | 50% | 21% |

Supports

| It is helpful to subscribe to educational journals. | 17% | 38% | 25% | 21% |
| It is helpful to keep up-to-date with academic research. | 8%  | 17% | 54% | 21% |
It is helpful to speak with other department chairs in my school.  
0% 4% 50% 46%

It is helpful to speak with department chairs outside of my school.  
0% 13% 63% 25%

It is helpful to let go of small issues.  
0% 13% 63% 25%

It is helpful to practice self-care (i.e., exercise, take an occasional day off, practice yoga or meditation)  
0% 13% 63% 25%

I feel supported when I ask the administration for help whenever I feel the need.  
0% 8% 71% 21%

I feel supported when I ask the teachers in my department to help.  
0% 13% 71% 17%

I feel supported when I ask any colleagues, even those outside my department, for help.  
0% 17% 67% 17%

It is helpful to delegate responsibilities to other teachers within my department.  
0% 17% 63% 21%

**Pillar Practices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Collaboration</th>
<th>Decision Making</th>
<th>Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I ask teachers in my department to team teach.</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I have teachers in my department use strategy development to solve problems together.</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I have teachers in my department use inquiry to ask each other questions and share ideas together.</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I have teachers in my department collaborate using approaches such as critical friends.</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I have teachers in my department participate in professional learning communities (PLCs).</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I have teachers in my department share teaching and learning practices through professional development.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I have teachers in my department share and exchange ideas.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I share decision making with teachers in my department.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I distribute tasks and/or responsibilities to teachers in my department as a way to support their learning.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I provide supports and challenges appropriate to the teachers in my department, depending on their capabilities.</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I engage in inquiry with teachers in my department to guide decisions and practice.</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I reflect with teachers in my department on their practice.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>As department chair, I take teaching walks with teachers in my department to informally discuss their teaching practice.</td>
<td>63%</td>
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<tr>
<td>As department chair, I create study groups with the teachers in my department.</td>
<td>50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>As department chair, I organize educational retreats (i.e., workshops) with the teachers in my department.</td>
<td>75%</td>
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<tr>
<td>As department chair, I engage in meaningful conversations with teachers in my department about teaching and learning.</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>As department chair, I explore firmly held convictions and/or beliefs about teaching with the teachers in my department.</td>
<td>8%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>As department chair, I establish developmental relationships with teachers in my department that are embedded within their careers.</td>
<td>8%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix J: Department Chairs’ Espoused Beliefs on Chairing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chair</th>
<th>Espoused Beliefs</th>
<th>Beliefs Influenced by Former Department Chair and School’s Leadership Team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Alex  | • Students come first  
        • Collaboration in the department | • Learned from former chair  
       • Emulated, respected former chair  
       | “I’m a teacher before anything.”  
       “The kids are my first priority.”  
       “Your students in the classroom come first.”  
       “My priority is that, that kid needed me, I sat there, because she’s my priority.”  
       “We have a duty of care, emotionally, academically, spiritually, for every child who walks into our building.”  
       “It was very important to me that the department works as a well-oiled, friendly machine.”  
       | “[Former department chair] was my mentor, she hired me, trained me.”  
       “If she said jump I just jumped.”  
       “I really looked at her as someone I admired and respected.”  
| Andy  | • Chairs supporting teachers | • Practice influenced by the former chair | “I had just watched her for 6-7 years, observed what she did.”  
       “So [former chair] hardly observed teachers…so… I go in as often as I can.”  
       “She was a great mentor for me…but she kind of alienated a lot of teachers, so I really try to make sure all the teachers feel comfortable.”  
       |}
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Charlie</th>
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</table>
| • Science should be taught as real-world | “It makes kids feel like science is real.”
“I say to them, you know you’d like to become educated citizens. You’re going to be voting on all these issues, like embryonic stem cells, like you’ve got to know what’s behind it.” | • Influenced by education | “The professor that I had was really good, and she had a whole philosophy of how you teach science.”
“I was supposed to become science chair there, because the current chair was thinking to the future, and so she wanted it, and also I had worked very closely with the principal there” “[leadership team at former school] all wanted me to become the science chair” |
| • High standards for science education | “I really felt like Jewish kids, they should get the best science education out there.” “The importance of all kids taking all three levels of the sciences.” | • Influenced by chair in former school |  |
| • Inclusivity | “Every kid should have, every high school kid, I don’t care what level, should have a strong foundation in bio, chem, and physics.” “Kids in the less academic class would say well, do you have to be a top student to go? No, if you want to go you can go,” “You still need to stretch the kids at their level, and have expectations of them.” | • School’s mission statement | Part of the mission statement of [name of school] was the grand conversation that you don’t have a Jewish side of yourself and a secular side and never the two shall meet.” |
| • Teacher growth | “We really feel like teachers should continue growing no matter how long they’ve been teaching.” |  |  |
| Jackie | • Teacher first | “I have no interest in administration—I have an interest in teaching.”  
“Would rather just teach.”  
“I’m kid-oriented.”  
“I’ll fight for the babysitting sooner than I’ll fight for my raise.”  
“I consider myself a mommy wherever I go.”  
“I really am more like a mommy in that situation.”  
“I’m like a big sister.” |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Chairs supporting teachers</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
|  |  | “The previous department chair told me what I should and shouldn’t be teaching, and I wanted to teach what I wanted to teach and when I wanted to teach it.”  
“I decided that if I run a department, a) I’ll be able to teach what I want to teach, and b) everybody who reports to me will be able to teach what they want to teach too.”  
“I have an extremely different style of the person I reported to before.”  
“He wasn’t kid-oriented. He was job-oriented. I’m kid-oriented.” |
|  | • Influenced by former chair |  |
|  | • Leadership shared their goals for chair | “When [leadership] hired me they told me right away we’ve been looking for a change in the math department.” |
Jamie • **Strict meritocracy**  
“I’m trying to shape the department into something that aligns with my core beliefs. Overall, I want to make sure that a kid who gets out of the school with a really high GPA is really a high-quality candidate for college.”  
“At that point I knew that if I pick any two A+s, those students are not equivalent. One is a genuine A+ and the other is probably not. So I don’t think it’s fair, especially to the students who really invested a lot in their education. So that was one of my priorities as chairman. Still is.”  
“Fighting a little bit against grade inflation.”  

**Leadership** shared their goals for chair  
“There was this idea that okay we didn’t have like a proper chairperson in the math department and we needed to fill this position at some point.”  
“In the beginning of the pandemic, n. So, even the fact that we were splitting the responsibilities between two people was not ideal. It was one of the things that concerned [former head of upper school] the most, I think. From what he shared with me.”  
“The idea of having a single person leading the department and with an idea of where the department was going.”

“[Leadership] said, please help us in changing [the department].”
| Pat   | Students are challenged. “More than that, you want students to be challenged at the right level.” “Kids change, and kids grow, and there’s some late bloomers as we call it, so how could we figure out how to do that?” [During Covid] “We’re going to hold kids accountable, and there’s going to be homework, and kids need to be paying attention.”
|       | Seeing the beauty in math. “My big thing was trying to move away from thinking of math as just solving for x, thinking of math as a set of processes and procedures, and seeing the beauty of math.” “We want kids to appreciate math, see its power, see its poetry in some ways.” “If they won’t appreciate it or understand it, why are we teaching it?”
|       | Compassion towards students. “The way we talk about kids.” “If I had a boss who didn’t speak respectfully about students, I wouldn’t want to be in that school.” “When we had a conversation about kids it was done in a very non-[evil tongue] kind of way.”
| Ricky | The chair must be an excellent teacher. “My teaching is important to me. Like, I must be an excellent teacher.”
|       | Influenced by former chair “He was a real role model for me in so many ways. He was a
| Ruby       | Chair’s personal growth | “I’ve always looked to expand my interests and goals as a teacher.” |
|           | Collegiality in the field | “Teaching is a very social job, it’s a very collegial job.” |
| Sam       | Finding the middle ground with the department. | “My personality tends to be more like, both of these are good options.” |
|           | Not being seen as an expert figure | “I’m not going to fight to the death on a lot of these issues.” |
|           |                           | “We don’t want to ruffle too many feathers.” |
|           |                           | “I also don’t walk around like the ‘department chair.’” |
|           |                           | “We didn’t want it to feel like, oh, the two of us know everything there is.” |
|           | Influenced by former chair | “I didn’t feel like I had a great role model of what a department chair was in the English department.” |
|           |                           | “I mean the only thing I would’ve wanted then was autonomy. Was the ability to make the decisions because I wasn’t really making so many of them.” |
|           |                           | “I didn’t feel like I had a great role model of what a department chair was in the English department.” |

- Department serves as a collective.
- “You can’t not be an excellent teacher and be department chair.”
- “I have to be great in the classroom.”
- “I don’t believe in mandates.”
- “I’ve never been a fan of the top-down approach.”
- “I can’t do anything on my own.”
- “I don’t see myself as an individual, because my leadership role is only as strong as my department.”
- “Leaders who are looking to take a center stage for themselves are not going to be successful.”
- “I’ve always looked to expand my interests and goals as a teacher.”
- “Teaching is a very social job, it’s a very collegial job.”
- “My personality tends to be more like, both of these are good options.”
- “I’m not going to fight to the death on a lot of these issues.”
- “We don’t want to ruffle too many feathers.”
- “I also don’t walk around like the ‘department chair.’”
- “We didn’t want it to feel like, oh, the two of us know everything there is

- fabulous teacher, and a leader, an inspiration, like I saw him as a wow, like I wish I could be like him one day.”
to know about teaching English.”
“I could learn from everyone here regardless of how long I’ve been teaching here, or teaching in general.”