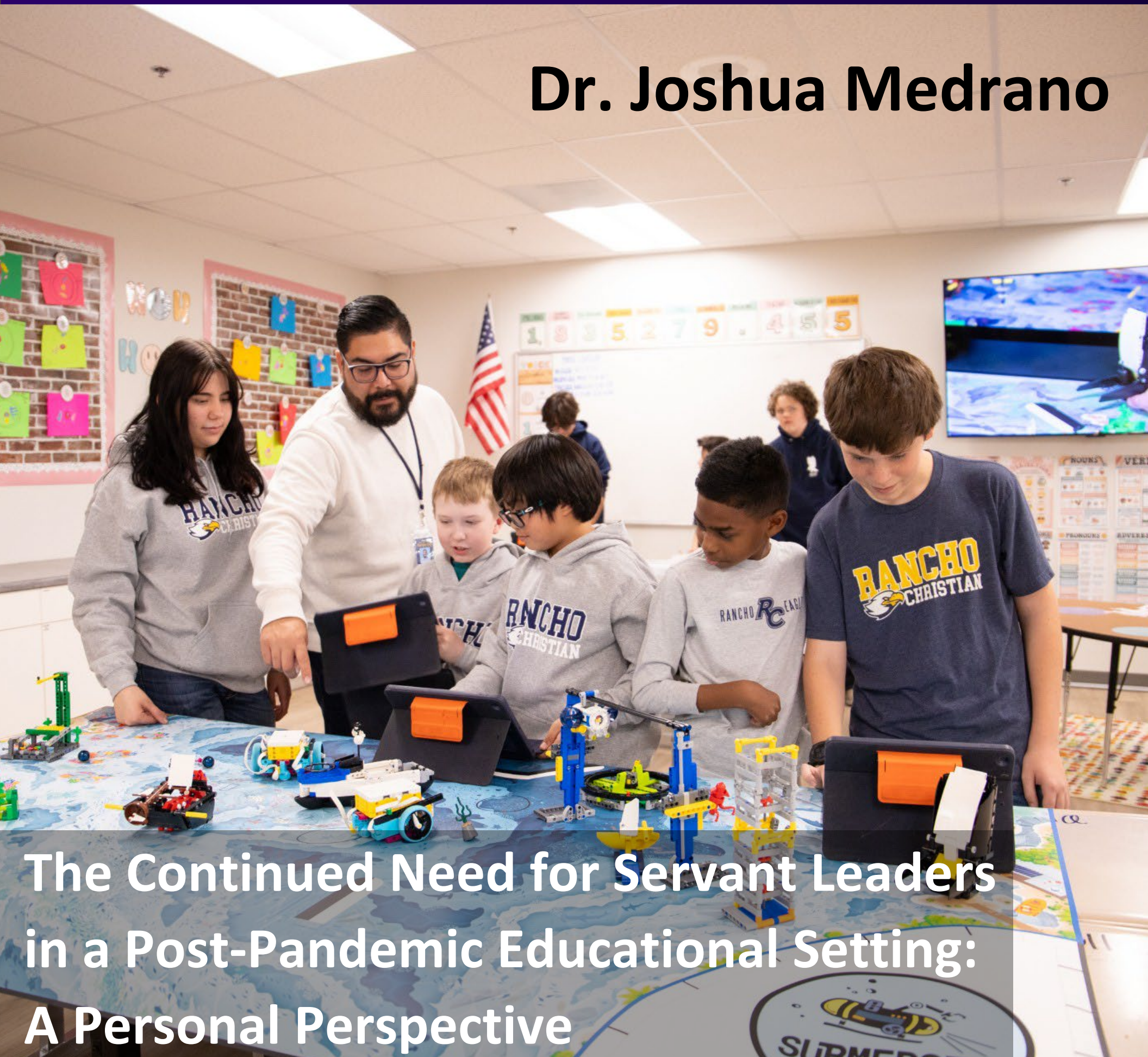


SPRING 2025

LEGACY

TRANSFORMATION IN ACTION

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**The Continued Need for Servant Leaders
in a Post-Pandemic Educational Setting:
A Personal Perspective**



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The Continued Need for Servant Leaders in a Post-Pandemic Educational Setting: A Personal Perspective

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When I began my teaching journey in South Central, Los Angeles, my time at AJMS was a blessing because the leadership team established multiple supporting systems that allowed me to enhance my pedagogical practices and methodology. After several years and three schools later, I made the decision to transition from teacher to administrator. One of my core goals was to offer the same experience I had to my team.

After careful reflection, I realized what made the school successful was the style of leadership. There was a teacher-first attitude that permeated throughout the school culture. Administrators genuinely valued the staff and worked to create an environment where people felt safe and their health was a priority. Experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic as a teacher there, I began to think about how leaders, including myself, can support their teams in a post-pandemic educational setting.

A survey conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2014 reported that teachers work in isolation, rarely collaborate or observe their peers, and 46% of teachers never received feedback from their leaders. Five years later, a report conducted by the United States Department of Education identified that teacher job satisfaction dropped by 15% and teachers were becoming more likely to leave the profession.



Now, after five years of suffering the lingering effects of the pandemic, we see teacher satisfaction in the profession at a higher risk than ever before. Teachers feeling the need to adapt new strategies and methodologies to close the gaps created by the COVID-19 disruption are experiencing a variety of stressors in the educational setting. Steiner and Woo (2021) explored the issue of job-related stress among teachers and identified that nearly one in four teachers stated they were likely to leave their jobs. Gabor (2022) shared that the number of education job openings surged by almost 75% by the fall of 2021, compared to the previous year. It is evident that education is in a state of crisis, and we are in need of new solutions to steady the profession. To achieve this, we need servant leaders more today than ever before to meet the needs of teachers and ease the unprecedented levels of stress documented in the research.

As a teacher, I experienced multiple leadership styles. Some, unfortunately, were managers masked as leaders. So I knew I wanted to offer a leadership experience similar to what I experienced as a teacher at AJMS. Morgan (2020) defines a leader as someone who sees how things can be improved and rallies people to move toward a better vision. Using this as a working definition, I ask how can servant leaders be a catalyst for combating the current crisis? Harper (2020) contends that a servant leader is sensitive to the needs of others, and is sensible, grounded and relatable in making practical, reasonable, realistic decisions that prompt others to rise to stated expectations for the benefit of everyone involved. The administrators at AJMS set the gold standard for me in my own leadership journey because of their intentionality. They made themselves available during my times of need, and most importantly, they actively listened to what I had to say. They did not dismiss any of my concerns or make me feel like I was the problem. As a result, the trust and understanding they built led to a relationship that was more proactive than reactive, and I made great strides growing as an educator.



Leaders influence individual and group behavior in the organization, and servant leaders support those in their charge through their value-oriented approach. Teachers trust leaders who show they have their best interests at heart. Staff feel more valued when leaders explain the “why” instead of the “how.” Sharing the vision and goals with the team allows everyone to understand and buy into the journey.

Hauden (2020) identified that servant leaders ask, “how can I help?” when teachers feel overwhelmed with work expectations and changes in the environment. This straightforward, meaningful expression of empathy goes a long way instead of simply stating expectations. By sharing common goals and working with the team to incorporate milestones, servant leaders help to identify areas of growth and work towards the ideal of work-life balance. And because servant leaders do not micro-manage, team members are less likely to experience burnout.

Servant leadership is essential in order to address the numerous needs researchers have identified in today’s teachers. Imagine if each of us adjusted our leadership approach to put the needs of our teachers first, in the same way that teachers adapt their instructional approaches to meet the varied and unique needs of the students in their care. This kind of flexibility and adaptability would go a long way in easing the stress and burnout we’re witnessing across the profession, and help us retain teachers rather than having them leave.

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Joshua Medrano holds an EdD in leadership focusing on systems thinking and educational policy. He has dedicated his career to fostering innovation in education. With years of experience teaching science and math, he successfully spearheaded numerous STEM-based programs that inspired students to engage with complex scientific concepts. Now, as Academic Dean, his passion for educational leadership and commitment to hands-on-learning empowers administrators, teachers and students to further enhance their learning and practice.



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