

**Psychological Perspectives on Contemporary  
Educational Issues**

# **EDUCATING THE PHOENIX**

**Rescuing Children, Reuniting Families, and Saving a School  
District After the 2018 Paradise, California Camp Fire**



**Amber Esping  
Jess Mercer**

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# **Educating the Phoenix**

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## **Praise for *Educating the Phoenix***

As you read this book, you'll marvel at the unexpected valor from people we look past every day—school “lunch ladies,” maintenance personnel, school administrators, bus drivers, and, of course, teachers—ordinary citizens who both followed through on their schools' exceptional safety policies and took heroic initiative when scripted evacuation plans were ineffective or inadequate. Esping and Mercer capture and highlight human ingenuity and self-sacrifice demonstrated on November 8, 2018 in Paradise, California, in ways that renew my hope in the capacity of ordinary American people to do the right thing, with courage, when called upon to act.

—**Frank N. Thomas, Emeritus Professor of Counseling and Counselor Education, Texas Christian University, USA**

This book is a powerful testament to the resilience of the human spirit. It chronicles the extraordinary efforts of the Paradise Unified School District to rebuild their community after the devastating Camp Fire. The story of how they persevered, innovated, and ultimately triumphed is both inspiring and informative. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in education, disaster recovery, or the power of human connection.

—**Trinette Marquis, APR Executive Director, California School Public Relations Association, USA**

As the former Mayor and another who lost everything in the Camp Fire, I watched our teachers and students come together to heal our community. The strength of our school system is one of the biggest reasons new families are moving to our town as we rebuild our community. Dr. Esping and Ms. Mercer's book, *Educating the Phoenix: Rescuing Children, Reuniting Families and Saving a School District after the 2018 Paradise, California Camp Fire* is a true and accurate retelling of how the PUSD saved our town.

—**Steve “Woody” Culleton, Former Mayor of Paradise, California, USA**

The Paradise Unified School District (PUSD) educational leaders demonstrated remarkable resilience in the aftermath of the Camp Fire, showcasing unwavering dedication to rebuilding the community's educational system despite the challenges they faced. We can recount the first hours of the fire and think how remarkable it was that no student was harmed in the evacuation, no easy feat when you have fire burning all around you and only one, jammed up, way out. Where I would note their true strength to be found was in the weeks and months after that, when they had to find students and families, find facilities, find hope, all in the name of restoring “normalcy”

back in the lives of their students and staff after such a tragedy. The innovative ways in which they did whatever it would take to get familiar faces back in a classroom, and heal through learning, together, is a story for the history books. *Educating the Phoenix* shows how these school leaders never gave up even though that would have been easier; never gave up when they were both personally and professionally impacted, because they could see the gleam of hope through dark smoke clouds, to focus on rebuilding Paradise.

—**Kindra Britt, Former Deputy Superintendent of Communications and Marketing for the California Department of Education, USA**

I would like to congratulate and thank Dr. Amber Esping for writing this book about our district's remarkable journey as we navigated this unprecedented environmental and human disaster. Her book clearly illustrates many of the actions we undertook, words of wisdom we learned along the way, a bit of advice, and our unrelenting commitment, resiliency, and love for our school district, employees, students, families, and community. Dr. Esping's book is a must-read for district leadership and educational communities as they plan and/or negotiate their way through any disaster that can and will occur at any time to anyone, even a small thriving school district that survived the largest California wildfire to date.

—**Michelle John O'Neal, Former Superintendent of the Paradise Unified School District, USA**

Sometimes a crisis is so widespread that every part of a community is decimated in short order. Some—including COVID-19, Hurricanes Ian and Sandy, the Joplin and Moore tornadoes, and the Camp Fire—are crises of massive magnitude, exceedingly complex and seemingly intractable at every turn. But as these authors show, nothing is intractable in the face of the human spirit and resolve. *Educating the Phoenix* is a testimony to the power of relationships imbued with sense of purpose. The book is both stunning storytelling and a helpful roadmap to thinking through how educational systems can prepare and persevere. How do communications reroute? How are human needs recognized and met? How can families, students, and educators recover and thrive in the aftermath of such devastation? In the vein of *Children of Katrina*, *Educating the Phoenix* shows a path forward, fueled by hope and resilience. In a time where educators are so often critiqued mercilessly, it's important to record stories like the one of Paradise USD personnel, who were nothing short of heroes in response to the Camp Fire. Even in the face of great personal risk, the teachers, staff, and leaders of PUSD did what needed to be done to keep kids safe and, after the Fire, to help them heal and thrive.

—**Jo Beth Jimerson, Professor, William L. and Betty F. Adams Chair of Education, Texas Christian University, Texas USA**

*Educating the Phoenix* is an amazing deep dive into the dedicated heroes of Paradise Unified School District. So many of us were displaced, living in unfamiliar places, wearing unfamiliar clothes, shaken with fear and uncertainty. This book tells the story of how dedicated individuals came together to restore some form of normalcy to the young people of our community... This is the story of how in a time of grief and fear the people of Paradise Unified showed their true character with generosity and love.

—**Kevin S. McKay, Former School Bus Driver Paradise Unified School District; Educator, Chico Unified School District (Portrayed by Matthew McConaughey in the 2025 film, *The Lost Bus*), USA**

# **Psychological Perspectives on Contemporary Educational Issues**

Series Editor  
Jonathan Plucker

For over 100 years, psychology has contributed to our understanding of education. These contributions have led to advances in instruction, assessment, student learning, creativity, talent development, and education policy, among many other areas. The *Psychological Perspectives on Contemporary Educational Issues* series provides a venue for scholars to examine important, contemporary issues within education from a psychological perspective, with a goal of proposing new ways to consider, and potentially address, these key issues. Proposals that use the lens of psychology to provide new insights about vexing problems within both formal and informal education are especially encouraged.

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**Amber Esping**

*and*

**Jess Mercer**



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*Dedicated to the People of the Paradise Unified School District*

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Amber Esping, Ph.D.** is an associate professor of Educational Psychology at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas, USA. In many of her previous publications, Amber wrote about researchers who have built meaningful careers around studying social phenomena related to their own personal adversity (e.g. her 2018 book, *Epistemology, Ethics, and Meaning in Unusually-Personal Scholarship*). The faculty members she met through this work view themselves as “wounded healers.” For them, writing and teaching provides access to both a successful scholarly career and a personal pathway through challenge. Writing *Educating the Phoenix* provided an opportunity to put into practice what she has learned from this work; Amber’s parents and brother escaped Paradise by driving through the Fire with only the clothes they were wearing, some important financial documents, and three pets. Fortunately, they were able to rebuild and move back to Esping Way just ahead of the third anniversary of the Fire. Amber’s nephew Jacob graduated from Paradise High School 62 years after her Dad did, in 2021. Amber lives in Texas, and has two sons and a daughter with her husband, Thomas. This is her fourth book.

**Jess Mercer** is a Paradise, California, USA community artist and an expert on trauma-informed art education. She is the founder of Butte County Art on Wheels, a community-oriented mobile therapeutic art studio and She has been deeply rooted in Paradise since she moved to the town with her father at age fifteen, but she came to national prominence with the creation of the *Ridge Key Phoenix*, a striking 800-pound monument created from more than 18,000 keys that once opened the doors to homes, schools, businesses, cars and places of worship in Paradise. She has been featured in media ranging from CNN and NPR to the BBC, but more meaningful for her are the numerous local awards, among them the *Key to the Town of Paradise* (the first recipient of this honor since the town was incorporated in 1979), and the Paradise Unified School District *Caring Heart Award*,

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both in 2019. She created and directs Camp Fire survivor school programs including “Tap-Pen, Tap-Out,” “15 in 15 Murals,” and the “Balanced Brain Project,” a 36-week, trauma-informed therapeutic art program focusing on trauma and self-awareness in students impacted by the Camp Fire and other adverse childhood experiences. She is the founder of Butte County Art on Wheels, a community-oriented mobile therapeutic art studio. Jess’s parents lost their home in the Camp Fire, which also destroyed the art studio she shared with her father. Jess currently lives in the neighboring city of Chico with her wife, Ashley.

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# FOREWORD

As the former Superintendent for Paradise Unified School District, I was humbled and honored when asked to write the Foreword for this inspiring story. As I read each chapter of *Educating the Phoenix: Rescuing Children, Reuniting Families and Saving a School District after the 2018 Paradise, California Camp Fire*, I was brought back to a time of hard work surrounded by many visionary individuals. I remembered the tears, laughter, innovation, and the joy of working side by side with a brilliant team. Each of us carried our own trauma, and we realized we needed one another to keep doing our important work. I hope when you have completed this book you are able to come away with the belief that by working together and holding each other up, you can overcome what is thought by many to be unattainable.

I would like to congratulate and thank Dr. Amber Esping for writing this book about our district's remarkable journey as we navigated this unprecedented environmental and human disaster. Her book clearly illustrates many of the actions we undertook, words of wisdom we learned along the way, a bit of advice, and our unrelenting commitment, resiliency, and love for our school district, employees, students, families, and community.

Dr. Esping's book is a must read for district leadership and educational communities as they plan and/or negotiate their way through any disaster that can and will occur at any time to anyone, even a small thriving school district that survived the largest California wild fire to date.

**Michelle John O'Neal**, Retired Superintendent,  
Paradise Unified School District, USA

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Our deepest thanks to the Paradise Unified School District employees who agreed to be represented by name in this book: Tanya Harter, Larry Johnson, Dena Kapsalis, Reiner Light, David McCready, Michelle John O'Neal, Tracy Parks, Chris Rinesmith, Linda Shields, Cynthia Smith, Victoria Steindorf, Tom Taylor, Jacob Timm, and Angie Van Blaricom.

We are also indebted to everyone else who lived this story but who is not named in these pages. We hope this book honors your anonymous contributions to your town and its children. We know many teachers, administrators, and PUSD staff who are reading this book personally saved students' lives on November 8, 2018. We also know that, seven years on, many of you are still doing this in smaller but significant ways every day. Bless you and thank you.

We wish to acknowledge our family members who experienced the Fire first-hand: Gilbert Esping, Mary Esping, Michael Esping, and Ashley Mercer.

Jess Mercer would like to thank the thousands of strangers in Paradise who welcomed and trusted her offers of help.

We are grateful to the volunteers at the Gold Nugget Museum in Paradise who assisted in creating the Resource list at the end of this book.

Two Texas Christian University master's students, Noortje Hermanns and Josie Ferrante, provided indispensable support throughout this project. Noortje gathered and summarized media accounts of the Camp Fire, helped conduct two interviews, and visited Paradise for the Third Anniversary Community Unifying Event. Josie transcribed many of our interviews and assisted with obtaining permission to use specific photographs.

Amber would like to thank her Texas family, who supported her in so many ways during the writing of this book—Thomas, Donna, Dylan, Khalil, and Merideth—and also Bobby and Kelli Spencer, who offered necessary support towards the end of the project.

A huge thank you to Jonathan Plucker, our Series Editor at Emerald (and longtime supporter in so many ways), and Cathy Sellars, Emerald Publishing Operations Editor.

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## CHAPTER 1

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# INTRODUCTION

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*May you find Paradise to be all its name implies*

—Road sign as you enter the town of Paradise, California

Nearly four weeks after the devastating November 8, 2018 Camp Fire obliterated the town of Paradise, California, I (Amber) found myself spending yet another late night obsessively scrolling social media for information. The home my elderly parents shared with my brother was one of the nearly 14,000 homes destroyed (Boghani, 2019). Since it had been hard for my family to access updates from their temporary berths at the Oroville Nazarene Church, the Yuba City Red Cross shelter, and eventually a hotel room two hours from Paradise, I was trying to relay necessary information from my own home in Texas. The 3-minute video currently on my screen had been uploaded to the Town of Paradise Facebook page earlier that day. The speaker was Matt Gates, Public Information Officer for the Town. Dressed casually in a long-sleeved plaid shirt and jeans, he stood in front of a devastated house. A brick chimney was the last waypost signifying that this had once been a family home, and it was surrounded on all sides by indecipherable piles of char. It was disorienting, impossible for my brain to create order out of the scene.

Gates was offering information for Paradise residents who were impatiently awaiting the reopening of evacuation zones. The town was a black, fuliginous wasteland and an attractive target for looters, yes, but it was also saturated with toxic chemicals and nearly 100,000 huge, unstable, “hazard trees” that could fall at any time (Associated Press, 2019; Curwen & Serna, 2018). For these reasons the perimeter of the Fire scar

around Paradise and the neighboring communities was locked down and patrolled 24/7 by a contingent of the US Army National Guard. This provisional reopening of Paradise at the checkpoint would be the residents' first opportunity since their escape to see with their own eyes what, if anything, remained of their homes, businesses, schools, and places of worship. "You will be going through a checkpoint where they will be issuing some personal protective gear," Gates said in the video.

I'm gonna demonstrate how that protective gear works. Included in there, there's gonna be a full-body Tyvek<sup>®</sup> suit, some rubber gloves, an N95 mask, and some information that you should go over before you begin to go through the remains of your property.

The video cuts here, and then Gates goes on. "We want to remind everyone that when you return home," he gestures to the debris behind him, "there are a lot of hazards that you'll want to be aware of." He turns away again, and for the first time the cadence of his speech accelerates. His shoulders drop, signaling resignation to a difficult situation.

"Um...behind me is my house."

The moment passes in an instant, and he's back to giving advice about how to safely sift through rubble. What a crushing example of quiet, unflashy heroism, I thought, this man just doing his job so competently among the ruins of his family home. It was not *a* house. It was *his* house.

By the time I saw Gates's video I was already familiar with many more dazzling examples of courage—ubiquitous accounts of firefighters and police driving and even running in preternatural late-morning darkness toward the danger (see [Honea, 2018](#) for a dramatic video), and of medical personnel who stayed with critically ill patients while nine campus buildings, the main hospital, and one of the two ambulances en route to their location, burned around them ([Gabbert, 2019](#)). I had also begun hearing about parents, teachers, bus drivers, and other Paradise Unified School District (PUSD) employees who shepherded thousands of children and teens to safety through and between walls of flame that were, quite literally, melting the metal on the vehicles they were driving ([Gee & Anguiano, 2021](#); [Villareal, 2018](#)). Some of these rescuers sang songs for the children and feigned confidence. Others prayed for either safe deliverance or a quick death. Some teachers who stayed with 22 elementary children escaping by bus prayed that the "smoke would kill them first" ([Johnson, 2021](#), p. 166). One female school employee I spoke with rescued four elementary school students with one other adult in her personal car. When it looked like the Fire was set to overtake them, she contemplated whether she possessed the physical and emotional capacity to render the children unconscious quickly:

This was my hardest moment. 10:26 in the morning. It's pitch black. There's power poles and telephone poles that were on Fire. And I'm driving..., and I had

this thought of if that falls, we're trapped. And I'm going, "how do you knock somebody out? If those kids are in the car, like are we gonna die of asphyxiation first? Or are we gonna burn? Like can I hit these kids so I can knock them out?" Because I had a second grader, a third grader, and two fourth graders.

I had no doubt that many of these heroes were watching Gates's video with me, and that by now they also already knew, intellectually if not yet viscerally, that they had no home or friend's home or favorite store or church or school or pets to come back to once the borders opened. These people, displaced and traumatized, were about to save Paradise's children once again.

### THE MAGNITUDE OF THE DAMAGE

When school started on November 8, 2018 the PUSD boasted a thriving network of 11 campuses housing 3,401 students and 390 full-time employees (D. McCready, personal communication, February 3, 2023). Four hours later, three schools were reduced to ash and all PUSD power, communications and maintenance infrastructures were wiped out. The foodservice warehouse and offices were gone. The transportation office was gone. The bus yard and its compressed natural gas filling station were damaged (J. Timm, personal communication, November 5, 2021). Seventeen buses were damaged or reduced to melted, sooty shells (M. John O'Neal, personal communication, October 9, 2021). The remaining eight campuses were in various states of ruin, from smoke damage only (one school and the District Office) to partially or mostly destroyed (seven schools) (J. Timm, personal communication, November 5, 2021). Much of the damage was irreparable (See [Table 1.1](#)). The students and teachers were scattered in a diaspora that spanned the US and internationally (See [Figure 1.1](#)). Those who remained local bunked in tents, cars,

**TABLE 1.1 Paradise Unified School District Status After the Camp Fire**

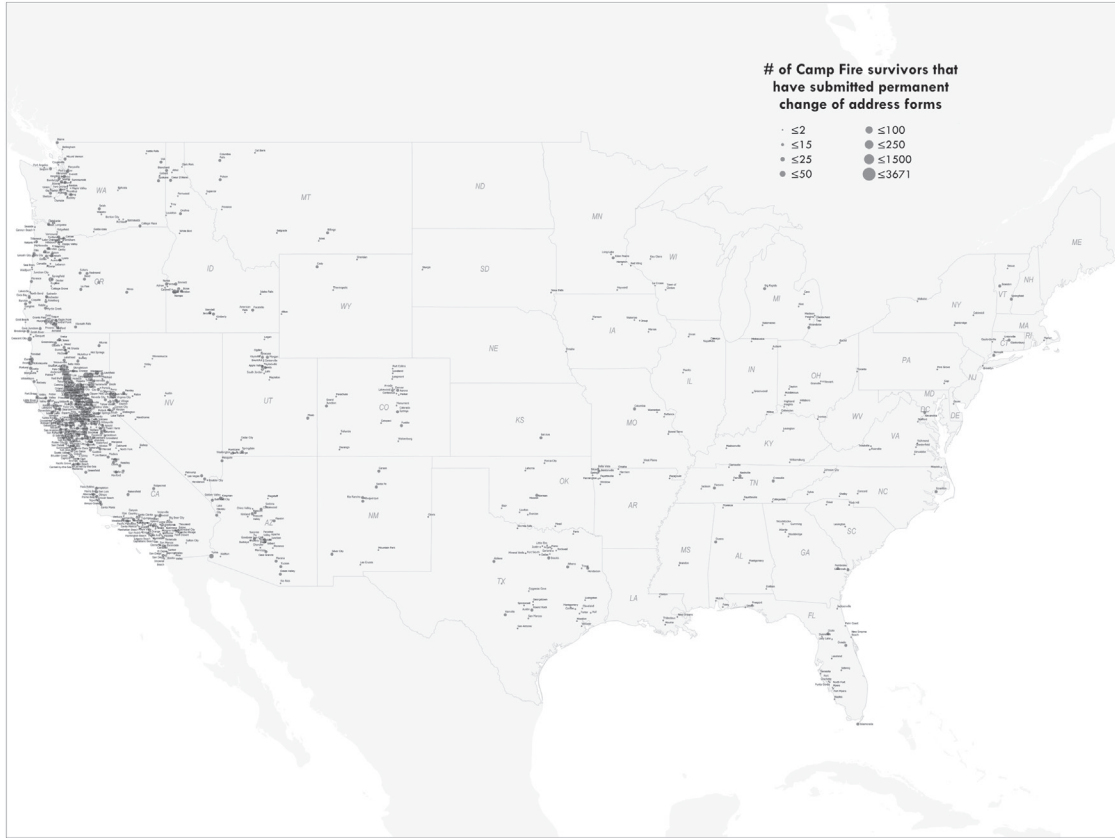
Elementary Schools	
Cedarwood	Smoke damage only
Pine Ridge	One portable destroyed, two damaged; gym electrical panel and siding damaged
Ponderosa	Multipurpose room damaged beyond repair; administration building damaged beyond repair; six Kindergarten portable classrooms destroyed; two portable classroom buildings were destroyed at the south end of campus (District Nurse and Music room); Building F at the south end of campus was damaged at the overhang from trees that were just feet away
Paradise	Entire site destroyed

(Continued)

**TABLE 1.1 Paradise Unified School District Status After the Camp Fire (continued)**

<b>Junior High Schools</b>	
Paradise Intermediate School	One one-room stick built structure destroyed
Evergreen Sixth-Grade	Four portable classrooms destroyed; one portable office/library destroyed; one portable restroom destroyed
Creekside Sixth-Grade	Four portable classrooms destroyed; one portable restroom destroyed
<b>High Schools</b>	
Paradise High School	Five portable classrooms were destroyed at the north end of campus; auto shop roof was damaged; athletic training room was damaged; softball field lighting, backstop and scoreboard were destroyed; baseball field scoreboard was destroyed; north end of the running track was severely damaged; septic treatment plant was destroyed; three modular classrooms at the south end of campus had all of the electrical wiring on the exterior destroyed, along with siding and Bard HVAC units; portable classroom at the northeast across the street from PHS destroyed along with its septic system
Ridgeview Continuation High School	All buildings except the shop were destroyed; the shop (which is a metal building) sustained damage to the metal siding on the south side and a wooden overhang over the man door and compressor was destroyed
<b>Other School Types</b>	
Honey Run Academy (servicing students who have an education expulsion order, probation referral, attendance review board referral, or administrative order)	Two portable classrooms and one portable office were destroyed; a house used for storage was destroyed; the septic system was destroyed
Pearson Center Day School (servicing individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities)	Entire building destroyed, along with a house that was at the north end of the property
<b>Administration and Operations</b>	
Maintenance	Steel maintenance building with storage and offices destroyed; two Quonset huts for maintenance equipment storage/supplies damaged
Food Service	Foodservice warehouse and offices destroyed; three walk-in freezer units destroyed
Transportation Yard	Compressed natural gas bus filling station damaged; bus barn south exterior wall damaged; transportation portable office destroyed; 17 buses and multiple district vehicles destroyed
District Office	Smoke damage only
Power and Communications	Destroyed

Source: Author's own.



**Figure 1.1** Camp Fire Survivor Diaspora, based on US Post Office change of address requests. An original digital image courtesy of Peter Hansen.

trailers, shelters, hotels, and in tense and crowded conditions with relatives and friends living outside the burn scar. Indeed, 70% of PUSD's full-time employees lost their homes or were temporarily or permanently displaced due to Fire damage or other hazards (T. Taylor, personal communication, February 3, 2023). Many would never return.

## WHAT INFORMATION IS IN THIS BOOK?

The focus of this book is rebuilding an entire school system in the wake of absolute physical devastation and population diaspora from wildfire. On November 8, 2018, 90% of Paradise's population of approximately 26,500 residents left town in about the same time it takes to watch the movie *Gone with the Wind*. It seemed inevitable to many that PUSD would shut down, perhaps permanently, with any remaining students transferring to neighboring school districts. This was what California law required under these circumstances, but this is not what the students or their parents said they wanted. When PUSD leadership visited with families, the message was clear: These children had already lost nearly everything else that was stable their lives, and dispersing them to unfamiliar schools would be another blow. They wanted to be together with their friends and their teachers. Hearing this feedback, Paradise Superintendent Michelle John O'Neal led the charge to keep the PUSD intact. From the County Superintendent level all the way to California Governor Gavin Newsom's office, she implored, "Give me a couple weeks to try and find places to bring kids together because that's what their parents are asking for." She prevailed, and many kids came back—even if they or their parents had to drive hours every day to get to school, and even if they had to go to school in some very unconventional locations. Larry Johnson, who was principal of Paradise Intermediate (relocated to an empty Orchard Supply Hardware (OSH) store in the neighboring city of Chico) described how meaningful this turned out to be:

The fact that one kid, even one kid, would go to school in a hardware store instead of a school that was probably much easier to get to, it's just remarkable. The fact that so many kids reunited and came back. And parents would literally drive from hours away just to get their kids to school to be with their teachers and their friends.

As we approach the five-year anniversary of the Camp Fire on November 8, 2023, Paradise Unified is a dynamic, fully functioning district with six beautiful campuses and an e-learning academy. Enrollment is 1,576 students (46% of its pre-Fire value) who are served by 110 full-time teachers (57% of pre-Fire). Now, as before the Fire, many of the students struggle economically (Pre-Fire, Social Security was the main source of income for

people in Paradise, and nearly 70% of the student body qualified for free or reduced lunch). There are drugs on the Ridge. Kids get into trouble. Mental health, an important consideration for Paradise schools even before the Camp Fire, is an even more vital area of concern. But despite all the challenges, the Paradise schools have emerged from the ashes as vibrant spaces where an ethic of caring pervades both large-scale decision-making and small, personal interactions. The District describes itself on the California Department of Education accountability website as a “hub for community,” a “safe place for families as well as a source of hope in our community,” and a resource that is “often looked to as the leading organization in the [town] rebuilding process” (California Department of Education, 2022). Sports are enthusiastically attended. Visual arts thrive. Most important of all, children and teens learn together in classrooms with their teachers and friends. This book tells the remarkable story of how the people of the PUSD made this happen.

Michelle John O’Neal, PUSD Superintendent at the time of the Camp Fire, identified six individuals who were part of the key leadership team during the disaster, its immediate aftermath, and the long process of rebuilding. We were able to interview five of these people: Michelle and her two assistant superintendents, Tom Taylor and David McCready; Dena Kapsalis, Director of Student Services; Jacob Timm, Director of Facilities, Maintenance and Operations; and Reiner Light, Camp Fire Educational Coordinator. The sixth member of this leadership team, PUSD legal counsel, did not participate in the present book. We also called on the wisdom of other essential District personnel, including Paradise Intermediate School Principal Larry Johnson; teachers Cynthia Smith, Tracy Parks, and Victoria Steindorf; bus driver/trainer Chris Rinesmith and bus driver Angie Van Blaricom; Director of Food Services Tanya Harter, and Food Service Site Manager Linda Shields. We supplemented their first-person accounts with deep dives into the Camp Fire news coverage. My coauthor, Jess Mercer, works in Paradise and was present during the Fire and throughout the rebuilding. I visited Paradise several times a year, toured the schools, and attended various commemorations and community celebrations of milestones.

Chapter 2, *Every Kid Made It*, focuses on the actions of PUSD administrators, teachers, bus drivers, food service professionals, and other staff the morning of the Camp Fire. We provide evidence that these individuals collectively saved the lives of thousands of school children on November 8, 2018.

Chapter 3, *Reuniting Parents and Children*, explains how the people of the PUSD, assisted by volunteers from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, kept the students safe, warm, and fed at the evacuation sites. It also describes Paradise Intermediate School’s successful plan for reuniting all PUSD students with their families.

Chapter 4, *Keeping the Students Together* explains how the people of the PUSD fought to keep the District open after the Fire had destroyed nearly all of its schools and left approximately 70% of its employees and nearly all of its students homeless.

Chapter 5, *The School in the Hardware Store*, is a case study of Paradise Intermediate School, which relocated to an empty OSH store in a neighboring city. The teachers transformed the aisles into classrooms. Lunch ladies served meals from the checkstands. Physical education took place in the garden center. This school serves as a beautiful example of commitment, creativity, and community in the wake of disaster.

Chapter 6, *Even Heroes are Human*, describes how the PUSD administrators, teachers and staff supported each other while caring for their students' emotional needs after the Fire. Much of the success in rebuilding the District can be attributed to this ethic of caring.

Chapter 7, *Embracing Radical Empathy*, is coauthor Jess Mercer's first-person account of her trauma-informed art education practice with the PUSD schools. Jess describes her personal experience of the Fire, focusing on how her personal history prepared her to respond to tragedy in such a public way. She also tells the story of how the *Ridge Key Phoenix* came to be. This chapter is unique in that the information has not been filtered through another writer's interpretation, as is the case with our interview-based chapters.

Chapter 8, *Phoenix Rising*, offers a summary of the resilience factors individual PUSD employees were able to draw on while recovering from the Camp Fire.

We close with an Epilogue, where we look back on the Camp Fire recovery and catch up with the PUSD employees introduced in previous chapters. Appendix A offers bulleted advice from each of them. Appendix B lists selected books, websites, and films pertaining to the Camp Fire, Paradise, and the PUSD.

## WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?

We wrote this book for the people of the PUSD, and also for school leaders, teachers, counselors, bus drivers, cafeteria and maintenance staff, paraprofessionals, and others who wish to learn from their extraordinary example. Massive wildfires and other forms of environmental catastrophe are becoming so common that it may be worth planning ahead for your own school district (Smith, 2019; Stanley, 2021). Case in point: On August 8, 2023, one day before Paradise USD celebrated the grand opening of its beautiful new high school campus, the town of Lahaina, in Maui, burned to the ground. The death toll, still uncertain as I write this, has already surpassed the Camp Fire. Paradise is of course reaching out, "from one Paradise to another" to share their unique expertise.