INTENT VS IMPACT: A MIXED METHODS EXPLORATORY STUDY OF K-12 CENTRAL

OFFICE EQUITY LEADERS

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Diversity, equity, and inclusion, or DEI, have emerged as prominent subjects of discourse in recent years, with evolving implications and definitions over time. Despite extensive efforts in education reform spanning the past 3 decades, the current educational system appears to be heavily influenced by partisan dominance. This mixed methods exploratory research study investigated the role of PreK–12 Central Office equity leaders by examining their practices, variables defining their roles, and methods for measuring impact. This mixed methods study utilized a concurrent triangulation research design. This study drew upon the Fields Equity Leaders Survey (FELS) (2024), specifically designed to gather quantitative and qualitative data for this study. By addressing these research questions, this study may contribute to a deeper understanding of the roles, practices, and impact assessment strategies of PreK–12 Central Office equity leaders, ultimately informing the structure and supports available to equity leaders. Findings revealed significant insights into the challenges related to structural barriers, belief systems, and resource allocation that hinder equity leaders' ability to drive meaningful change. Moreover, the study uncovered the diverse range of metrics and data utilized by equity leaders for monitoring the impact of this work. This dissertation may contribute to a deeper understanding of district-level equity leadership and informs best practices for promoting equitable educational environments.

<u>Dedication</u>

This dissertation is dedicated to my late grandfather Oscar L. Fields Sr., whose spirit was with me every step of the way on this journey to obtaining my doctorate. To every Black girl who dared to defy the odds and achieve those things they were afraid of, in a world where your value and contributions may go unseen, know that you are remarkable, you are worthy, and you deserve to be celebrated. It is an honor to dedicate this body of work to you.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Nieto reminded us of the wisdom of bell hooks, "To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin" (Nieto, 2012, p.2). When one considers the "necessary conditions" for learning, they must shift their focus to the learners themselves and ask, "Who is doing the learning?" It becomes apparent, based on the findings of numerous researchers, that it is essential to truly understand the identity and individual needs of students. Only then can you create the necessary conditions for learning to thrive. School districts throughout the United States continue to grapple with the pursuit of best practices and strategies that meet the needs of all students. Although not new concepts, diversity, equity, and inclusion have recently gained prominence as essential factors in enhancing the quality of education for American students.

Background of the study

In the realm of public education, Clayton et al. (2020) state that equity in schools breeds equality in society, and the lack of equity in public education exacerbates societal inequality (Clayton et al., 2020). This research study was centered around central office equity leaders at the PreK–12 public schools, aiming to decipher any common practices among equity leaders and a comprehensive understanding of the structure of their roles and the potential variables that may influence their impact. This study also sought to uncover any common barriers faced by district-level equity leaders and explore the methods they employ to measure the impact of their initiatives.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion, or DEI, have emerged as prominent subjects of discourse in recent years, with evolving implications and definitions over time. Despite being longstanding

concepts, in the year 2020, a heightened focus on racial climate was witnessed, encompassing attitudes, perceptions, and expectations related to race (Griffin, 2011). This intensified attention can be attributed to increased awareness of issues like police brutality, political tensions, and the global pandemic, making DEI discussions prevalent in educational institutions, corporations, businesses, politics, and day-to-day conversations. Consequently, there was an uprising in acknowledgment and support from various organizations. Many educational establishments responded by establishing dedicated DEI-focused positions, acknowledging and supporting the importance of fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion. Irving et al. (2021) affirmed that hiring equity directors signaled a new direction in how districts aimed to confront persistent educational inequities.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

In most educational settings, the term diversity is often merely used as a descriptor or metric in assessing the representation of minority groups within the broader population. Typically, inquiries revolve around the question, "How diverse are they?" and the answer predominantly always refers to the racial demographics of both staff and students. However, Trainer et al. (2019) cautioned against this imprecise usage of diversity and prompted a shift toward more purposeful and incisive questions that delved deeper into the true meaning and dimensions of diversity. Today, we should have a better understanding of diversity. Diversity extends beyond just minority representation and encompasses various aspects such as race, age, gender, class, religion, and language. Shields and Sayani (2005) defined cultural diversity as inclusive of all influences that contribute to the dynamic identity formation of an individual or group. Within an educational context, Shields and Sayani emphasized that diversity encompassed socioeconomic class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, race, ethnicity, culture, and language.

Additionally, Outlaw (2014) explained that diversity could be examined from the perspective of individual or group/social differences. Individual differences include traits like personality, learning styles, or life experiences, while group differences encompass more common characteristics such as race, class, or gender.

In the landscape of K–12 education, the notion of diversity has expanded to encompass more comprehensive measures, including diverse representation not only among the teaching staff but also within the curriculum and the overall student population. Educational institutions are increasingly recognizing the significance of diversity initiatives, committing themselves to address the unique needs of diverse groups and enhancing their efforts to recruit "diverse" individuals into their academic communities. Districts choose equity directors to help them achieve transformative goals that they have struggled to attain for a long time. Although equity directors have long been present in higher education settings (Irby et al. 2021), these diversity initiatives aim to foster an inclusive learning environment that embraces various cultural perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences. In addition, they recognize the importance of having a diverse teaching staff who can serve as positive role models for students, promoting cross-cultural understanding and empathy.

At its core, equity refers to providing individuals with precisely what they require to thrive. A common misunderstanding about equity is the tendency to equate it with equality. However, equity involves tailoring support and resources to meet each individual's unique and diverse needs. In Figure 1, a compelling image illustrates the distinction between equality and equity, where a diverse group of people with varying requirements receives the same bicycle initially, followed by an image of the same diverse individuals receiving a bicycle that aligns with

their specific needs. This visual representation vividly highlights the importance of addressing individual differences to achieve true equity.

Figure 1

Distinction Between Equality and Equity

Note: Adopted from Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Copy right 2017.

In 2014, Outlaw presented a comprehensive definition of equity, referring to it as "the creation of opportunities for historically underrepresented populations to have equal access to and participate in educational programs that are capable of closing the achievement gaps in student success and completion" (Outlaw,2014, p.527). According to Chu (2019), equity in education has been defined in a variety of ways, including equity in access to educational resources (input, such as financing and educators), equity in learning outcomes (output, frequently evaluated by high-stakes test scores), and to a lesser extent, equity in the process, such as pedagogy (Chu, 2019). Additionally, Chu (2019) highlighted other definitions of equity, one of which focuses on "policies and practices that ensure every student has access to an education centered around meaningful learning—one that imparts deeper learning skills essential for today's society, empowering students to become independent lifelong learners" (p. 4).

In the last two decades, there has been a surge in popularity of inclusion. While its exact origins and widespread adoption remain uncertain, the term is frequently employed in policy documents, mission statements, and political speeches, and it is now often linked with diversity and equity initiatives. However, when used in an educational context, inclusion is commonly associated with the integration of students with disabilities into regular classrooms alongside their non-disabled peers. Despite its prevalence, there still exists a lack of consensus regarding the comprehensive meaning of inclusion (Griffen, 2021). A common misconception prevails that inclusion naturally occurs in environments where diversity and equity are embraced and valued. In public schools, inclusion may be a focal point for the special education administration team or even incorporated into the job title of the equity leader. However, the expectations for inclusion in the role of equity leaders appear to be implicit and often assumed to involve heightened efforts toward promoting diversity. Historically, inclusion was primarily regarded as a civil rights issue focused on students with disabilities. However, in recent years, the concept of inclusion has evolved to encompass not only students but also staff and community members. The central aim is to cultivate a sense of belonging and value within the educational organization. Inclusion extends beyond academic achievement, specific competencies, or school placements; it also relates to individual and group experiences, social participation, access to quality education, and overall well-being. Thus, inclusive education is viewed as an approach that acknowledges individuality and strives to enhance presence, access, participation, and success within a learning society (Hyde & Power, 2006).

Despite extensive efforts in education reform spanning the past 3 decades, the current educational system appears to be heavily influenced by partisan dominance. According to a report by Green and Paul in 2021, blue states may have had a higher prevalence of school districts with

chief diversity officers, reflecting the greater support for their objectives and programs in the prevailing political climate (Paul & Greene, 2021). Substantial evidence exists to underscore the enduring impact of racism in the educational system. Welborn (2019) emphasized that research has consistently focused on addressing access, opportunity, and achievement gaps among students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social class backgrounds since the publication of the Coleman Report (Coleman, 1966). Over the past 5 decades, diversity, equity, and inclusion have increasingly gained importance in the current educational policies and reforms. Nevertheless, persistent disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes for marginalized groups continue to plague our education system. Outlaw (2014) drew attention to the devastating effects of racism and its ongoing influence on racially diverse groups, leading to disparities in wealth, poverty, health, access to educational opportunities, and achievement levels among different racial and ethnic communities.

Definition of Terms

In the context of this research study, a clear understanding of key definitions was essential. The following relevant terms and their meanings are outlined below to provide a comprehensive foundation:

Diversity: Refers to the range of differences and unique characteristics exhibited by individuals or groups within a particular context. These differences may include but are not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, socioeconomic status, and language (DuPont, 2019, Fields, 2024).

Equity: Refers to the idea of providing fair or appropriate access to rights and privileges for people who represent known marginalized groups (Doggette, 2022).

Educational equity: The assurance that every student has robust access to the core elements of a quality education they need during their education despite race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, family background, or income (National Conference of State Legislatures [NCSL], 2018).

Inclusion: Refers to inclusion of all, regardless of race, ethnicity, disability, gender, sexual orientation, language, socioeconomic status, and any other aspect of an individual's identity that might be perceived as different (Griffen, 2021).

Equity leader: A PreK–12 school district central office administrator whose title includes one of the following terms in any variation: diversity, equity, or inclusion (Fields, 2024).

Impact: Refers to a powerful effect that something, especially new, has on a situation or person (Cambridge Business English Dictionary, 2023).

Culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL): This is a set of practices and traits with which educators and researchers are always seeking and improving (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Statement of the Problem

The persistent challenge faced by K–12 educational leaders in fostering equitable educational practices for diverse student groups has been a subject of concern for years. Despite concerted efforts, this complex issue remains unresolved, leading to alarming disparities between historically marginalized students and dominant populations. Areas such as disciplinary practices, over-representation in special education, and unequal access to educational resources continue to perpetuate educational inequity.

Existing research often points to school leaders, particularly building principals, as key players in shaping an equitable school culture and learning environment. Cooper (2009) asserted that "they must look beyond academic test scores and embrace being cultural workers" (p. 700).

Moreover, recent studies have explored the role of teacher leaders in promoting equity-related concepts like equity mindset and cultural work.

Despite these insights, limited attention has been given to district-level equity leaders and their specific best practices. As the functions of equity leaders in PreK–12 settings are relatively new and still not clearly defined, their actual impact on creating more equitable educational systems is yet to be fully understood. This knowledge gap prompted the formulation of the following research questions, which guided this dissertation:

Research Questions

This mixed methods exploratory study answered the following research questions:

RQ1: What culturally responsive school leadership practices are district-level equity leaders demonstrating to foster equitable schools?

RQ2: What variables compose the role of a district-level equity leader?

RQ3: How are district-level equity leaders measuring their impact?

By addressing these research questions, this study may contribute valuable insights into the unique role of district-level equity leaders. In addition to providing information about best practices, this study aimed to advance the knowledge base in equity leadership and contribute to more effective strategies of creating equitable learning environments for all students.

Significance of Study

This study may make an important empirical contribution to the literature where there is a significant knowledge gap in research specifically centered around central office equity leaders. Skrlua et al. (2004) explained "the importance of leadership in shaping accountability implementation to facilitate improved equity" (p. 134). Additionally, this study will help the reader understand what variables make up this role, key implementation practices, and how

district-level equity leaders measure their impact in creating a more equitable school. Documenting how these leaders navigate their roles as educational advocates while considering their professional responsibilities and personal commitments may help explicate their challenges and successes and offer a window through which to consider how to best recruit and retain effective leaders in these positions (Mattheis, 2017). This mixed methods concurrent triangulation exploratory survey-based study is intended to allow district-level equity leaders to self-report about their current position, practices, and impact in PreK–12 public school districts.

This research represented a crucial contribution aimed at addressing a significant knowledge gap in the existing literature, specifically concerning central office equity leaders. Mizoguchi, (2020) acknowledged that "today's district leaders need to be adept at not only examining equity within a district, but also addressing equity within the district and literature contends that district leadership practices can have a significant impact on student outcomes. Within the realm of educational research, there is a dearth of comprehensive studies focused explicitly on this role. By undertaking this study, the research aimed to shed light on the variables that constitute the central office equity leaders' responsibilities, identify key implementation practices they adopt, and discern how they gauge their effectiveness in fostering greater equity within schools.

In order to achieve these objectives in the most holistic representation, a mixed methods concurrent triangulation exploratory survey-based approach was adopted. This research design allows for the acquisition of valuable insights directly from current district-level equity leaders in PreK–12 public school districts. Through self-reporting, these practitioners may provide valuable data regarding their present roles, the practices they implement, and their perceptions of their impact on promoting equity and inclusivity within their respective districts.

The study's significance lies in its potential to offer practical and actionable insights that can inform and enhance the strategies and practices employed by central office equity leaders. By understanding the intricacies and challenges of this role, educational stakeholders can better support these leaders in their vital mission of creating a more equitable educational environment for all students. Furthermore, this research may contribute to the advancement of knowledge in educational leadership, adding a distinct and valuable perspective that has been previously underrepresented in the literature. Through rigorous data analysis and interpretation, this dissertation may make a substantial scholarly contribution to the domain of educational research and serve as a valuable resource for educators, policymakers, and researchers seeking to promote equity and inclusivity within school systems.

Positionality Statement

As an African-American woman living in the United States, my life has been shaped by encounters with racism and growing up in a disadvantaged socio-economic community. Having grown up in a single-parent household with limited resources, I deeply relate to many of the lived experiences encountered by students facing DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) initiatives. This personal background provided me with a profound understanding of the challenges and obstacles these students may confront during their educational journeys. As Berger (2015) aptly reported, shared experiences can position an individual to be better equipped with insight and the ability to interpret implicit material and more sensitized to specific features of data. My professional journey led me to become an educator in a public PreK–12 school district. I have witnessed firsthand the importance of understanding and addressing implicit biases and specific aspects of diverse experiences.

In 2020, I was honored to be appointed director of equity and inclusion for a public school district near Chicago, IL. This significant role allowed me to play a crucial part in promoting equality and inclusivity within the educational system. Additionally, I am privileged to serve as an adjunct professor at a local community college, where I teach a course called Diversity in Schools and Society. As I continued to serve as the director of equity and inclusion and teach at the collegiate level, this connection motivated me even further to advocate for meaningful and impactful changes that benefit all students. By drawing from my own experiences and listening to others, I aim to support and empower all those seeking a fair and inclusive educational environment. These responsibilities have significantly influenced and inspired my interest in this field.

Due to my unique position as a director of equity and inclusion, I was deeply attuned to the intricacies and varying expectations that come with this role. This personal connection enables me to better empathize with the challenges and nuances that individuals in similar positions face. However, I am also conscious that my insider status may have influenced how I approach and interpret the data in this research study. I am fully aware that my actions and decisions may hold the potential to impact the study's meaning and context.

Embracing this responsibility, I was committed to conducting unbiased and comprehensive research that accurately reflected the experiences and perspectives of those involved. My goal was to contribute to the ongoing efforts to create a more equitable and inclusive educational environment, acknowledging and respecting the diverse voices that shape this crucial work. By remaining aware of my positionality and continuously learning from the lived experiences of others, I strive to make a positive difference in the realm of equity and inclusion.

Assumptions

This research study operated under several key assumptions. First and foremost, it was assumed that survey participants possessed the ability to accurately recognize and describe the specific culturally responsive school leadership practices they were actively engaging in within their roles as equity leaders. Furthermore, it was assumed that participants were actively engaged in the assessment of their own impact on the educational environment and developed a capacity of general knowledge when it came to DEI implementation practices.

When addressing the complex variables inherent to the equity leader role, it was hypothesized, based on personal observations and experiences, that a significant proportion of equity leaders were predominantly Black/African-American women who had served in their capacities for a duration of less than 5 years. Additionally, it was assumed that these equity leaders were situated within school districts characterized by a substantial population of socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

This study made the implicit assumption that there was an apparent relationship between the unique characteristics of participants' roles and the resources at their disposal, juxtaposed with the more general characteristics displayed by their specific school districts. These assumptions collectively contributed to the holistic understanding of the complexity between role dynamics and contextual variables, which was one of the main objectives of this research study.

It was important to recognize that the range of hypotheses that underlie this work was much greater than these assumptions. The key objective of this study was to clarify the intricate nuances of the equity leader role, putting light on its many facets and fostering a deeper understanding of its significance within the landscape of educational equity work.

Organization of Study

This research study is organized into six chapters, each serving a specific purpose in exploring the topic of equity leadership in K–12 educational settings. Chapter 1 served as an introductory section, providing a comprehensive overview of the subject matter. It included key definitions that are crucial throughout the study, setting a clear framework for the subsequent chapters. Moreover, Chapter 1 presented a statement of the problem, articulating the research question that guided this investigation and highlighted the significance of the study, emphasizing its potential contributions to the field of educational equity. Additionally, I acknowledged my positionality, recognizing how my background and experiences may influence the study's design and interpretation.

In Chapter 2, the reader is presented with a detailed literature review, offering a comprehensive analysis of five identified themes related to equity leadership, including the history of DEI, the role of central office equity leaders, equity leadership practices, and barriers to district level leadership, to clarify the intricacies of this field. This chapter provides a solid foundation for understanding the study's existing research landscape and theoretical underpinnings. Chapter 3 is dedicated to the methodology employed in this research. It clearly outlines the rationale behind the chosen methodology, explaining how it effectively addresses the research question. Moreover, this chapter describes the population and sample of participants selected for the study, justifying the selection criteria. It elucidates the instruments used to collect data, highlighting their reliability and validity. Furthermore, I detail the data analysis process and acknowledge any limitations inherent in the study design, ensuring transparency and rigor.

Chapters 5 and 6 serve as the sections where the research findings are presented and reported. These two chapters are separated by data type, with Chapter 4 containing the quantitative data sets and Chapter 5 containing the qualitative data sets. The data is organized

according to the research question, and a variety of tables are referenced to foster a simple understanding and interpretation of the data set. I highlight any patterns or outliers in the data. Detailed themes and relationships to the research question and its implications are discussed in the following chapter.

Finally, Chapter 6 serves as the culmination of the dissertation, presenting a comprehensive summary of the key findings derived from the data analysis and conclusions drawn, shedding light on the implications they have for equity leadership in K–12 educational contexts. This includes a discussion of themes, patterns, and juxtaposed data points with the research questions. Additionally, this chapter offers recommendations for future research, suggesting potential avenues to further deepen the understanding of the topic. Overall, the study provides valuable insights, contributing to the advancement of knowledge in the field of educational equity and offering practical implications for enhancing equity leadership practices in educational institutions.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

A mixed methods concurrent triangulation exploratory survey-based research study explores the pivotal role and impact of central office equity leaders in the context of fostering equitable schools. The central focus of this research study was on the varied practices by district-level equity leaders to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion within educational institutions. This literature review is methodically organized around five broad themes, including the history of DEI, the role of central office equity leaders, equity leadership practices, and barriers to district-level leadership, to clarify the intricacies of this field. These themes emerge from a comprehensive review of existing literature, which has been thoughtfully selected for its relevance and significance in illuminating the central questions of this research study.

As I embarked on this exploration, it was essential to emphasize the overarching objective of this mixed methods concurrent triangulation exploratory survey-based research study, which was to provide a deeper understanding of the culturally responsive school leadership practices exhibited by district-level equity leaders and the variables that shape their roles. Moreover, using culturally responsive school leadership practices as a theoretical framework for understanding, I investigated how equity leaders measured the impact of their efforts in promoting equity within the educational landscape.

The following sections unpack and analyze each of the five themes, contributing valuable insights into central office equity leadership. Through this synthesis of existing literature, this chapter seeks to lay a robust foundation upon which the critical issues at hand can be comprehensively understood. By doing so, this helped to respond effectively to the research questions that framed this study which were:

RQ1: What culturally responsive school leadership practices are district-level equity leaders demonstrating to foster equitable schools?

RQ2: What variables compose the role of a district-level equity leader?

RQ3: How are district-level equity leaders measuring their impact?

This chapter is organized into the following sections: Theoretical Framework, where I delve into the theoretical framework of culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) and its relevance in fostering equitable schools. The theoretical framework explores the key concepts and models associated with CRSL and their impact on educational institutions. The history of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) is documented along with the historical evolution of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts in education. The section provides insights into the historical context that has shaped the current landscape of equity in schools. The role of equity leaders explores understanding the role and responsibilities of district-level equity leaders. Equity leadership practice is a core aspect of equity in education, and thus, this section explores the current research and synthesizes the key implementation practices of this role. Finally, barriers to DEI are explored to help understand the challenges that hinder DEI efforts. This section identifies and analyzes the obstacles and challenges equity leaders' encounter in pursuing equitable schools.

Each section of this literature review was designed to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the central research questions, laying the groundwork for subsequent chapters in this research study. Through this structured approach, the landscape of central office equity leadership and its profound impact on the educational landscape are discussed.

Theoretical Framework

  As referenced in Mizoguchi's (2020) literature review, "One level of leadership whose positive impact on creating equitable learning systems and student learning outcomes that has become increasingly clear is district-level leadership" (p.12). Culturally responsive school leadership as a theoretical framework for researching the PreK–12 equity leader's role provides a framework for understanding how leaders can promote equity and culturally responsive practices and, ultimately, more equitable schools. Culturally responsive school leadership acknowledges the importance of culture in shaping educational experiences and outcomes for students. It recognizes the role of culture in shaping students' identity, worldview, and socialization and the impact of culture on learning and achievement.

  Culturally responsive school leadership can provide a lens for understanding how the PreK–12 equity leader can effectively engage with students, families, and community members from diverse backgrounds. Khalifa et al. (2016) described CRSLF as "practices and actions, mannerisms, policies, and discourses that influence school climate, school structure, teacher efficacy, or student outcomes" (p.1274). Culturally responsive school leadership can also help identify strategies for creating inclusive and culturally responsive policies and practices that promote equity and support the success of all students.

  This theoretical framework assists researchers in exploring how the PreK–12 equity leaders collaborate with school leaders, teachers, and staff to create a culture of inclusivity and equity. This leadership approach prioritizes students, families, and communities' experiences, knowledge, and cultures in educational decision-making and practice. Culturally responsive school leadership framework (CRSLF) generally focuses on school leadership with a cultural focus; however, it is appropriate to consider this framework from a district leadership lens. Within this study, I focused on the four primary strands of behaviors related to the CRSLF, which are: (a)

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critically self-reflecting on leadership behavior, (b) developing culturally responsive teachers and curriculum, (c) promoting culturally responsive and inclusive school environments, and (4) engaging students, parent, and indigenous contexts (Khalifa et al., 2016). Culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) should not be thought of as having a singular quantifiable definition or as a practice that can be definitively attained. Rather, it should be considered a flexible and dynamic process that educators are constantly honing and working toward a culturally responsive school leadership institute. Tables 1 and 2 below outline various CRSL practices that equity leaders can demonstrate as they embark on developing equitable schools. By prioritizing these elements in their leadership approach, culturally responsive school leaders can create learning environments that are inclusive and culturally affirming for all students.

Table 1

Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework Practices

Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework	
Critically Self-Reflects on Leadership Behaviors	**Develops Culturally Responsive Teachers**
- Accepting indigenized, local identities (Khalifa, 2010) - Displays a critical consciousness on practice in and out of school; displays self-reflection (Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Johnson, 2006) - Uses school data and indicants to measure CRSL (Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004) - Uses parent/community voices to measure cultural responsiveness in schools (Ishimaru, 2013; Smyth, 2006) - Challenges Whiteness and hegemonic epistemologies in school (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011) - Using equity audits to measure student inclusiveness, policy, and practice (Skrla et al., 2004) - Leading with courage (Khalifa, 2011; Nee-Benham, Maenette, & Cooper, 1988) - Is a transformative leader for social justice and inclusion (Alston, 2005; Gooden, 2005; Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015; Shields, 2010)	- Developing teacher capacities for cultural responsive pedagogy (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000; Voltz, Brazil, & Scott, 2003) - Collaborative walkthroughs (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) - Creating culturally responsive PD opportunities for teachers (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000; Voltz et al., 2003) - Using school data to see cultural gaps in achievement, discipline, enrichment, and remedial services (Skrla et al., 2004) - Creating a CRSL team that is charged with constantly finding new ways for teachers to be culturally responsive (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006) - Engaging/reforming the school curriculum to become more culturally responsive (Sleeter, 2012; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) - Modeling culturally responsive teaching (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) - Using culturally responsive assessment tools for students (Hopson, 2001; Kea, Campbell- Whatley, & Bratton, 2003)

Note. Adapted from Culturally Responsive School Leadership Institute. Copy right 2023. (https://www.crsli.org/?about)

Table 2

Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework Practices (Continued)

Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework Continued

Promotes Culturally Responsive/Inclusive School Environment	Engages Students, Parents, and Indigenous Contexts
• Accepting indigenized, local identities (Khalifa, 2010) • Building relationships; reducing anxiety among students (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) • Modeling CRSL for staff in building interactions (Khalifa, 2011; Tillman, 2005) • Promoting a vision for an inclusive instructional and behavioral practices (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Webb-Johnson, 2006; Webb-Johnson & Carter, 2007) • If need be, challenging exclusionary policies, teachers, and behaviors (Khalifa, 2011; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) • Acknowledges, values, and uses Indigenous cultural and social capital of students (Khalifa, 2010, 2012) • Uses student voice (Antrop-González, 2011; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) • Using school data to discover and track disparities in academic and disciplinary trends (Skiba et al., 2002; Skrla et al.,2004; Theoharis, 2007)	• Developing meaningful, positive relationships with community (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Johnson, 2006; Walker, 2001) • Is a servant leader, as public intellectual and other roles (Alston, 2005; Gooden, 2005; Johnson, 2006) • Finding overlapping spaces for school and community (Cooper, 2009; Ishimaru, 2013; Khalifa, 2012) • Serving as advocate and social activist for community-based causes in both the school and neighborhood community (Capper, Hafner, & Keyes, 2002; Gooden, 2005; Johnson, 2006; Khalifa, 2012) • Uses the community as an informative space from which to develop positive understandings of students and families (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006) • Resists deficit images of students and families (Davis, 2002; Flessa, 2009) • Nurturing/caring for others; sharing information (Gooden, 2005; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) • Connecting directly with students (Gooden, 2005; Khalifa, 2012; Lomotey, 1993)

Note. Adapted from Culturally Responsive School Leadership Institute, copy right 2023 (https://www.crsli.org/?about)

History of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Although there is minimal research on equity-focused district leadership, there is a long history of school reform efforts that attempt to address our educational system and the inequities present. Weiler and Stanley (2023) explained that "For decades, academics have worked to define

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and characterize educational systems and system-level change" (p. 3) from the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the No Child Left Behind Act, and the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program (CSRD). One thing that seems apparent is that the American education system seems to be cognizant of the long-lasting impact racism has had on the educational system, despite the multiple attempts to introduce reform for over the years. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 required the U.S. Commissioner of Education to conduct a survey and make a report to the President and the Congress concerning the lack of availability of equal educational opportunities for individuals by reason of race, color, religion, or national origin in public educational institutions at all levels. This is what the Equality of Educational Opportunity report, also known as the "Coleman Report," was in response to (Berends, 2004). According to Welborn (2019), "since the Coleman Report, published in 1966, access, opportunity, and achievement gaps between and among students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social class backgrounds have been the focus of research and the goals of educational reform efforts across the United States" (p. 168). Identifying discrepancies is still required at the school and district levels to improve conditions, and this report is a reminder of today's equity audits. Berends (2004) documented the standards movement, which advocated for increased rigor and measurability in educational standards for content and pedagogy. This movement also emphasized educators' need to meet stringent educational standards, exhibit teaching proficiency, and demonstrate competence within their academic discipline. The intent of elevating these standards and expectations for all students was to ensure uniformity and equity in education. This encompassed providing a consistent educational experience regardless of students' backgrounds or school locations, including implementing standardized assessments aligned with these standards.

Consequently, this initiative imposed accountability on educational institutions and instructors to ensure the attainment of these standards. This juncture in the history of education was pivotal, as policymakers acknowledged the disparities among diverse student groups while advocating for equal rights and opportunities for all. Nonetheless, the potential to establish a more equitable educational system remains unrealized. Recent educational policies and reforms spanning the last 5 decades have increasingly emphasized diversity and equity. However, persistent disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes among marginalized groups continue to plague the educational system.

Failing to recognize how institutional and structural racism has impacted our educational system would be negligent. Black and Indigenous people of color (BIPOC) endured strict laws that restricted their access to education, only to be given access with several restrictions. According to Outlaw (2014):

These effects are manifested in patterns of consequences and stratifications across racially and ethnically defined groups: accumulation and distribution of inequalities of wealth, poverty, and health that do not—cannot—meet widely accepted standards of fairness and justice; unequal opportunities for the highest quality of education and disparities in performance and achievement among persons identified by different racial and ethnic groups.

The prevailing political climate of the nation profoundly shapes the history of education in the United States. Greene and Paul (2021) proved that in the blue Democratic-leaning states, 47% of school districts have an equity leader, while in red Republican-leaning states, 32% of districts have equity leaders.

A comprehensive understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion within school districts is a necessary parallel understanding of the historical context at the national level. This broader

perspective lifts the significant impact of this historical narrative and its influence on the outcomes experienced by diverse student groups and their educational trajectories.

The Role of Equity Leaders

The role of a PreK–12 equity leader is centered on ensuring that students of all backgrounds have equal access to educational opportunities and resources. This role requires a deep understanding of the diverse needs of students and communities and the ability to create and implement policies and practices that promote equity and inclusivity. This role "is different from any other obligation in a school or district because it is influenced by the external and internal demands and pressures that school districts confront, connected to racism and all intersecting kinds of inequity and oppression," (Irby et al., 2022, p 449). If you were to survey 10 different educational leaders with the term "equity" in their official job titles, to define their roles, you would get 10 different answers. The complexity of this role makes it look very different in different spaces due to several factors, such as district size, partisan dominance of the state, and student demographics. According to Greene et al. (2021), "many public-school districts, particularly sizable districts in Democratic states, have imitated their higher-education counterparts and developed senior administrative roles and offices to address achievement gaps and to advance specific social goals" (p.1).

This individual's title can have a variety of job titles, including coordinator, director, or chief equity officer. Irby et al. (2021) confirmed that individual titles go by numerous names such as Directors of Diversity and Inclusion in some districts. In some, they are chief equity officers. For the purpose of this study, chief equity officers were referred to as equity leaders. One could conclude that the job title and level of this position are dependent on the district's level of

commitment to its DEI efforts, which can be influenced by a number of factors (Greene & Paul, 2021).

Although it may be difficult to determine the total number of equity leaders present in public school districts, some common characteristics of the role are identifiable. According to Irby et al. (2021), the equity leader position is typically filled by experienced teachers or administrators with a clear vision of what equity looks like in educational settings. These leaders usually hold at least a master's degree and often are pursuing or already hold a doctoral degree in education or a closely related field. While there is limited research on the paths necessary to become a district-level equity leader, much research is available on school leaders and equity-minded teacher leaders. General leadership experience and classroom teaching experiences can benefit this role. Irby et al. (2021) also noted "that equity leaders are disproportionately people of color; they are most likely to be women" (p.1). Sutton (2021) asserted that superintendents often choose to put leaders of color "in charge" of equity initiatives; however, they often neglect to give them the support and authority required to make those initiatives successful.

The role configurations of a district-level equity leader are another factor that impacts the success of DEI work within public school districts. Success can be highly dependent on the level of commitment to equity work and understanding of the role of the board of education and superintendent of K–12 public school districts. According to Irby et al. (2021), equity leaders must be extended forms of formal power and authority to carry out the charges of their work. In addition, the structure and positioning of the role that makes different forms of organizational power and authority available to the person can both extend and create vulnerabilities for the individual who inherits it. Moreover, Starr (2020) underscored the significance of centering this role at the cabinet level, with a direct reporting line to the superintendent, highlighting the pivotal

organizational positioning of equity leaders. Role configuration is key when considering the impact of equity leaders. Irby et al. (2021) warned against misalignment and this position becoming a symbolic powerless gesture.

When examining the responsibilities of equity leaders, research reveals many areas that constitute the scope of this role. These responsibilities encompass conducting equity audits or data collection, engaging with the community, overseeing curriculum and program evaluation, addressing complaints, and facilitating professional development in social justice, bias, and racial awareness. Additionally, equity leaders are involved in human resource audits, practice evaluation, staff recruitment, retention efforts, and policy evaluation. As Ahern and Cole (2021) aptly stated, "A systemic commitment to equity means supporting learning at all levels and roles of the system and for people at all places on the continuum of racial awareness" (p. 42). While equity leaders bear responsibility for numerous equity initiatives, the effectiveness of their work is contingent upon robust collaboration and a shared vision among the leadership of the school district. In addition, they should "support the design and implementation of district-wide equity reforms that will make educational experiences and outcomes more equitable and not just for racially, ethnically, and linguistically marginalized students" (Irby et al., 2021, p.1).

Equity Leadership Practices

There is limited research on the specific behaviors and individual practices of district-level equity leadership roles. Equity leaders are responsible for ensuring that the school district is operating in an equitable and inclusive manner. Greene and Paul (2021) asserted that "the primary purpose of this role is to help reduce the achievement gap between students from diverse regions and backgrounds" (p. 8). The success of this work (reducing the achievement gap) is highly dependent on multiple factors such as individual capacity, departmental collaboration, and access.

Weiler and Stanley (2023) recognized eight common leadership practices of equity leaders and put them into four themes: (a) planning and development, (b) professional and organizational, (c) learning, data use, and family, and (d) community engagement. The following section explores what these leadership practices entail.

In their recent study, Weiler and Stanley (2023) highlighted the complexity of planning and development within equity initiatives. These tasks encompass a range of activities to facilitate the successful implementation of equity-driven strategies. Among these tasks are the formulation of a clear vision statement, the development of strategic plans, the initiation of policy reforms, and the coordination of school-based collaborations. Notably, this comprehensive approach extends to the school level by building leadership and reviewing school improvement plans and other equity-focused processes. According to Mattheis (2017), central office administrators do tasks such as establishing linkages between school sites, offering coaching, and imparting technical expertise to other leaders in school districts. Collaboration between school and district leaders is key to ensuring the successful implementation of equity initiatives.

Participating in policy development and modification is a pivotal aspect of planning and fostering equity within educational systems. As Weiler and Stanley (2023) highlighted in their comprehensive study, equity leaders collaborate closely with superintendents and other central office leaders to adapt existing policies or craft new ones that align with the overarching principles of equity. This engagement in policy work is instrumental in reshaping the educational landscape, ensuring that policies reflect a commitment to equity and serve as actionable mechanisms for addressing disparities and promoting inclusivity in K–12 public school districts. In addition, it underscores the critical role that equity leaders play in shaping educational institutions' structural and operational aspects to advance equitable outcomes for all students.

Professional and organizational learning is a leadership practice centered around professional development activities. Weiler and Stanley (2023) noted that this assumes a significant portion of their work. Equity leaders are responsible for engaging in providing professional development around DEI topics. Ahern and Cole (2021) emphasized that "a systemic commitment to equity means supporting learning at all levels and roles of the system and for people at all places on the continuum of racial awareness" (p. 42). The DEI topics can include bias training and culturally responsive teaching practices. Ahern and Cole's (2021) research suggested that building knowledge and capacity that centers on racial equity was instrumental in recognizing and affirming culturally diverse populations. According to Mathis (2017), "Leaders who prioritized objectives that were focused more on building cultural awareness and 'positive interracial relationships' contributed to improved learning environments in ways that were often overlooked" (p. 542). Khalifa et al.'s (2016) research stated that it is the role of a culturally responsive school leader (CRSL) "to lead professional development to ensure their teachers and staff, and the curriculum, are continuously responsive to minoritized students" (p.1274). In addition to implementation, developing resources to support professional growth is crucial. Equity leaders reported a proactive approach to creating and disseminating educational materials within their district. According to Weiler and Stanley (2023), "Equity directors built their own resources and adapted the existing ones to assist school staff" (p.13). The research abundantly clarified that equity leaders must "develop professional development that improves teachers' pedagogy in ways that result in improved student outcomes but this must be done with cultural responsiveness" (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Data use is another critical leadership practice equity leaders engage in to advance equity within educational settings. Data collection, analysis, and presentation are pivotal in shedding

light on existing inequities and their underlying sources. Jones (2023) reminded us that "one way to address patterns of inequities in special programs is through equity audits. Equity audits examine trends in data, analyze current policies, and assess culturally responsive pedagogy, curriculum, and overall practices in education" (p. 119). By harnessing data, equity leaders can effectively illustrate the disparities within their systems, fostering a shared awareness of the magnitude and nature of these disparities among stakeholders. Furthermore, data-driven approaches empower equity leaders to build the capacity of their colleagues to comprehend and actively engage in equitable practices and processes. In addition, it serves as a catalyst for informed dialogue and action in specific areas where intervention is required. Weiler and Stanley (2023) asserted that "We not only looked at our data in terms of disproportionality but also examined it in terms of risk ratio" (p.14). The consistent use of data by educational leaders is a key practice in sustaining and adapting equity initiatives. Data collection and analysis enable equity leaders to identify trends, assess the impact of interventions, and make necessary adjustments to ensure the longevity and relevance of their equity efforts.

Researchers reveal that equity leaders engage in family and community engagement, which is another fundamental leadership practice. Equity leaders can address concerns, dispel misconceptions, and garner support from a broader spectrum of stakeholders through transparent communication, partnership-building, and active engagement. By building strong internal and external coalitions, equity leaders harness diverse stakeholders' collective power and expertise, fostering a sense of shared ownership and commitment to equity goals. In addition to involving families and local community people in creating school-district equity goals, equity directors also use them as partners in accountability. According to Weiler and Stanley (2023), equity leaders reported about a variety of official, informal, indirect, and direct ways they interacted with their

communities. These partnerships bring valuable perspectives and contribute to the sustainability of equity efforts by expanding the network of support and resources. In summary, engaging with families and communities is a fundamental leadership practice for successful district-level equity leadership. Contributing to this type of community building helps strengthen the commitment to equity.

The identification of eight common leadership practices by Weiler and Stanley's (2023) study and grouping them into four overarching themes, has provided valuable insights into the varied dimensions of equity leadership. These themes encompass planning and development, professional and organizational learning, data utilization, and family and community engagement. Through an in-depth exploration of these practices, this research study may contribute to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted role of equity leaders in shaping educational equity within school districts.

Barriers to District-Level Equity Leadership

District-level equity leaders' pursuit of advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion within their educational institutions is not a task that is free from barriers and challenges. DEI work is very complex, and those responsible for leading equity work in public school institutions can be met with a specific set of challenges and various obstacles. Much of the research included barriers or obstacles that are present for equity leaders. Understanding these barriers is critical for creating effective strategies to address them and to promote positive changes within educational settings. The following section explores some of the prominent barriers faced by equity leaders in their dedicated work which are: (a) commitment to DEI, (b) reporting structure, (c) insufficient resources, and (e) resistance.

As equity leaders lead the charge for rectifying long-standing inequities, there is a need to acknowledge the level of commitment to DEI work. Irby (2022) warned that the district equity-director hiring process is often reactionary and merely symbolic. This depends on the level of commitment the district has to its DEI efforts. The DEI person is responsible for ensuring that the school district is operating in a manner that is equitable and inclusive for all. Irby (2022) emphasized how this role includes but is not limited to developing and implementing equity policies, restorative-justice reforms, supporting hiring and retaining initiatives to increase teacher diversity, and designing and leading professional learning about culturally responsive teaching and anti-racist instruction. In addition to community partnerships and responding to the needs and wants of marginalized parents and students, the success of this work is highly dependent on multiple factors, such as departmental collaboration and access. DEI work is a large task and cannot be the sole responsibility of one person, so they are looked at to lift inequities and facilitate the change that needs to happen among all stakeholders. Irby (2022) emphasized that investments in equity leadership promoted equity for all kids' links to moving the focus from districts' intentions to districts' actions. Equity leadership is put on the "back burner" when it is considered as an addition to, rather than a top priority. Far too frequently, those who get the added responsibilities lack the skills, confidence, or capability to lead on equity.

The reporting structure of district-level equity leaders was highlighted in several articles as a barrier to this work, as these leaders should be positioned within the organization in a way that can make the most impact. The role of equity leader should be positioned prominently within the district hierarchy, such as a "cabinet position," (Starr, 020). Much of the scholarship around school district equity leaders reported that the position's structure acts as a barrier to the success of DEI work in schools. Starr (2020) cautioned that if authority is ambiguous or how much

authority or what range of responsibilities the job actually comprises, everyone else assumes that equity is no longer their responsibility after it has been delegated to a single individual. These new equity leaders risk becoming isolated if their organizational responsibilities aren't designed for success from the beginning (Starr, 2020). Directly accessing all levels of leadership and other departments is critical, and not having this impedes the span of an equity leader's reach and influence.

Another prominent barrier faced by equity leaders is insufficient resources. Limited financial and human resources can significantly impede equity efforts. Equity leaders often grapple with budgetary restrictions that hinder their ability to implement necessary reforms, such as providing professional development opportunities or hiring additional staff to support equity initiatives. Starr (2020) denoted that equity leaders require their own budget and staff. Chu (2019) reported that "schools and districts serving high poverty and high minority students, on average, receive less funding but are disproportionately impacted by state funding cuts" (p. 4). This can present a barrier to district-level equity leaders as the lack of resources impacts their ability to efficiently fund and support equity initiatives.

Being met with resistance is the most significant commonality among equity leaders. This is seen across the country through the media as states continue to create bans and put limitations on critical race theory and many texts written by authors of color that highlight experiences of BIPOC. Jones and Sutton (2021) provided an example where the most seasoned teachers worked with the most vulnerable students or if you suggested a fairer way to identify students for gifted and talented programs or if you recommended detracking the curriculum, then you probably faced resistance from parents and community members. While Starr (2021) reminded us of "how deflating it was to labor over a thoughtful, well-intentioned effort to promote racial

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understanding, only to see one's efforts casually dismissed and misrepresented" (p.40). Equity leaders must persist when being met with resistance. One article suggested meeting your leadership team where they are and beginning by focusing on less controversial initiatives while you work to bring others along.

The intricate challenges and complex barriers to DEI work are inevitable. A district-level equity leader's reporting structure, access to resources, district commitment to DEI, and ability to face resistance all impact the conditions and practices necessary to achieve equity and ultimately improve students' outcomes. Understanding these barriers is essential for equity leaders as they strive to create equitable educational environments. Effective strategies to overcome these challenges may require a combination of reform and ongoing commitment equity in schools.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this mixed methods concurrent triangulation exploratory survey-based research study helped to embark on a comprehensive exploration of the role of central office equity leaders in the endeavor to cultivate equitable schools. In bridging the gap in existing research, this dissertation sought to empower educational leaders and policymakers with the necessary knowledge to advance equitable outcomes for all students. This exploration served as a catalyst for continued inquiry and action in the pursuit of educational equity. This literature review was methodically organized to cover five overarching themes. By delving into the historical underpinnings of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts, the pivotal role of central office equity leaders, is to examine equity leadership practices and expound the barriers faced by district-level equity leaders. This review provided a robust foundation for understanding the complexities of this field. The themes explored have been woven together through a comprehensive analysis of existing literature, carefully selected for their relevance and

significance in addressing the core inquiries that underpinned this research study. The insights

gleaned from this literature review serve as a guide, shaping the exploration of the vital work of

central office equity leaders and their contributions to fostering equity in American educational

institutions. In Chapter 3, the methodology used in this study is broken down by providing details

about the research design, population, instruments, data collection procedures, and analysis in

addition to the limitations of this exploratory research study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology used to conduct a concurrent triangulation mixed methods exploratory survey-based research design to address the significant knowledge gap in research specifically centered around central office equity leaders. The primary objective of this study was to contribute to the existing literature by shedding light on the roles of district-level equity leaders, the metrics they use to assess their effectiveness, and the key practices that support the creation of a more equitable school district. To accomplish this, the study utilized survey design as a primary data collection method to gain insights from district-level equity leaders.

Mixed methods study design allowed for more in-depth and thorough exploration of research. This study was exploratory research because I was exploring various aspects in under-researched areas. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), a mixed methods study can assist with "understanding the data at a more detailed level by using qualitative follow-up data collection to help explain quantitative results" (p. 127).

Research Objective

The main purpose of this study was to explore the roles and responsibilities of district-level equity leaders, understand how they assessed their impact, and identify key practices that facilitated the development of a more equitable school district. This research aimed to provide valuable knowledge and contribute to the existing literature on educational equity and leadership by investigating these aspects.

Theoretical Framework

The Utilization of a culturally responsive school leadership framework (CRSLF) as a theoretical framework to enabled research the PreK–12 equity director's role provided a framework to clearly understand their responsibilities. Culturally responsive school leadership acknowledges the importance of culture in shaping educational experiences and outcomes of students. It recognizes the role of culture in shaping students' identity, worldview, and socialization and the impact of culture on learning and achievement.

According to Khalifa et al.'s (2016) research, culturally responsive school leadership is a leadership approach that prioritizes the experiences, knowledge, and cultures of students, families, and communities in educational decision-making and practice. The CRSLF generally focuses on school leadership with a cultural focus; however, it is appropriate to consider this framework from a district leadership lens. Within this study, I focused on the four primary strands of behaviors related to the CRSLF, which are: (a) critically self-reflect on leadership behavior; (b) develop culturally responsive teachers and curriculum; (c) promote culturally responsive and inclusive school environment; and (d) engages students, parent, and indigenous contexts (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Khakifa's take on culturally responsive school leadership framework attempts to address an area of need regarding reforming and transforming all aspects of the educational spaces through culturally responsive leadership. However, the focus is still centered around school leaders. In terms of equity, you must consider funding, policymaking, and district level administration. This framework provides the characteristics of a culturally responsive school leader?

Khakifa's culturally responsive school leadership framework addresses a crucial aspect of educational reform by emphasizing the necessity of culturally responsive leadership in transforming educational spaces. However, the framework primarily focuses on the role of school leaders, potentially limiting its scope in terms of achieving equity across the broader educational system. While acknowledging the importance of culturally responsive school leadership characteristics, it's imperative to recognize that equity in education extends beyond this. Consideration must be given to broader systemic influences such as equitable funding distribution, policymaking, and the role of district-level administration in fostering culturally responsive practices throughout the entire educational ecosystem. While the framework provides valuable insights into the characteristics of culturally responsive school leaders, its effectiveness in promoting equity may be enhanced by incorporating district level perspectives.

Research Question

My position as a researcher served as the study's compass and ultimately led me to inquire about what district-level equity leaders are doing to achieve more equitable schools. This also led me to explore the role and what possible variables could impact the type of work in PreK–12 public school settings. This quantitative exploratory study ultimately assisted in answering the following research questions:

RQ1: What culturally responsive school leadership practices are district-level equity leaders demonstrating to foster equitable schools?

RQ 2: What variables compose the role of a district-level equity leader?

RQ 3: How are district-level equity leaders measuring their impact?

Research Design

This study adopted a concurrent triangulation mixed methods survey-based research design, which allowed for an in-depth examination of the roles and practices of district-level equity leaders. The purpose of concurrent triangulation design is to use both qualitative and quantitative data to confirm or cross validate individual findings thus providing the ability to accurately identify relationships among variables. This research design used both quantitative and qualitative notation to indicate the two different data types being embedded within the research design. Quantitative indicated a higher emphasis on numerical data while qualitative data focused on deriving meaning from data and was less emphasized within this study (Plano Clark, 2005). The exploratory nature of the research design was particularly suited to investigating relatively unexplored areas and generating holistic insights that may contribute to future studies in the field. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) contended that "The purpose of the research design was to determine the best method or procedure that would result in the ability to draw reliable and valid conclusions from the data collected by the researcher" (p.31). In-depth interviews or structured questionnaires can be used in surveys to collect data from many respondents quickly. The outcomes are frequently quantitative in character and are subject to statistical analysis. Creswell and Plano (2018) explained that "mixed methods research provides a way to harness strengths that offset the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative research. According to Creswell and Plano (2018), "mixed method research helps answer questions that cannot be answered using either quantitative or qualitative approach alone" (p. 13).

Figure 2

Mixed Methods Concurrent Triangulation Exploratory Survey-Based Research Design
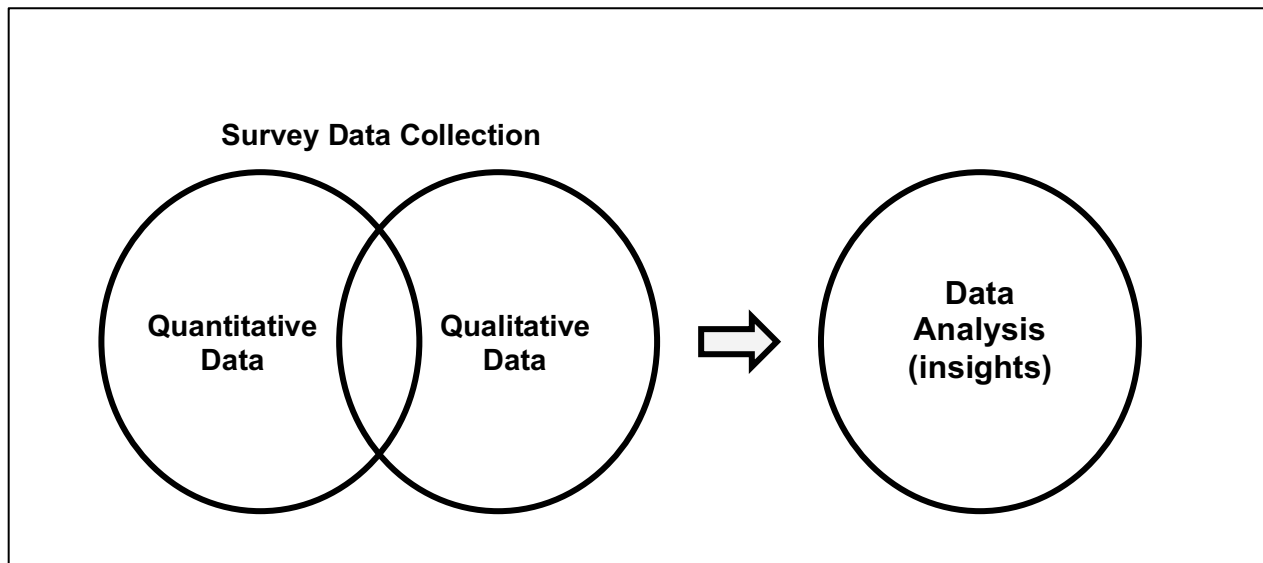
For this mixed methods concurrent triangulation exploratory survey-based research study, I used Lickert-based response and open-ended response survey data. The Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS) analyzed the quantitative data. The qualitative data were managed and analyzed using the qualitative analysis software program NVivo. In this chapter, I provide a detailed description of the decisions made regarding the participants, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, and validity.

To efficiently explore the role of PreK–12 equity leaders, I had to understand who held these roles, how their roles were situated within the organization, what key practices they are engaging in regularly, and how they measured their impact in creating equitable schools. It was necessary to deeply understand PreK–12 equity leaders through an in-depth survey design that includes open and closed questions.

This quantitative study encompassed a mixed methods concurrent triangulation exploratory survey design to answer the research questions. Utilizing this type of design enabled the development a confidential online survey instrument to gather quantitative data. The study adhered to ethical guidelines, including obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality, and securing the data to protect participants' confidentiality (see Appendix A). I complied with all relevant ethical regulations and guidelines set forth by the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix B).

Population

Creswell and Creswell (2018) defined a sample as a subgroup of the target population or the unit of analysis that is intended to be studied. The two main eligibility requirements for this mixed methods study included that the participants: (a) held a central-office level leadership/administration position at a PreK–12 public school district and (b) had an aspect of diversity, equity, and or inclusion in their current job title. At the time of the study, no national database or public listing existed to provide an accurate account of individuals meeting the above research requirements. Thus, utilizing purposeful sampling was most appropriate. According to Creswell and Clark (2018), deliberate selection or recruitment of participants who have firsthand knowledge on the primary phenomenon or crucial idea under consideration in the study constitutes purposeful sampling. Using social media and email requests served as the most advantageous means of recruitment for this study.

Extensive recruiting began for participants to participate voluntarily with a one-time confidential online survey. Potential participants were invited to participate in the study through targeted recruitment efforts, such as sending personalized invitations to individuals who met the predetermined criteria. The invitations through the recruitment flyer emphasized the voluntary

nature of participation and assured confidentiality to encourage candid responses (see Appendix C).

Using social media and email recruitment offered many benefits to recruitment processes, such as convenience and a larger potential access pool to reach potential participants (i.e., equity leaders who reside in the United States). The appendix contains the research study recruitment flier, email, and social media post language used for recruitment (see Appendix D). Using social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn as recruitment measures, I gained access to various networks of equity leaders who would not have been available otherwise. I also used a simple Google search of PreK–12 school districts that had DEI offices and contacted their listed equity leaders via their public emails. Though time-consuming, this method proved invaluable as individuals shared the study recruitment flier within their network of equity leaders. All these recruitment measures allowed me to gain access across regions.

According to Zippia.com, school administrator demographics and statistics in the United States (U.S.) showed that over 5,595 school administrators were employed in the U.S. (Zippia.n.d). I chose to consider the possibility of 5% of that population being able to identify as equity leaders. This gave the study a potential of 280 possible participants, who were considered a reasonable estimate based on this estimate of the potential population of qualified participants who could be recruited. Recruiting 50 eligible participants with representation from all U.S. regions would provide a sample population of over 10%. Participants were selected through purposeful sampling to ensure representation across different geographical locations, school sizes, and demographic contexts. Through purposeful sampling, researcher strategically handpicked participants with the specific characteristics, knowledge, and experiences necessary to provide valuable insights and rich data, thereby enhancing the depth and breadth of this study. Creswell's

(2018) ethical considerations were taken into account, ensuring participant confidentiality and voluntary participation.

Receiving 10% of participants to complete the survey provided an adequate sample size representing the estimated population while giving enough data to address the research questions.

Thirty-five participants completed the Fields Equity Leaders Survey (FELS). Thirty-five participants represent 12.5% of the estimated population of United States' school administrators' demographics and statistics using reports from Zippia.com. The sample's demographics were generally consistent with the literature, which indicates that people of color typically represent the majority of district-level equity leaders. Of the 35 participants (see Table 3) who completed the study, the majority were Black/African-American (63%) and female (63%). Participants ranged from 25 to 64 years of age, with the 45 to54 age range representing over half of the participants (63%) and the majority holding a terminal degree (49%).

Table 3

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Variable	*n=35*	*%*
Gender		
Female	22	63%
Male	13	37%
Race/Ethnicity		
Black/African American	22	63%
White	8	23%
Hispanic/Latinx	2	6%
Other	2	6%
Asian/Asian American	1	3%
Highest level of education		
Bachelor's degree	2	6%
Master's degree	13	37%
Educational specialist degree	2	6%
Master's degree & educational specialist degree	1	3%
Terminal degree	17	49%
Age ranges		
25-34	1	3%
35-44	10	29%
45-54	22	63%
55-64	2	6%

Instrument

This mixed methods concurrent triangulation exploratory study utilized an instrument titled Fields Equity Leaders Survey (FELS), specifically designed for this research study. The

FELS questionnaire was designed to gather quantitative and qualitative data. Multiple-choice and Likert scale questions were included to quantify participants' engagement in culturally responsive practices, identify variables related to their roles as equity leaders, and assess the frequency and importance of their practices. Open-ended questions were included to allow participants to provide more in-depth and specific details and insights about their experiences and methods of measuring impact.

The Fields Equity Leader Survey is a cross-sectional survey formatted using a Google Form to structure to collect data (Google.com Fields Equity Leader Survey was an online survey located in (see Appendix E). This survey consisted of 31 total questions and was intended to gather primarily quantitative data; however, it also included four open-ended questions that would garner additional qualitative data. The quantitative survey questions consist of choice survey items, which are questions that have multiple-choice answer options. Choice survey items provided trends among the data and served as potential variables for comparison. The type of response categories captured in the quantitative questions were rating scales that included the following options: "like," "never," "rarely," "sometimes," "often," "always," various demographic checklists, and ranking that consists of "not at all important," "slightly important," "moderately important," "very important," "extremely important," or "strongly agree," "agree" "neither agree," "nor disagree," "disagree," and "strongly disagree." The qualitative questions consist of open-ended questions that require open responses where participants self-report by providing a written response. This online survey took approximately 25 minutes to complete.

Measures

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Practices

The research question, "*What culturally responsive school leadership practices are district-level equity leaders demonstrating to foster equitable schools?"* was examined by implementing the Fields Equity Leaders Survey (FELS). This survey incorporated a series of questions as part of its comprehensive assessment. Participants were presented with a list of 31 practices and were instructed to rate the frequency of their engagement in each practice using a 5-point Likert scale. The scale ranged from "Never" (0) to "Rarely' (1), "Sometimes" (2), "Often" (3), and "Always" (4). Cronbach's alpha for the CRSLP using this sample was high (α = .90).

Culturally Responsive School Leadership Practices (CRSLP)

The Fields Equity Leaders Survey (FELS) incorporated the culturally responsive school leadership framework (CRSLF) as a guiding framework for its questions. To explore the research question, "*What culturally responsive school leadership practices are district-level equity leaders demonstrating to foster equitable schools?"* The culturally responsive school leadership practices (CRSLP) questions were developed. This alignment assessed the extent to which participants' responses reflected their regular engagement with CRSLF indicators. Furthermore, using multiple 5-point Likert scales allowed participants to rate the frequency and importance of each practice. The importance scale ranged from "Not Important" (0) to "Very Important" (4), while the frequency scale spanned from "Never" (0) to "Always" (4). Cronbach's alpha for the CRSLP using this sample was moderately high (α = .75). In addition to the qualitative questions, the FELS asked participants about the most critical aspects needed to make an impact as equity leaders. This open-ended question provided additional quantitative data to assist in answering this research question and aligning practices to CRSLF.

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Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Variables

To investigate the research question, *"What variables constitute the role of a district-level equity leader?"* the study utilized "the Fields Equity Leaders Survey (FELS)," comprising 18 questions. These questions encompassed a range of demographic inquiries directly relevant to the participants, their respective school districts, and their roles. Participants were requested to provide self-reported responses based on various multiple-choice options, including percentages and other relevant variables. In addition to the qualitative questions, the FELS included an open-ended question regarding the barriers that equity leaders face. This additional quantitative data set provided additional insight onto the various variables that comprise the role of equity leaders.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Impact

To explore the research question, *"How are district-level equity leaders measuring their impact?"* the Fields Equity Leaders Survey (FELS) was utilized. The survey contained specific questions that directly addressed the measurement of impact by equity leaders. These questions employed a 5-point Likert scale, enabling participants to indicate their level of agreement with statements related to their impact. Moreover, the survey inquired about the frequency of using various practices and measures to evaluate their impact. The Likert scale spanned from "Never" (0) to "Rarely" (1), "Sometimes" (2), "Often" (3), and "Always" (4). Cronbach's alpha for the questions used to measure impact using this sample was high (α = .91). To add more explanation to the quantitative data, I incorporated an open-ended qualitative question, allowing participants to describe the methods they employed to measure the impact of their work as equity leaders.

With the inclusion of quantitative and qualitative prompts, data collected through the survey provided a rich dataset for analysis and exploration of the research questions. The quantitative data enabled the identification of prevalent culturally responsive practices, variables

that shape the role of equity leaders, and the frequency and importance assigned to these practices. The qualitative data offered additional insights into the experiences and practices employed by district-level equity leaders to measure their impact.

Validity and Reliability

Creswell and Clark (2018) defined, "validity in mixed methods research as employing strategies that address potential threats to drawing correct inferences and accurate assessments from the integrated data" (p.251) Measuring the reliability of the survey is crucial to ensure the consistency and stability of the obtained data. Validity in quantitative research is maximized by using a set of procedures to demonstrate the accuracy of the findings and convince readers of that accuracy (Creswell, 2014). In this study, internal reliability was examined. A survey's internal reliability measures how consistently participants respond to questions that measure the same concept. It gives an indication as to the degree to which the components of a scale are measuring the same fundamental idea. For each scale in the survey, the commonly used Cronbach's alpha coefficient was determined to measure the internal reliability of various questions used in the Fields Equity Leaders Survey (FELS). Greater internal consistency is indicated by higher values of Cronbach's alpha, which range from 0 to 1. For establishing internal reliability, a minimal threshold of 0.70 is commonly regarded as acceptable (DeVellis, 2017).

In terms of validity and reliability of the qualitative data Merriam & Tisdell (2016) point out that one "can never capture an objective *truth* or *reality*" (p.244). My ability to triangulate the qualitative data with the quantitative data allowed confirming emerging findings. Internal validity was confirmed as a result of this increased credibility. "Triangulation in whatever form, increases credibility and quality by countering the concern that a study's findings are simply an artifact of a single method, a single source, or a single investigator's blinders" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016,

p.245). Another method I used to guarantee data reliability was purposeful selection, which involved employing a single, standardized instrument, FELS, to collect participants' responses on both outcomes.

Data Collection Procedures

The research process began after receiving University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. I conducted a modest pilot study as the first step in this research project, applying the FELS to survey a select number of subject matter experts. This was done to better understand each question/prompt's validity and the functionality of the FELS instrument. Participants reported that the tool was easy to use and the questions made sense. One participant raised concern about the survey's length. I subsequently made a few minor adjustments to the instrument and the participant was ready to conduct the study.

Before implementing the instrument, a survey pilot was conducted. The study aimed to investigate the practices, variables, and impact measurement related to district-level equity leaders in PreK–12 educational settings. The survey incorporated quantitative and qualitative questions aligned with the research questions of this study. This study's primary data collection method included the Fields Equity Leaders Survey (FELS), a survey instrument where district-level equity leaders self-reported. The FELS instrument was carefully developed to ensure it comprehensively encompassed quantitative and qualitative research questions.

The survey was administered online using Google Forms, a secure platform, that allowed participants to complete it at their convenience while maintaining the privacy of their responses. As Creswell (2013) noted, "Voluntary participation is essential in maintaining the integrity of the research process and ensuring that participants feel comfortable providing their insights and

experiences" (p. 147). This approach maximizes participants' engagement and data quality while upholding ethics and safeguarding confidentiality.

The survey was then administered electronically (one-time) to a diverse sample of district-level equity leaders in PreK–12 educational settings. Utilizing this type of design enabled development of a confidential online survey instrument to gather quantitative data. There were many benefits to using this design, such as the rapid turnaround in data collection.

Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data analysis involves "converting the raw data into a form useful for data analysis" (Creswell & Clark, 2018, p. 212). The quantitative data was examined in the analysis phase to identify any numerical patterns or trends. SPSS statistics, designed to perform a wide range of statistical procedures, was used to code and compute the data (Cronk, 2020). SPSS assisted me with creating tables of the data to be included in the data analysis phase of this study. SPSS is a widely recognized and extensively used software tool specifically designed for social sciences research. Its statistical functionality and analysis capabilities make it ideal for managing complex datasets and conducting rigorous statistical analysis. To efficiently and effectively perform the analysis in SPSS, the quantitative data was cleaned.

Once the data were prepared for analysis, SPSS was used to provide descriptive statistics, inferential analysis, and various multivariate procedures. The software's easy-to-use interface and intuitive features facilitated data manipulation, visualization, and interpretation. These features enabled to derive meaningful insights and reliable conclusions from the data. The use of SPSS in the analysis processes ensured the application of suitable statistical techniques to enhance the validity and reliability of the data analysis process. Descriptive statistics were utilized to analyze all survey items with multiple-choice answer options, referred to as choice-survey items. These

choice survey items enabled the identification of data trends. Additionally, correlations between different choice survey items were explored to further examine the relationships within the data. Creswell and Clark (2018) indicated that "descriptive statistics are generated for all major variables in a study" (p.213).

After the quantitative analysis, I analyzed the responses to the qualitative open-ended questions to identify patterns or themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018) within the data to gain further insights into the district-level equity leaders' perspectives, roles, and key practices regarding DEI. This process began by cleaning up the open-ended questions and ensuring the responses made sense. The majority of the data cleaning consisted of revising punctuation, spelling out acronyms, and adding information encased in brackets so that the data were understandable. Next, a spreadsheet of the qualitative data was uploaded into the computer-aided qualitative data analysis software program NVivo. Then, the data related to the qualitative questions were inductively coded separately. This process involved assigning meaning-based labels to segments of data relevant to the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Then, the coded data were organized into groups of similar meaning. These groups were then combined to form larger patterns (i.e., themes). Within the grouping stage, the data were checked and rearranged to ensure the data were relevant to the grouping and relevant to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once the themes were generated, the themes were named according to the meaning of the data within each theme.

Limitations and Delimitations

This research study acknowledges several limitations and delimitations that shape the scope and boundaries of the investigation. To begin with, the eligibility criteria for the study were limited to people holding specific titles as outlined in job descriptions. This limitation restricted

the inclusion of other relevant positions, such as directors of culture and climate, who may actively engage in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work. Furthermore, the study's exploration of participants' level of education was hindered by a limited understanding of their degree concentrations and expertise in equity leadership. This lack of information reduced the depth of analysis regarding the participants' educational backgrounds and specializations. Another challenge lies in the absence of records or public listings of equity leaders, making it difficult to identify and recruit potential participants. The limited availability of such information further narrowed the pool of eligible individuals for this study.

This research study also encountered hurdles posed by the research approval processes implemented by some districts. These processes involved time-consuming approval procedures, multiple steps, and administrative requirements, creating barriers to participant recruitment. The intricate nature of these procedures may have impeded the study's ability to gather data from those districts, affecting the overall representation and generalizability of the findings. By acknowledging these limitations and delimitations, this study provided transparency and context for the findings, allowing for a more nuanced interpretation and understanding of the research outcomes.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the methodology used in this mixed methods concurrent triangulation exploratory survey-based research of equity leaders at the PreK–12 public school level. This study sought to bridge the knowledge gap in the existing literature and contribute valuable insights into how the role of equity leaders is structured and key implementation practices. Additionally, the study sought to uncover how diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts are being measured within a school district and any variables that may impact

diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. Participants in the research study comprised those with a current job title that includes diversity, equity, or inclusion and who hold leadership or administrative positions at the central office level in a public school system serving grades K–12.

In alignment with an mixed-method concurrent triangulation exploratory research design, this chapter included the quantitative and qualitative processes and decisions made. The subsequent chapters include the findings derived from the quantitative and qualitative data analysis. In Chapter 6, I answer the research questions and discuss the related implications for educational diversity, equity, and leadership in the K-12 U.S. context. Finally, recommendations for future practice and research are presented.

CHAPTER 4: QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of a mixed methods concurrent triangulation exploratory survey-based aimed at investigating the roles of district-level PreK–12 equity leaders, the variables that compose the roles, and the methods employed by these leaders to measure their impact in fostering equitable schools. This chapter focuses on the quantitative findings of this study.

The primary data collection method for this quantitative phase was an online survey. The Fields Equity Leader Survey (FELS) included 31 questions intended to gather quantitative data. The quantitative survey questions consist of choice survey items, which have multiple-choice answer options. Choice survey items revealed trends among the data and served as potential variables for comparison and deeper analysis. The type of response categories included in the quantitative questions are rating scales that include the following options: "like," "never," "rarely," "sometimes," "often," and "always." The various demographic checklists ranking had the following options: "not at all important," "slightly important," "moderately important," "very important," "extremely important," or "strongly agree," "agree," "neither" "agree," "nor disagree," "disagree," and "strongly disagree." The Fields Equity Leaders Survey (FELS) was completed by 35 participants. Based on data from Zippia.com, 35 participants represent 12.5% of the estimated population of school administrators in the United States. This quantitative data collection method provided a nuanced understanding of the practices and impact exhibited by district-level equity leaders and the factors that shape their pivotal roles to gain insights from district-level equity leaders.

By analyzing this dataset, valuable insights and answers to the research questions were gathered. The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

RQ1: What culturally responsive school leadership practices are district-level equity leaders demonstrating to foster equitable schools?

RQ2: What variables compose the role of a district-level equity leader?

RQ 3: How are district-level equity leaders measuring their impact?

These findings may contribute to a deeper understanding of district-level equity leaders' practices, variables, and impact measurement strategies, ultimately informing the development of effective practices and measures of impact in PreK–12 educational settings. I believe these results may also add to the growing body of knowledge on equitable leadership in academia and help shape the creation of useful and efficient strategies for the diverse range of PreK–12 educational environments.

Research Question 1

Research question one asked, "*What culturally responsive school leadership practices are district-level equity leaders demonstrating to foster equitable schools?"* I systematically examined this question through a series of quantitative choice questions. This data set comprised responses from 35 participants. The following tables represent quantitative data that is relevant to this research question, offering a comprehensive perspective on the prevalence, frequency of use, engagement in attitudinal traits, and perceived importance of culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) practices among the participants.

Each table within this section is organized to present not only the number of indicated responses but also the corresponding percentages of these responses, providing a nuanced understanding of the distribution patterns. Additionally, the mean and standard deviation values are included to offer insights into the central tendency and variability of the quantitative data. This structured presentation aimed to uncover the multifaceted nature of culturally responsive

school leadership practices, allowing for a thorough examination of the extent to which district-level equity leaders engage in and perceive the importance of CRSL practices in their pursuit of fostering equity within school districts.

In Table 4, I provide a comprehensive overview of the frequency with which participants engaged in identified diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices. The practices are systematically ranked from most to least frequently utilized. Notably, participants reported high engagement in collaborative efforts and advisory roles with internal stakeholders, indicating a mean of 3.29. Similarly, working directly with school leaders was identified as a frequently employed practice, with a mean of 3.26. Additionally, the practice of representing and communicating district DEI efforts garnered notable frequency of use, reflected in a mean of 3.23. Conversely, the least frequently utilized DEI practice was found to provide professional development for district board of education with a mean of 0.94. Furthermore, it was reported that human resources auditing or evaluation, with a mean of 1.51 and collaborating and advising the board of education, with a mean of 1.66 had the lowest frequencies. This table represents the varying degrees of engagement among district-level equity leaders in specific DEI practices, shedding light on the practices that are most commonly embraced and those that may warrant further attention or exploration.

Table 4

DEI Practices Used by Study Participants, Ordered from Most-Commonly Used to Least-Commonly Used Practices

Practice	M	SD
1. Collaborate and advise with internal stakeholders (district and school leadership)*	3.29	0.79
2. Working directly with school leaders**	3.26	0.70
3. Represent and communicate district DEI efforts****	3.23	0.91
4. Networking outside of district.****	3.09	0.95
5. Collaborate with other instructional departments (teaching, learning, curriculum, and instruction)**	3.06	1.00
6. Working directly with other district leaders.*	3.00	0.94
6. Collaborate with external stakeholders (parents, community members).****	3.00	0.80
8. Establish DEI committees or affinity groups.***	2.97	1.25
8. Respond to racially motivated incidents or reports of injustice.*	2.97	1.04
10. Collaborate and advise the superintendent.*	2.94	1.06
11. Provide professional development for district leadership staff (principals, directors, superintendent, etc.).**	2.91	0.85
12. Establish or implement initiatives to improve the culture and climate of the district for students.***	2.83	0.99
12. Develop and implement DEI programs and initiatives and staff.***	2.83	0.89
14. Provide professional development for instructional staff (teachers, paraprofessionals, etc.)**	2.80	0.87
15. Establish or implement initiatives to improve the culture and climate of the district for staff.***	2.77	1.00

Note. Each asterisk indicates a CRSLP. *critical self reflection|**developing and sustaining culturally responsive teachers & curricula|***promoting inclusive anti-oppressive school contacts|****engaging students local neighborhood community context.

Table 5

DEI Practices Used by Study Participants, Ordered from Most-Commonly Used to Least-

Commonly Used Practices (Continued)

Practice	M	SD
16. Collaborate with non-instructional departments (outreach, safety, operations, family and community engagement)***	2.71	1.02
17. Strategic planning*	2.69	1.23
17. Provide DEI curricular resources to schools**	2.69	0.99
19. Engage in policy work (review, revising, or writing)*	2.57	1.17
20. Develop or implement DEI programs and initiatives for students.***	2.54	1.04
20. Working directly with students****	2.54	1.01
20. Collaborating with outside resources (consultants, etc.)**	2.54	0.89
23. Host or sponsor diversity celebrations or events.***	2.46	1.34
24. Establish or implement an Equity Policy*	2.37	1.42
25. Conduct or review Equity Audit or equity needs assessment.*	2.17	1.29
26. Advise and review School Improvement Plans***	2.11	1.41
27. Conduct DEI focused school visits or walkthroughs.**	1.86	1.38
28. Budgeting	1.86	1.26
29. Collaborate and advise the Board of Education*	1.66	0.97
30. Human resources audit or evaluation of practices.*	1.51	1.22
31. Provide professional development for district Board of Education.**	0.94	1.06

Note. Each asterisk indicates a CRSLP. *critical self reflection|**developing and sustaining culturally responsive teachers & curricula|***promoting inclusive anti-oppressive school contacts|****engaging students local neighborhood community context.

In Table 6 outline the frequency of engagement in culturally responsive school leadership practices (CRSLP) to advance equity in school districts on a regular basis is outlined. The variables of CRSLP include critical self-reflection, developing and sustaining culturally responsive teachers and curricula, promoting inclusive anti-oppressive school contacts, and engaging students/local neighborhood community context. Among these practices, critical self-reflection emerged as the most frequently reported practice, attaining a mean of 3.06. A substantial 43% of participants reported engaging in critical self-reflection "always," while 37%

reported doing so "often." Subsequent practices were reported to be used "sometimes" by participants, with the development and sustenance of culturally responsive teachers and curricula at 34%, the promotion of inclusive anti-oppressive school contacts at 26%, and the engagement with students/local neighborhood community context at 31%. This detailed breakdown illuminates the varying levels of engagement among district-level equity leaders in specific CRSLP, providing insights into the practices that are consistently embraced and those that exhibit fluctuating degrees of utilization.

Table 6

Frequency of Culturally Responsive School Leadership Practices

Variable	*n=35*	*%*	*M (SD)*
Critical self-reflection			3.06 (1.11)
Never	1	3%	
Rarely	4	11%	
Sometimes	2	6%	
Often	13	37%	
Always	15	43%	
Developing and sustaining culturally responsive teachers and curricula			2.37 (1.11)
Never	2	6%	
Rarely	5	14%	
Sometimes	12	34%	
Often	10	29%	
Always	6	17%	
Promoting inclusive, anti-oppressive school contacts			2.29 (1.32)
Never	3	9%	
Rarely	8	23%	
Sometimes	9	26%	
Often	6	17%	
Always	9	26%	
Engaging students indigenous/local neighborhood community contexts			1.86 (1.06)
Never	4	11%	
Rarely	9	26%	
Sometimes	11	31%	
Often	10	29%	
Always	1	3%	

Tables 7 and 8 display the frequency of engagement in attitudinal traits exhibited by culturally responsive school leaders. The traits presented in no particular order and defined within the FELS encompass courage, connectedness, humility, deference, intolerance, distributive, decolonizing, and humanizing. Notably, participants reported utilizing all attitudinal traits "often," with 37% or more endorsing each trait at this frequency. Specifically, 43% reported engaging in courage, 37% in connectedness, 49% in humility, 57% in deference, 40% in intolerance, 63% in distributive, 46% in decolonizing, and 49% in humanizing "often." Remarkably, only 6% or less of participants reported "never" engaging in each attitudinal trait. This detailed breakdown provides a nuanced understanding of the widespread utilization of these attitudinal traits among district-level equity leaders, shedding light on the consistent incorporation of these traits in their leadership practices.

Table 7

Frequencies for Engagement in Attitudinal Traits of Culturally Responsive School Leaders

Variable:	n=35	%	M (SD)
Courage			2.86 (1.03)
Never	1	3%	
Rarely	3	9%	
Sometimes	6	17%	
Often	15	43%	
Always	10	29%	
Connectedness			2.77 (1.00)
Never	1	3%	
Rarely	2	6%	
Sometimes	10	29%	
Often	13	37%	
Always	9	26%	
Humility			2.80 (.87)
Never	0	0%	
Rarely	3	9%	
Sometimes	8	23%	
Often	17	49%	
Always	7	20%	
Deference			2.83 (.92)
Never	0	0%	
Rarely	5	14%	
Sometimes	3	9%	
Often	20	57%	
Always	7	20%	

Table 8

Frequencies for Engagement in Attitudinal Traits of Culturally Responsive School Leaders (Continued)

Variable:	n=35	%	M (SD)
Intolerance			3.00 (1.09)
Never	2	6%	
Rarely	1	3%	
Sometimes	5	14%	
Often	14	40%	
Always	13	37%	
Distributive			2.77 (1.03)
Never	2	6%	
Rarely	3	9%	
Sometimes	2	6%	
Often	22	63%	
Always	6	17%	
Decolonizing			2.94 (1.03)
Never	1	3%	
Rarely	3	9%	
Sometimes	4	11%	
Often	16	46%	
Always	11	31%	
Humanizing			2.89 (.96)
Never	1	3%	
Rarely	2	6%	
Sometimes	6	17%	
Often	17	49%	
Always	9	26%	

Table 9 presents equity leaders' perceptions of the importance of culturally responsive school leadership Practices (CRSLP) to their role. The CRSLP variables examined in this dataset include critical self-reflection, developing and sustaining culturally responsive teachers and curricula, promoting inclusive anti-oppressive school contacts, and engaging with students/local neighborhood community context. Participants notably underscored the importance of critical self-reflection, with 43% deeming it "extremely important." Developing and sustaining culturally responsive teachers and curricula received a rating of "moderately important" from 34% of participants. Promoting inclusive anti-oppressive school contacts was perceived as both "moderately important" and "extremely important" by 26% of participants. Additionally, engaging with students/local neighborhood community context was reported as "moderately important" by 31% of participants. This nuanced exploration offers insights into the varying degrees of importance attributed to different CRSLP variables by district-level equity leaders, providing a comprehensive understanding of the nuanced perspectives that shape their leadership roles.

Table 9

Frequencies for Participants' Perceptions of Importance of Culturally Responsive School Leadership Practices

Variable:	n=35	%	M (SD)
Critical self-reflection			3.06 (1.11)
Not at all important	1	3%	
Slightly important	4	11%	
Moderately important	2	6%	
Very important	13	37%	
Extremely important	15	43%	
Developing and sustaining culturally responsive teachers/curricula			2.37 (1.11)
Not at all important	2	6%	
Slightly important	5	14%	
Moderately important	12	34%	
Very important	10	29%	
Extremely important	6	17%	
Promoting inclusive, anti-oppressive school contacts			2.29 (1.32)
Not at all important	3	9%	
Slightly important	8	23%	
Moderately important	9	26%	
Very important	6	17%	
Extremely important	9	26%	
Engaging students' indigenous (or local neighborhood) contexts			1.86 (1.06)
Not at all important	4	11%	
Slightly important	9	26%	
Moderately important	11	31%	
Very important	10	29%	
Extremely important	1	3%	

Research question 1 delved into the complexities of culturally responsive school leadership practices (CRSLP) demonstrated by district-level equity leaders. The synthesized quantitative findings in this section contributed to a nuanced understanding of how these leaders engage in diverse diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and CRSLP while also shedding light on their perceptions of the importance of CRSLP. This comprehensive perspective provided valuable insights into the multifaceted landscape of practices embraced by district-level equity leaders.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 investigated *the variables that compose the role of a district-level equity leader.* A series of choice questions tailored to the unique positions and contexts of each participant within their respective school districts were administered. The data tables within this section present supplementary quantitative data, highlighting the demographics of participants and their districts, as well as the characteristics of their roles and available resources. Additionally, a set of targeted choice questions was administered to collect pertinent data, allowing equity leaders to self-report on the adequacy of resources and their accessibility for advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives within their school districts. This data served to contribute to a thorough understanding of the diverse factors that shape the multifaceted roles of district-level equity leaders.

Table 10 outlines a variety of demographic characteristics of participants, providing insights into their gender, race/ethnicity, gender-specific race/ethnicity, level of education, and age ranges. Within this dataset, 63% of equity leaders identified as Black or African-American, whereas 23% were White. Conversely, 6% or less reported being Hispanic/Latinx, Asian/Asian-American, or other. Notably, 34% of participants identified as Black or African-American females, while 29% identified as Black or African-American males. In terms of educational

attainment, 49% held a terminal degree, and a substantial 37% possessed at least a master's

degree. Moreover, 63% of participants fell within the 45 to 54 age bracket, with an additional

29% in the 35 to 44 age group. This comprehensive breakdown of demographic characteristics

provided a detailed snapshot of the diverse and complex composition of equity leaders involved

in the study.

Table 10

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Variable	*n=35*	*%*
Gender		
Female	22	63%
Male	13	37%
Race/Ethnicity		
Black/African American	22	63%
White	8	23%
Hispanic/Latinx	2	6%
Other	2	6%
Asian/Asian American	1	3%
Male Race/Ethnicity		
Black/African American	10	29%
White	2	6%
Asian/Asian American	1	3%
Female Race/Ethnicity		
Black/African American	12	34%
White	6	17%
Hispanic/Latinx	2	6%
Other	2	6%
Highest level of education		
Bachelor's degree	2	6%
Master's degree	13	37%
Educational specialist degree	2	6%
Master's degree & educational specialist degree	1	3%
Terminal degree	17	49%
Age ranges		
25-34	1	3%
35-44	10	29%
45-54	22	63%
55-64	2	6%

Table 11 shows the diverse job titles held by the participants in this study. Among the 19 distinct titles reported, a notable 37% of equity leaders indicated that their job titles included the term "director." This analysis sheds light on the range of titles within this study, providing valuable insights into the leadership positions and responsibilities held by district-level equity leaders.

Table 11

Professional Titles of Study Participants

Title	n	%
Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion/Belonging	13	37%
Executive Director of Equity/Educational Equity	2	6%
Associate Superintendent of Teaching and Learning with Equity	1	3%
Assistant Superintendence of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion	2	6%
Chief Equity and Diversity/Inclusion Officer	2	6%
Director of Educational Equity	1	3%
Director of Equity and Access/Belonging	2	6%
Director of Equity and Continuous Improvement	1	3%
Director of Equity and Student Support	1	3%
Director of Instructional Equity and Accountability	1	3%
Director of Student Support	1	3%
Coordinator of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion	1	3%
Cultural Unity and Equity Coordinator	1	3%
Diversity Recruitment Program Manager	1	3%
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Coordinator	1	3%
Senior Manager for Equity	1	3%
Specialist-Equity	1	3%
Specialist-Diversity Hiring	1	3%
Inclusion coach	1	3%

Table 12 provides a comprehensive overview of the distinctive qualities inherent to each equity leader's role. A substantial 89% of equity leaders reported occupying their roles for a duration spanning 2–5 years. Notably, 60% of participants disclosed possessing over 5 years of classroom teaching experience, coupled with prior roles as school or district/central office administrators and/or diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) experience in education or other settings. In response to inquiries about their participation in the superintendent's cabinet, 51%

affirmed their membership, while 49% indicated otherwise. Further insights into the organizational structure revealed that 46% of equity leaders assumed the role of leading a dedicated department. In contrast, 37% of participants reported functioning as sole practitioners within their respective departments. Additionally, 17% of participants indicated that their role was situated within another department. However, 29% reported having access to a budget exceeding $100,000, reflecting a substantial commitment to equity initiatives within their respective districts. Noteworthy is the revelation that 20% of participants either lacked a budget allocation or operated with a budget totaling less than $25,000 to $50,000. These nuanced details provided a comprehensive understanding of the varied experiences, responsibilities, and resource allocations associated with the roles of district-level equity leaders.

Table 12

Characteristics of Participants' Role and School Resources

Variable	*n=35*	*%*
Years in role		
<1 year	4	11%
2-5 years	31	89%
Previous experience		
5+ years of classroom teaching	6	
Previous role as a school or district/central office administrator	2	6%
<5 years classroom teaching and previous role as a school or district/central office administrator or DEI experience in education/other setting	3	9%
5+ years of classroom teaching and previous role as a school or district/central office administrator or DEI experience in education/other setting	21	60%
No classroom teaching experience; DEI experience in education/other setting	3	9%
Are you a part of your Superintendent's cabinet?		
Yes	18	51%
No	17	49%
Which of the following best describes your role?		
I lead a department	16	46%
I am a department of one	13	37%
My role is part of another department	6	17%
Current budget allocation to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion		
$0	7	20%
<$25,000	7	20%
<$50,000	7	20%
<$100,000	4	11%
>$100,000	10	29%

Additionally, an assessment of district-level characteristics is provided in the following tables, detailing the racial/ethnic composition of the participants' school districts and other pertinent data. The majority, 77% of equity leaders, reported their school district is situated in a suburban community, with 20% indicating an urban community setting. Additionally, 80% of equity leaders noted their school district's location in a democratic state, while 20% reported being in a republican state. Approximately 57% of participants mentioned that 0–10% of their students were Black, and 54% reported 10–25% being Latinx. Moreover, 34% of participants indicated that 50% to 75% of their student body was White. In contrast, 94% reported having only 0–10% of their student body composed of Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders. Furthermore, 32% of participants noted that 10% to 25% of their student body is considered low-income, and 46% of equity leaders stated that 10% to 25% of their student body was English language learners. This comprehensive examination offers insights into the diverse demographic and socioeconomic landscapes of the school districts represented by the equity leaders in the study. Refer to tables 13 - 15 in the text.

Table 13

District Community Characteristics of the sample

Variable	*n=35*	*%*
Type of school community		
Suburban	27	77%
Urban	7	20%
Rural	1	3%
Political State Affiliation		
Democratic States	28	80%
Republican States	7	20%

Table 14

District Student Demographic Characteristics

Variable	*n=35*	*%*
Percentage of Black students		
0-10%	20	57%
10-25%	6	17%
25-50%	6	17%
50-75%	2	6%
Over 75%	1	3%
Percentage of Latinx students		
0-10%	8	23%
10-25%	19	54%
25-50%	7	20%
50-75%	1	3%
Over 75%	0	0%
Percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander		
0-10%	23	66%
10-25%	9	26%
25-50%	3	9%
50-75%	0	0%
Over 75%	0	0%
Percentage of White students		
0-10%	0	0%
10-25%	6	17%
25-50%	11	31%
50-75%	12	34%
Over 75%	6	17%
Percentage of Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander		
0-10%	33	94%
10-25%	2	6%
25-50%	0	0%
50-75%	0	%
Over 75%	0	0%

Table 15

Other District Student Demographic Characteristics

Variable	*n=35*	*%*
Percentage of low-income students		
0-10%	6	17%
10-25%	11	32%
25-50%	7	21%
50-75%	7	21%
Over 75%	3	9%
Percentage of students who are English learners		
0-10%	10	29%
10-25%	16	46%
25-50%	7	20%
50-75%	2	6%
Over 75%	0	0%

In the following tables, a Likert scale, spanning from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," was employed to assess equity leaders' perceptions of access to resources. Notably, 29% of participants responded with "neither agree nor disagree" when questioned about their sufficiency of access to financial resources for impactful initiatives. Conversely, 37% expressed disagreement regarding their access to human resources to make an impact. When questioned about access to principals and schools, 31% agreed, with an additional 31% selecting "neither agree nor disagree." Regarding access to the superintendent, 43% of participants concurred. In terms of influence over instructional design, 34% responded with disagreement, accompanied by another 34% selecting "neither agree nor disagree." Concerning influence over policy, 31% of participants responded with "neither agree nor disagree." Participants' access to the board of

education to make an impact prompted 37% to respond with "neither agree nor disagree."

Interestingly, when asked about access to internal and external stakeholders, a majority of 54%

expressed agreement. This detailed examination unveiled the nuanced perspectives of equity

leaders regarding their access to critical resources and their influence across various domains

within the educational landscape.

Table 16

Frequencies for Resources and Access to Advance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Variable:	n=35	%	M (SD)
Sufficient access to financial resources to make an impact as an Equity leader			2.06 (1.16)
Strongly disagree	4	11%	
Disagree	7	20%	
Neither agree/disagree	10	29%	
Agree	11	31%	
Strongly agree	3	9%	
Sufficient access to human resources to make an impact			1.46 (1.22)
Strongly disagree	8	23%	
Disagree	13	37%	
Neither agree/disagree	7	20%	
Agree	4	11%	
Strongly agree	3	9%	
Sufficient access to principals and schools to make an impact			2.34 (1.06)
Strongly disagree	1	3%	
Disagree	7	20%	
Neither agree/disagree	11	31%	
Agree	11	31%	
Strongly agree	5	14%	

Table 17

Frequencies for Resources and Access to Advance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Continued)

Variable:	*n=35*	*%*	*M (SD)*
Sufficient access to the Superintendent			3.00 (1.00)
Strongly disagree	1	3%	
Disagree	2	6%	
Neither agree/disagree	5	14%	
Agree	15	43%	
Strongly agree	12	34%	
Sufficient influence over instructional decisions to make an impact			1.69 (1.05)
Strongly disagree	4	11%	
Disagree	12	34%	
Neither agree/disagree	12	34%	
Agree	5	14%	
Strongly agree	2	6%	
Influence over policy to make an impact			2.20 (1.21)
Strongly disagree	3	9%	
Disagree	7	20%	
Neither agree/disagree	11	31%	
Agree	8	23%	
Strongly agree	6	17%	
Sufficient access to the Board of Education to make an impact			1.83 (1.07)
Strongly disagree	4	11%	
Disagree	9	26%	
Neither agree/disagree	13	37%	
Agree	7	20%	
Strongly agree	2	6%	

Table 18

Frequencies for Resources and Access to Advance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Continued)

Variable:	*n=35*	*%*	*M (SD)*
Access to internal stakeholders to make an impact (staff, students)			2.49 (.92)
Strongly disagree	1	3%	
Disagree	5	14%	
Neither agree/disagree	7	20%	
Agree	20	57%	
Strongly agree	2	6%	
Access to external stakeholders to make an impact (parents, community members)			2.49 (.89)
Strongly disagree	1	3%	
Disagree	4	11%	
Neither agree/disagree	9	26%	
Agree	19	54%	
Strongly agree	2	6%	

In conclusion, in this section, Research Question 2 was explored and provided a comprehensive spotlight on the variables that intricately compose the roles of district-level equity leaders. Through the use of purposefully tailored choice questions, participants provided insights into their unique positions and contextual nuances within their respective school districts. The data tables within this section, presented quantitative data, and provided a comprehensive overview of the demographics of participants, district characteristics, and the intricate details of their roles and perspectives on the sufficiency of resources and their accessibility for advancing DEI initiatives within their respective school districts. Additionally, I believe that this wealth of information may significantly contribute to a thorough understanding of the diverse factors that shape the multifaceted roles of district-level equity leaders. The findings not only illuminated the intricacies of their responsibilities but also underscored the significance of context-specific variables that influence their contributions to fostering equity within their educational settings.

Research Question 3

In addressing Research Question 3, this study delved into the crucial aspect of how equity leaders gauge and measure their impact. Participants provided insights into the frequency with which they engaged in practices aimed at assessing the impact of their DEI efforts. The ensuing tables within this section present quantitative data aligned with this research question, shedding light on the varied approaches employed by equity leaders to evaluate and understand the effectiveness of their initiatives in fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

Table 19 provides insights into the frequency of utilization of various practices adopted by equity leaders to gauge their impact. These practices were systematically ranked based on their

extent of utilization, spanning from "never" to "always." Notably, 40% of participants reported

"often" engaging in the monitoring and review of achievement data, while 46% similarly reported

"often" monitoring and reviewing demographic data. Significantly, when assessing the monitoring

and reviewing of program data, 40% of participants reported doing this "sometimes."

Furthermore, in the context of monitoring and reviewing perception data, 37% reported doing so

"often." This detailed analysis sheds light on the diverse practices employed by equity leaders to

assess their impact, emphasizing the varying degrees of frequency in the utilization of these

evaluative measures.

Table 19

Frequency of Engagement in Practices to Measure the Impact of Participants' District's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Efforts

Variable	*n=35*	*%*	*M (SD)*
Monitor and review student achievement data			2.74 (.98)
Never	1	3%	
Rarely	2	6%	
Sometimes	10	29%	
Often	14	40%	
Always	8	23%	
Monitor and review demographic data			2.94 (.80)
Never	0	0%	
Rarely	1	3%	
Sometimes	9	26%	
Often	16	46%	
Always	9	26%	

Table 20

Frequency of Engagement in Practices to Measure the Impact of Participants' District's

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Efforts (Continued)

Variable	*n=35*	*%*	*M (SD)*
<u>Monitor and review program data (information on all school programs)</u>			2.57 (1.04)
Never	1	3%	
Rarely	3	9%	
Sometimes	14	40%	
Often	9	26%	
Always	8	23%	
<u>Monitor and review perception data (information on the attitudes of stakeholders in the school, such as teachers, students, parents)</u>			2.43 (1.15)
Never	2	6%	
Rarely	6	17%	
Sometimes	8	23%	
Often	13	37%	
Always	6	17%	

To sum up, Research Question 3 explored the vital aspect of how equity leaders operate within the domain of diversity, equality, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives and assessed their influence. Participants provided valuable insights into the frequency of their engagement in practices designed to assess the impact of their DEI efforts. The quantitative data presented in this section illuminated the diverse strategies and approaches embraced by equity leaders in their pursuit of fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the quantitative findings of this mixed methods concurrent triangulation exploratory survey-based research study, delving into the intricate dimensions of district-level PreK–12 equity leadership. Through a survey design, the roles and the variables that shape equity leaders' roles, practices, and impact measurement strategies in fostering equitable school districts were explored. The extensive dataset from the Fields Equity Leader Survey provided a quantitative lens through which I addressed the research questions, offering valuable contributions to the existing knowledge gaps surrounding equity leaders. The numerical insights gained in this chapter lay the foundation for a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted landscape of equity leadership.

In the next results chapter, a qualitative exploration that complements and enriches the quantitative data are provided. Chapter 5 illuminates district-level equity leaders' lived experiences, challenges, and successes, offering a deeper understanding of their practices. Through open-ended survey questions, I sought to uncover nuanced aspects of equity leadership, and the qualitative findings provide a narrative layer to the broader investigation. By combining quantitative and qualitative dimensions, this study aimed to provide a holistic and nuanced perspective on the roles and impact of district-level PreK–12 equity leaders in fostering equitable PreK–12 educational environment.

CHAPTER 5: QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the qualitative results derived from this exploratory mixed methods study focused on the roles, practices, and impact measurement strategies of district-level PreK–12 equity leaders. While the previous chapter focused on the quantitative aspects of the investigation, the following section provides a deeper understanding of the impact exhibited by district-level equity leaders and the factors that shape their pivotal roles

The primary data collection method for this qualitative phase was a survey design. The Fields Equity Leader Survey (FELS) included three specific open-ended questions intended to gather qualitative data that further explored the complex work of district-level equity leaders. By delving into their experiences, challenges, and successes, the intricate layers of equity leaders' practices and the underlying variables that define their roles were uncovered. The Fields Equity Leaders Survey was completed by 35 participants (FELS). Based on data from Zippia.com reports, 35 participants represent 12.5% of the estimated population of school administrators in the United States.

This dataset analysis provided insightful information and addressed the research questions. The following research questions served as this study's guide:

RQ 1: What culturally responsive school leadership practices are district-level equity leaders demonstrating to foster equitable schools?

RQ 2: What variables compose the role of a district-level equity leader?

RQ 3: How are district-level equity leaders measuring their impact?

Addressing these research questions, valuable insights beyond the quantitative data, providing a qualitative narrative to the broader exploration were unearthed. As I navigate through the responses and reflections of district-level equity leaders, the analysis aimed to illuminate the

lived experiences that shape their practices, identify the essential components of their roles, and elucidate the nuanced approaches employed to measure their impact.

The analytical process for examined responses to the qualitative open-ended questions, included identifying patterns and themes within the data to gain deeper insights into district-level equity leaders' perspectives, roles, and key practices related to DEI. The process involved cleaning up responses, uploading qualitative data to NVivo, inductively coding the data, organizing codes into thematic groups, and finally, naming themes based on the underlying meaning of the data, ensuring relevance to the research questions.

This chapter is organized by each research question. Then, various graphs are provided that highlight significant themes and subcategories identified in the coding process of this descriptive data analysis. Each theme and subcategory identified provides valuable insights into the various dimensions of district-level equity leadership. With 35 participants, this qualitative data set had a combined total of 190 references. The references include direct quotations or responses from participants.

The significance of these qualitative findings lies in their potential to contribute to a deeper understanding of district-level equity leadership. By illuminating the practices, variables, and impact measurement strategies, this exploration sought to inform the development of effective practices and measures in PreK–12 educational settings. In doing so, it may aspire to enhance the collective efforts towards fostering equitable and inclusive educational environments.

Research Question 1

Research question 1 asked, "*What culturally responsive school leadership practices are district-level equity leaders demonstrating to foster equitable schools?*" Several questions were used to evaluate this study question.

Participants were asked to respond to this open-ended question: *"Please describe the most critical aspects needed to make an impact as an Equity Leader in your district?"* Participants provided a response to this question in their own words in the space provided in the survey document. The tables below are organized by themes derived from the data after coding the key indicators mentioned. This qualitative data set had four major themes: access, actions, identified needs, and power. Each table displays a code name and description. Also, the number of times that code was referenced within the data file is indicated. Thirty-five participants and 52 references total for this question's references.

In Table 21, illustrates a prominent theme that emerged from the data were access, with equity leaders consistently emphasizing its critical role in impacting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within schools. While access stood out as a primary theme, a more nuanced understanding was achieved by exploring identified subcategories that further explained the dynamics within this dataset. The theme of access encompassed four distinct subcategories: access to decision-makers, curriculum, people resources, and stakeholder input. The subcategories of access to people and resources were highlighted as particularly significant, with seven references in the dataset underscoring their importance. Additionally, equity leaders emphasized access to decision-makers, with this subcategory referenced four times, reflecting its perceived significance in pursuing DEI goals within schools.

Table 21

Critical Aspects Needed to Impact DEI in School Districts: Access

Theme Name	Description	Ref.
Access		**15**
Access to decision makers	● Access to decision makers is one of the most important ways we can make an impact. ● Access to district and school leaders ● Resources, Access to the Executive cabinet and Board of Education ● Access to the top decision makers (superintendent and board)	4
Curriculum	● Curriculum	1
People - Resources	● [Having the] right people on the bus in the right seats ● If you are a office of 1 and are responsible for thousands of individuals to engage in the equity journey with no real support to help implement or execute makes the work much more difficult and slower. ● Direct access to the Black community (which I don't have); ● Direct access to teachers (limited--as many admin try to protect their staff from interactions with me. Sad, but true). ● Direct access to Black students especially is limited ● Other indigenous or people of color--I seem to be able to access easily. ● The staff ● More fiscal and Human Resources.	7
Stakeholder Input	● Input from stakeholders about what they most value so that those values may be aligned with the DEI work. ● Are the students okay? - what are the experiences our students are having? Listen to the students and act upon the ways that it can be changed/ addressed. ● Access to data	3

In Table 22, a prominent theme that emerged from the data was actions. Equity leaders consistently emphasized various actions critical to impacting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within schools. Irby (2021reminds us equity leaders' positions are configured in ways that give them access to power and authority. While actions stood out as a primary theme, a more nuanced understanding was achieved by exploring the identified subcategories that further

explained the dynamics within this dataset. The theme of actions encompassed four distinct subcategories: courageous leadership, equity opportunities, goals, influence, and buy-in. The most notable actions were courageous leadership with five references and equity opportunities with four references.

Table 22

Critical Aspects Needed to Impact DEI in School Districts: Actions

Theme Name	Description	Ref.
Actions		**13**
Courageous Leadership (Take on systemic Issues regarding equity)	• We have policies that continue to perpetuate oppression and reinforce the white narrative and are actively working to dismantle these through the lens of MTSS related policy revisions. • Identifying identities in need: race, language, ability, economic, gender... important to support all groups • Having all leaders lead with an equity lens and not expecting that equity work is only the purvey of the Equity Office • Being consistent, being able to take on issues that plague the system and make immediate changes • Building the infrastructure to support the district at multiple levels. Developing an equity-based Multi-tiered System of Support as a pathway to equitable experiences and outcomes for students	5
Equity Opportunities	• The most critical impact is adult interactions and understanding or our marginalized students • Intentional opportunities to discuss equity in all areas of the district. • Willingness to drill down/use root cause analysis to appropriately describe and address issues and concerns • I consider my job now to be asking questions to help others to self-reflect, sitting in the discomfort of folks not know what to do or how to do it, and planting seeds of information, context, skills as much as possible.	4
Goals	• Clear goals and targets	1
Influence Buy-in	• The ability to influence staff and parents to create buy-in to make changes. • Leadership competency to create the space for the work to thrive. • Consistency in leadership support across all levels- not backpedaling when facing pushback	3

Table 23 highlights the identified needs as a prominent theme that emerged from this data set. Equity leaders consistently emphasized various needs critical to impacting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within schools. Those identified needs included education, shared commitment and understanding, committed team, BIPOC representation, and time. Equity leaders indicated that a shared commitment and understanding of equity work was key to making an impact with five references in the data. The need for a committed team was also highlighted with three references. It should be noted that the "development of culturally responsive teaching" was referenced once in this data set.

Table 23

Critical Aspects Needed to Impact DEI in School Districts: Identified Needs

Theme Name	Description	Ref.
Identified Needs		**17**
Education	● Internal reflection, growth, and learning ○ Development of culturally responsive teaching	2
Shared commitment & understanding	● Shared understanding, commitment ● A true district-wide commitment to the work. This is not a one-person job. ● Commitment to DEI not being an option ● Stakeholders who are willing to demonstrate intellectual humility, confront their defensiveness and move past guilt ● Relationship building with district and school staff and stakeholders - trust! ● Buy-in from leadership ● Unwavering support from the Supt. and Board of Ed and community	7
Need for a Committed Team	● I think there needs to be a critical mass of individuals who deeply understand the work and are invested in doing the work. ● Someone who is a coach to admin and teachers that relates on an attainable level so that teachers and principals feel like they can make adjustments. ● I need a team. I need faculty and staff who value this work and not just see it as a box to be checked ● As a department of one, I have to be a self-starter, wear many hats, manage a lot of content, and be the public face of DEI in the district. It's A LOT for one person.	4
BIPOC Representation	● I need more BIPOC representation in Faculty and Admin and Board ● Diverse staff	2
Time	● Time to allow the slow process of growth. ● Time	2

Table 24 underscores power as a critical theme from this data set. Equity leaders

consistently emphasized access to power as critical to impacting diversity, equity, and inclusion

(DEI) within schools. The subcategories of power that emerged in the data were: ability to make change, make decisions, connection of DEI with student performance, and policy change. The ability to make change was referenced four times within this data set.

Table 24

Critical Aspects Needed to Impact DEI in School Districts: Power

Theme Name	Description	Ref.
Power		**7**
Ability to make changes	● It is critical that the Equity Leader is allowed to lead systems work that addresses systemic racism and operates through a intersectional and anti-racism.	4
Make Decisions	● The ability to make changes to some policies and hire more diverse staff. ● Leader must be allowed to call out the system and address the barrier with tools that will dismantle it and not center whiteness. ● The most critical aspects that I am currently working on are high school policy changes to ensure our students at the high school level have the most equitable opportunities possible to reach graduation day. ● Ability to influence and make changes to policy, procedures, respond to data, and instructional practices.	1
Connection of DEI with Student performance-behavior	● Relate DEIB to student achievement, student behavior and social and emotional learning	1
Policy Changes	● Policy and Procedures	1

In summary, Research Question 1 delved into the examination of culturally responsive school leadership practices demonstrated by district-level equity leaders with a focus on fostering equitable schools. Participants were prompted to elaborate on the most critical aspects necessary for making an impact in their roles as equity leaders, providing nuanced responses in their own words. The qualitative dataset generated from these open-ended inquiries revealed four major

themes: access, actions, identified needs, and power. The subsequent tables organized by these themes, derived from coding key indicators, lifted the complex dimensions inherent in the practices of district-level equity leaders. The thematic analysis, informed by the responses of 35 participants and totaling 52 references, contributed to a richer understanding of the complex and nuanced landscape of culturally responsive school leadership practices within the context of fostering equity in PreK–12 educational settings.

Research Question 2

The purpose of research question two was to investigate the variables that compose the role of a district-level equity leader. The quantitative data in Chapter 4 provided a comprehensive list of variables reported by PreK–12 equity leaders. Several stand-alone variables emerged from the data analysis of the responses to this open-ended question that focused on the barriers to DEI work in schools. The stand-alone variables that immerged in this study are depended upon each participant's individual experience and variables specific to their role.   This question specifically asked equity leaders to *"describe any barriers that prevent the advancement of diversity, equity, and inclusion in your district?"* From examining the responses, three main themes surfaced: climate of resistance, structural barriers, and belief systems. Thirty-five participants and 64 references totaled for this question's references.

Table 25 underscores the significance of the climate of resistance theme, identified as a prevalent barrier by equity leaders, garnering 24 references within the dataset. This overarching theme comprised three subcategories: current climate and culture, lack of commitment, and community pushback. Notably, 17 equity leaders explicitly self-reported the lack of commitment as a prominent barrier impeding progress in advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion. Within this subset, 10 responses specifically highlighted leadership and the absence of change as key

indicators contributing to the perceived lack of commitment. Additionally, community pushback

emerged as a reported barrier, with four references highlighting the challenges faced in navigating

external resistance within the community context. This detailed breakdown offered a nuanced

perspective on the various aspects of the climate of resistance theme, providing valuable insights

into equity leaders' specific challenges in fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion at the district

level.

Table 25

Barriers to Equity Leadership: Climate of Resistance

Theme Name	Data	References
Climate of Resistance		**24**
Current climate and culture	● Politics in Texas ● My district is not diverse ● Culture wars: having so few AA students that people have been able to bury the issues, etc. (DENIAL)	**3**
Lack of Commitment		**17**
Buy in	● Staff and community buy-in **(3 mentions)**	3
Professional Development	● When trainings that are provided to encourage the type of behavior we 'want to see' are made OPTIONAL (in the area of cultural proficiency and cultural responsiveness in teaching/learning) ● Time for professional development is our biggest barrier ● Lack of proper training for educators during undergrad and postgrad work ● A lack of understanding of what DEI is	4

Leadership and Lack of Change	● *Status quo*
	  o *Decentralized leadership structure*
	  o *Executive Leadership inability to operate from a courageous perspective.*
	  o *The district has not had much change in leadership or programming, they continue to be reactive.*
	  o *Lack of a willingness to change hiring practices to entice more diverse staff*
	    ▪ *Low turnover- not a lot of new openings*
	    ▪ *Some teachers don't belong here, and we need to help them leave quicker than we are.*
	    ▪ *Lack of work to retain diverse staff*
	● *Capacity*
	● *Equity fatigue*
		10

Community Pushback	● The greatest barrier is community pushback on our efforts **(5 mentions)** ● We have a small but vocal group of dissenters who regularly attend board meeting to voice their concerns (mainly about books in the library and the curriculum). ● The community is very vocal in a negative way. ● Societal interference.	**4**

Note. The sub-bullet data connotes that the topics are related to the main bullet.

Structural barriers are shown in Table 26 as a notable theme within the dataset, with 15 references from equity leaders citing them as a barrier. Additionally, two subcategories were identified: (a) procedural barriers with seven references that included lack of appropriate

accountability with five references and (b) lack of power with two references, and external factors

with eight references which included two subcategories; financial barriers and teacher and staff

shortage being referenced.

Table 26

Barriers to Equity Leadership: Structural Barriers

Theme Name	Data	References
Structural Barriers		**15**
Procedural Barriers		**7**
Lack of Appropriate Accountability	• Accountability, scope of influence, and prioritization (Focus or intentionality?) • Accountability for teachers to examine and confront their biases • Curriculum review process o Teacher Evaluation process doesn't include culturally responsive practice • Tracking	5
Lack of Power	• Being micromanaged, only being allowed develop programming that is performative • Lack of transparency	2
External Factors		**8**
Teacher and staff shortages		1
Time	• Timing and pacing • Time and resources • Time	3
Financial Barriers	• A looming budget deficit has led to some community members to seek cuts in unnecessary/non-mandated positions – DEI among them • Funding **(3 mentions)**	4

Note. The sub-bullet data connotes that the topics are related to the main bullet.

In Table 27, belief systems is indicated as another primary theme with 25 references

made. In addition to the three subcategories identified, racism received nine references, while

beliefs and fear received eight references.

Table 27

Barriers to Equity Leadership: Belief Systems

Theme Name	Data	References
Belief Systems		**25**
Beliefs	• Belief systems and biases of adults about DEI **(5 mentions)** • A small number of staff who don't support students who live outside of the staff member's box of what is right/ expected. • Ignorance • The school district itself would be much further along if the community would support the idea that ALL students should have equitable access to learning in our schools.	8
Racism	• School Board composition (left, right and center beliefs and personal agendas) • Still a very racist and heavy politicized school district • Having a racist and homophobic/transphobic board of education • Racism • White supremacy culture **(4 mentions)** • Centering Whiteness	9
Fear	• Fear **(3 mentions)** • Parents are difficult to deal with, and they push school leadership and school leadership reacts in fear of parents even though it's a small bunch. • A small but loud faction of the community believes DEI is CRT and that CRT is destructive. • [Lack of] Comfort • White fragility o The perception of what the dominant group thinks DEIB is......ex CRT/Cancel culture, indictment of the dominant culture	8

Note. The sub-bullet data connotes that the topics are related to the main bullet.

In summary, the investigation into Research Question 2 was to distinguish the intricate variables that make up the role of district-level equity leaders. Chapter 4's quantitative data provided a comprehensive compilation of variables reported by PreK–12 equity leaders, offering valuable insights into the complex nature of their roles. Additionally, stand-alone variables emerged through the analysis of responses to an open-ended question focusing on barriers to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work in schools. I prompted equity leaders to articulate barriers hindering DEI advancements within their districts. As a result, three main themes—climate of resistance, structural barriers, and belief systems—surfaced from the responses of 35 participants, with a total of 64 references. This exploration deepened our understanding of the challenges faced by equity leaders and contributed to a nuanced perspective on the variables shaping their pivotal roles in fostering equitable educational environments.

Research Question 3

The third research question focused on analyzing the impact of district-level equity leaders. Specifically, this open-ended question explored how these leaders measure the impact of their DEI work in schools. Participants were asked to respond to this open-ended survey question, *"Please describe how you are measuring the impact of your work in diversity, equity, and inclusion in your district?"* Four primary themes emerged from the analysis of the replies. Staff-based measures, student-specific measurements, combination population measures, and various progress monitoring were the identified themes. Thirty-five participants and 74 references totaled for this question's mentions.

In Table 28, a prominent theme that emerged from the data was stuff-based measures with a total of 15 references. Three additional subcategories in this data set were identified.

Professional development (PD) with seven references, hiring and staffing received six references,

and survey data had two references.

Table 28

Measurements of Impact of Equity Leaders: Staff-based

Name	Description	Ref.
Staff-based Measurements		**15**
PD	• DEI professional development • PD evaluations, requests for consultation • Post-PD surveys • Impact centered on new professional development initiatives • Assessment rubrics from professional development participants • Professional development exit surveys • Increased awareness of diversity as measured by professional development offerings and satisfaction and cultural/ethnic celebration/acknowledgement	7
Survey Data	• Educator survey data	2
Hiring and Staffing	• Hiring and recruitment practices • In process with a program evaluation to review protocols and activities put in place to support diverse hiring, hiring numbers • Hiring and retention practices • Increase in racially diverse staff LSMs • Staff demographics and retention data • Staffing diversity in proportion to school demographics for staff and students	6

Table 29 displays an additional prominent theme that emerged from the data set. Student-based

measures received a total of 28 references. In this data set, an additional five subcategories

identified were achievement data, enrollment demographics, discipline, and attendance data,

access to programming, and perception/climate data. Achievement data had the most mentions,

with 14 references. Subsequently, perception/climate data received five references, while

discipline and access to programming each had four references leaving enrollment demographics with the least mentions with one reference.

Table 29

Measurements of Impact of Equity Leaders: Student Specific

Name	Description	Ref.
Student-specific Measurements		**28**
Achievement Data	- State testing data - Closing achievement gaps - Student achievement data **(8 mentions)** - Test scores – are student groups improving - Impact on increasing student outcomes for marginalized populations - Student learning outcomes - KPIs - MTSS related activities due to this [conservative district who banned DEI language]; we measure the impact of systems, program, and progress checks	14
Enrollment Demographics	Enrollment diversity as reflected in student demographics	1
Discipline & Attendance Data	- SEL perception data, behavior/office referral data, attendance data - Student discipline numbers - Disaggregated student engagement data (attendance, behavior) - Impact on disproportionality regarding disciplinary suspensions and alternative education placement for marginalized populations	4
Access to programing	- Access to programs - Disaggregated student engagement data (extracurriculars) - Academic and non-academic program access and offerings by schools and participation of marginalized populations. - We are measuring the impact through AP enrollment courses	4
Perception / Climate Data	- Student data on culture and climate - Feedback from students (surveys) **(2 mentions)** - Conducting [student] focus groups and asking them questions about their experiences in the classroom/ school - Qualitative perceptions of culture and climate - real-life conversations with [students]	5

Another theme was identified, which is highlighted in Table 30 and consist of a combination of population measures. Four additional subcategories were identified within this data set and they were: goal setting and new initiatives, survey data, equity audit, and other measurement tools. This prominent theme received a total of 22 references. Survey data received nine references making it the most referenced subcategory following goal setting, new initiatives with six references and equity audit with five references. Leaving other measures had two references.

Table 30

Measurements of Impact of Equity Leaders: Combination Populations

Name	Description	References
Combination Population Measures		**22**
Goal Setting & New Initiatives	• Setting and monitoring annual goals • Measuring progress through the Strategic Plan • See this report: <u>2023-01-01 LPS Report on Efforts to Reduce Systemic Barriers to Equity</u> • Measurement based on new initiatives • Launching new initiatives in a new department • Our school improvement goals are aligned to our MTSS work which is how we begin the work of equity in our district	6

Survey Data (Assumption that the survey data is about DEI in one way or another)
 	
Climate surveys
	• Panorama survey data
	• Pre/Post assessments, survey data, Thought Exchange.
	• Panorama [survey] data from all stakeholders
	• Surveys
	• Perception survey data
	• Climate Survey
	   ○ Climate surveys **(2 mentions)**
	   ○ Surveys from equity audit and annual data on climate
	   ○ Percentage increase on Climate Survey in specific areas related to equity, inclusion, and diversity
		9

Equity Audit	• Equity audits, collaboration with consultants • External audit • Equity checklist (needs development) • We recently completed an extensive Equity Audit • Surveys from equity audit and annual data on climate	5
Other measurement tools	• Equity Journey Continuum growth • District Racial Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policy measures	2

Note. The sub-bullet data connotes that the topics are related to the main bullet.

This final emergent theme in this data set is reflected below in Table 31. The various progress monitoring received a total of nine references. Three additional subcategories were identified among the mentions, which were: various qualitative data with five references and development of new tools receiving two references. Additionally, no current measures or not applicable was the final subcategory receiving two mentions.

Table 31

Measurements of Impact of Equity Leaders: Various Progress Monitoring

Name	Description	Ref.
Various Progress Monitoring		**9**
Various Qualitative data	- Informal data - Walkthrough data - Qualitative data and individual feedback - Stakeholder reactions as an indicator - Parental involvement and engagement in schools—curricular and extra-curricular areas	5
Development of new tools	- Creating a bias tool, operational information - Development of a better measuring tool	2
No Current Measures or Not Applicable	- Aren't measuring - N/A.	2

In summary, Research Question 3 provided a detailed examination of the impact of district-level equity leaders, particularly focusing on how they measure the effectiveness of their diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in schools. This open-ended survey question prompted participants to provide insights into their approaches, asking them to describe how they measure the impact of their work in DEI within their districts. The analysis revealed four primary themes—staff-based measures, student-specific measurements, combination population measures,

and various progress monitoring—that collectively contributed to the evaluation strategies employed by 35 participants. The qualitative, in-depth responses provided by the 74 references to this question enhanced our understanding of the diverse methods utilized by district-level equity leaders to gauge the impact of their DEI efforts and further informed the broader exploration of fostering inclusive and equitable educational environments in PreK–12 settings.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the qualitative dimensions of this exploratory mixed methods study, focusing on the roles, practices, and impact measurement strategies of district-level PreK–12 equity leaders. Building upon the quantitative insights provided in the previous chapter, this chapter aimed to deepen our understanding of the nuanced impact exhibited by these leaders and the intricate factors that shape their pivotal roles.

This qualitative phase's primary data collection method employed a survey design featuring three specific open-ended questions. These questions aimed to unveil the complex landscape of district-level equity leadership by exploring these leaders' experiences, challenges, and successes. Through this exploration, I sought to uncover the intricate layers of their practices and identify the underlying variables that define their roles.

In Chapter 6, I will embark on a comprehensive discussion and final analysis that synthesizes the insights gleaned from the quantitative and qualitative components of this exploratory mixed methods study. This integrative approach allows for constructing a holistic understanding of the roles, practices, and impact measurement strategies of district-level PreK–12 equity leaders. By juxtaposing the quantitative survey data findings with the rich narratives derived from qualitative responses, I identify patterns, connections, and implications that transcend the individual datasets. This chapter serves as the nucleus where numerical trends merge with qualitative nuances, facilitating a meaningful exploration of the multifaceted

landscape of equity leadership in educational settings. Through the discussion and final analysis, meaningful connections between the identified themes, subcategories, and overarching research questions will be drawn, offering a comprehensive perspective contributing to the broader discourse on fostering equity and inclusivity within PreK–12 educational environments. Through this synthesis, I provide actionable insights, highlight areas for future research, and propose implications for policy and practice in the realm of district-level equity leadership.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

Introduction

As I begin the final discussion chapter of this mixed methods concurrent triangulation exploratory survey-based research study focused on the roles, practices, and impact measurement strategies of district-level equity leaders, I confront the persistent challenges that PreK–12 educational leaders grapple with while tasked with improving equitable educational practices that provide better outcomes for marginalized student groups. This issue, although looming for years, has remained consistent despite dedicated efforts. The consequences are evident in alarming disparities between historically marginalized students and dominant populations, perpetuated by the achievement gap, disciplinary practices, over-representation in special education and unequal access to educational resources.

The findings presented in this research study may contribute to a deeper understanding of the practices, variables, and impact measurement strategies employed by district-level equity leaders. The results provide valuable insights into these equity leaders' culturally responsive school leadership practices, shedding light on their specific actions and strategies to foster equity within their schools. Additionally, identifying variables that comprise the role of a district-level equity leader enhances our understanding of the multifaceted nature of their responsibilities. Furthermore, this study explored how district-level equity leaders measure their impact in fostering equitable schools.

Overall, the spotlight on district-level equity leaders and their specific best practices remains relatively dim. While their functions in PreK–12 settings are still evolving, their impact on creating more equitable educational systems is not yet fully understood. This research study

sought to bridge this knowledge gap by addressing the research questions and guiding our exploration into the uncharted territory of district-level equity leadership.

The purpose of this mixed methods concurrent triangulation exploratory survey-based research study was to critically explore the practices and persistent challenges faced by PreK–12 equity leaders in fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within their educational institutions. This study acknowledges the urgency for equitable education practices, particularly for historically marginalized student groups with consistent achievement gaps. Culturally responsive school leadership was the theoretical framework used to analyze PreK-12 equity leaders' roles and provide a framework for understanding how equity leaders can approach DEI work within their roles. This research study adds to the knowledge gap by investigating the specific best practices and impact of district-level equity leaders in PreK-12 settings. As a result, this study provided valuable insights into the complex landscape of district-level equity leadership, contributing to the ongoing discourse on fostering more equitable educational systems.

In this mixed methods concurrent triangulation exploratory survey-based research study, 35 equity leaders were surveyed using the Fields Equity Leader Survey that incorporates Lickert-based response and open-ended response survey data. The Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS) analyzed the quantitative data. The qualitative data was managed and analyzed using the qualitative analysis software program NVivo. This study addressed the following research questions:

RQ 1: What culturally responsive school leadership practices are district-level equity leaders demonstrating to foster equitable schools?

RQ 2: What variables compose the role of a district-level equity leader?

RQ 3: How are district-level equity leaders measuring their impact?

This final chapter includes the following sections: discussion, conclusion, limitations, and implications for future research and practice.

Discussion

Research Question 1: What culturally responsive school leadership practices are district-level equity leaders demonstrating to foster equitable schools?

The first research question in this study sought to understand what culturally responsive school leadership practices district-level equity leaders were demonstrating to foster equitable schools. To answer this question, participants are asked to rank their most commonly used diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices. This question listed thirty-one DEI practices, as presented in Table 4. The results of this question indicated that collaboration is a crucial practice among equity leaders. The highest ranked practice was "collaborate and advise with internal stakeholders (district and school leadership), in addition to other practices being ranked high that included a form of collaboration, whether with a specific department or stakeholder group. It's apparent that working with other leaders is most often practiced among equity leaders.

If I were to group the 31 practices into three categories, they would be collaboration, professional development, and implementation and development. These categories directly align with Weiler and Stanley's (2023) eight common leadership practices of equity leaders: planning and development, professional and organizational learning, data use, and family and community engagement. In terms of this study Khalifa' et al.'s (2016) culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) that frames this study is taken into consideration. The DEI practices aligned to CRSL, which consists of the "primary strands of behaviors: critically self-reflecting on leadership behavior; developing culturally responsive teachers and curriculum; promoting culturally

responsive and inclusive school environments; and engaging students, parent, and indigenous contexts" (Khalifa et al., 2016). I found it most appropriate to align these 31 practices to CRSL to assist in answering this research question. Khalifa et al. (2016) posited that there is no singular way to define these practices but to consider them to be flexible processes that educators continue with. As I further engaged with the results of this data, I noticed that many of the practices overlap. They are practices that should often be repeated and/or revisited on a consistent basis to inform next steps in fostering equitable schools.

The collaborative practices that would fall under critical self-reflection would include advising or working with various stakeholder groups. This validates the ongoing research that elevates the need for robust collaboration. Although the data doesn't explicitly state what collaboration entails, I conclude that equity leaders need to collaborate on various DEI-related tasks, such as culturally responsive teaching pedagogy, reviewing discipline data, and fostering culturally responsive school environments. Among the lowest-ranked practices were collaborating with the board of education, advising and reviewing school improvement plans, and conducting DEI-focused school visits or walkthroughs.

Professional development was the next category identified among frequent DEI practices, which would align nicely with Khalifa et al.'s (2016) development of culturally responsive teachers. Equity leaders engaging in leading professional development was also confirmed in much of the research that states this takes up a significant portion of their work. Providing professional development for district leadership staff (principals, directors, superintendents, etc.) was reported more commonly used than providing professional development for instructional staff (teachers, paraprofessionals, etc.). Providing professional development for the district board of education was reported as the lowest practice.

Implementation and development was the final category among this data set of frequent DEI practices. Representing and communicating district DEI efforts, networking outside of the district, and establishing DEI committees or affinity groups were among the most commonly used practices that fell within this category. A variety of DEI practices where equity leaders were establishing or developing initiatives and/or programs specifically for staff or students fell in the middle of this data set. In addition, some of the more commonly popular DEI initiatives, such as implementing an equity policy or conducting equity audit and/or human resources audits, were among some of the least commonly used DEI practices as reported by equity leaders. This does not align with current research that indicates policy development, and equity audits are key to addressing patterns of inequities (Jones, 2023). This type of data collection is key to not only lifting disproportionalities but also underscoring trends and assessing the impact of equity efforts.

In contrast, the qualitative data resulted in four themes among the most critical aspects needed to make an impact. The themes are access, actions, identified needs, and power. Equity leaders had access to key decision-makers such as the executive cabinet and board of education as well as teachers and diverse representation of students, teachers, and community members. In terms of actions, equity leaders emphasized the need for courageous leadership and equity opportunities. Courageous leadership that is willing to approach everything they do from an equity lens is vital. Equity opportunities that prompt the engagement of root-cause analysis and critical conversation about equity are required. Equity leaders stressed the need for a shared commitment and understanding because DEI work is not optional in addition to needing a committed team of individuals who provide support. Power was the final theme lifted in this data set as equity leaders continued to emphasize how important it is to be able to make decisions and affect change.

An interesting phenomenon was identified. Although equity leaders reported to be engaged in all of Khalifa et al.'s (2016) culturally responsive school leadership framework (CRSLF) practices, they were still suggesting the need for deeper access to leadership. So, how can collaboration be a common practice and still a need for equity leaders? This indicates that collaboration was one of the most common practices. I'm left wondering how effective their collaboration can be if some of those key practices, such as working directly with students, advising school improvement plans, or establishing or implementing an equity policy, are among the least common practices equity leaders indicated.

It is apparent that equity leaders are engaging in culturally responsive school leadership practices consistently. They recognize the benefits and value of culturally responsive school leadership practices, as seen in their consistent demonstration of their engagement in the attitudinal traits of CRSLF. However, one must presume that their leadership must not share those values. If they did, how could equity leaders also experience the need for shared commitment, understanding, and power to make change? All these are in clear alignment with recent research emphasizing the need for a shared commitment to DEI work and improved access at the cabinet level to foster and encourage these practices throughout their school districts.

Research Questions 2: What Variables Compose the Role of a District-Level Equity Leader?

This research question examined the roles of district-level equity leaders and the key variables that define them. In alignment with the research, the data illustrated in Table 9 revealed significant findings regarding the demographic characteristics of surveyed equity leaders. Notably, 63% of the equity leaders in the study identified as female, while 37% as male. Furthermore, 63% of the participants identified as Black or African American, and 23% as White, aligning with previous research emphasizing the prominence of individuals from racially diverse

backgrounds, particularly females, in equity leadership roles. However, it is noteworthy that the data highlights an underrepresentation of Hispanic or Latinx equity leaders, with only 6% of participants identifying as such.

When considering the level of education of the participants, 49% of them reported having a terminal degree, and at least 37% having at least a master's degree. Furthermore, 63% of participants reported being between the ages of 45 and 54, and 29% were in the 35–44 age range. This aligns with the current research and supports the claim that most equity leaders are veteran educators who bring at least 5 or more years of experience working in education to this role. It can be asserted that acquiring advanced degrees, along with classroom and leadership experience, represent viable pathways to assume equity leadership roles.

Turning our attention to district-level characteristics (see Table 12); it becomes evident that variations exist within the student populations served by equity leaders. Seventy-seven percent of equity leaders reported that their school community was suburban. Additionally, 80% of equity leaders reported their school district was located in a majority democratic state, while 20% was in a majority republican state. Approximately 50% of participants reported that 0–10% of their students were Black, while 54% reported 10-25% of their students were Latinx. Additionally, 34% of participants reported that 50–75% of their student population was White, while 94% reported having 0–10% of the student population represent Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders. These statistics underscored the limited racial diversity reported by equity leaders in their respective school districts.

Moreover, 32% of participants reported having 10–25% of their student population as low-income. Similarly, 46% of equity leaders reported that 10–25% of their student population represented students who were English learners. Furthermore, it is worth noting (see Table 12)

that a majority of equity leaders, specifically 80%, reported that their school district was situated in a state governed by a Democratic political affiliation, with the remaining 20% indicating their school district's location within a Republican-led state.

The data analysis revealed the demographic breakdown of student groups within the reported student populations. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the majority of these reported student populations comprised White students. Upon closer examination of the raw data (please refer to the appendix for details), a notable trend emerges among White equity leaders. They are more likely to report having no Black or African-American students and 10–25% of Latinx students within their districts. This observation raises an intriguing point, as previous research has indicated that equity leadership roles are predominantly held by individuals who identify as people of color. In instances where racial and ethnic diversity in student populations is limited, it is striking to note that there may not be a person of color leading equity initiatives within these contexts.

Among the group of equity leaders surveyed, a notable 37% held titles indicative of Director-level positions, signifying that a significant portion of the participants occupied leadership roles with a director position. Conversely, the remaining equity leaders reported diverse job titles, reflecting the multifaceted nature of their roles as supported by the research. Additionally, a significant group of 51% reported their inclusion as members of the superintendent's cabinet, signifying their proximity to the executive team of district leadership. In contrast, 49% of equity leaders indicated that they were not part of the superintendent's cabinet, illustrating the varied organizational structures within school districts and the range of access to decision-making and influence for equity leaders.

When assessing the supplementary characteristics of the equity leadership role in conjunction with resource availability, the budgetary resources allocated to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts revealed a spectrum of financial resources available to equity leaders. Specifically, 29% of equity leaders reported having access to a budget exceeding $100,000, signifying a substantial commitment to equity initiatives within their districts. However, a noteworthy 20% of participants reported having either no budget allocation or a budget totaling less than $25,000 to $50,000. This disparity in budget availability underscored the financial challenges aligned with current research and the variations equity leaders face in their pursuit of fostering equity and inclusion within their educational institutions.

The qualitative data supported the quantitative data by revealing four prominent themes that highlighted dependent variables that made up the role of equity leader. Specifically, the barriers inhibiting the advancement of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within the district were as follows: climate of resistance, structural barriers, and belief systems. Analyzing the alignment of these themes with the collected data provided insight into their interconnectedness and the resultant impact on DEI initiatives.

The prevalence of a climate of resistance expressed by numerous equity leaders, particularly among the 66% of equity leaders who are people of color in districts with limited student diversity, was not unexpected. The political influences, lack of commitment, and community pushback referenced as barriers to DEI efforts reflected the broader societal divisions regarding educational priorities. These findings align with current research that highlights political partisanship as a major influence in the type of districts that have equity leaders. Structural barriers highlighted various procedural challenges that included a lack of accountability and power faced by equity leaders in driving DEI initiatives. The fact is that only half of the

equity leaders in this study had direct access to the superintendent as cabinet members. At the same time, 37% operated as single-person departments, raising concerns about the efficacy of their efforts. It was mentioned that "having no accountability measures for teachers to examine and confront their biases" was a barrier. This is worrying because it is known that providing professional development is a critical practice of equity leaders. The real purpose of DEI work is debatable when it comes to Equity leaders' expressing, "only being allowed to develop programming that is performative." The question that arises is how can one individual effectively catalyze change within such constraints? Current research supports this, stating that it can be presumed that equality is now the sole individual's responsibility rather than a shared one when equity leaders have unclear authority.

Belief systems emerged as a significant theme, illustrating the profound impact of beliefs, racism, and fear of DEI efforts in schools. Equity leaders expressed barriers such as biases surrounding DEI and the diverse beliefs among the board of education and community members. The notion of White supremacy culture was frequently highlighted, alongside fear and discomfort with DEI initiatives in schools. These discussions directly intersect with current research as various forms of resistance often show up in DEI work, indicating the depth of adversity equity leaders face in advancing inclusive practices within educational settings.

Research Question 3: How are District-Level Equity Leaders Measuring Their Impact?

This final research question explores the methods employed by district-level equity leaders to gauge their impact within PreK–12 school districts. Equity leaders were specifically asked to indicate how often they used various metrics to evaluate the impact of their DEI efforts. Table 18 reflects the use of various data on a consistent basis as a source of data to inform the implementation. This aligns with current research that underscores the importance of harnessing

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data to not only reflect disparities within their systems but also to empower equity leaders to build the capacity of their colleagues in gaining equitable practices. Equity leaders frequently utilized achievement data, demographic data, and perception data as common types of data for monitoring and reviewing purposes. In terms of programmatic data, 40% was sometimes used in monitoring and reviewing that data.

The qualitative analysis offers profound insights into the types of data that equity leaders actively engage with. This analysis revealed four overarching themes: staff-based, student-specific measures, combination population measures, and various progress monitoring approaches.

Among the staff-based measures, it is evident that equity leaders prioritize the evaluation of professional development. Notably, hiring and staffing practices emerged as significant topics, which is noteworthy considering after earlier findings indicated that human resource evaluations were among the least common practices. Concerning student-specific measurements, responses were consistent with the quantitative data while also aligning with current research emphasizing not only achievement data but also enrollment demographics, discipline, and attendance records.

Equity leaders also incorporate programmatic and perception data into their assessments. In terms of combined data, goal setting and the introduction of new initiatives were prominent, alongside various survey data and tools. Surprisingly, equity audits, initially identified as among the least common practices, were mentioned in this context. Regarding various progress monitoring measurements, qualitative data revealed the development of new tools and forms of qualitative data. Notably, it is worth mentioning that two equity leaders admitted to not engaging in measurement practices.

Limitations of Findings

There are several limitations that shaped the scope of this research study. To begin with, private school equity leaders are excluded from this study, leading to the omission of valuable perspectives and potentially limiting the transferability of the research findings. Their unique experiences and insights in equity leadership remain unexplored, creating a gap in the study's coverage.

Additionally, the selection criteria limited eligible participants to individuals holding specific titles outlined in job descriptions. Consequently, certain positions, such as the director of culture and climate, which often encompass DEI responsibilities, were excluded from participation, potentially impacting the comprehensiveness of the findings. An absence of specific questions targeting inclusion within the research instrument represents another limitation, potentially overlooking critical aspects of DEI work. Moreover, the size of districts from which participants were drawn remained unknown, which may impact the generalizability of findings to districts of varying sizes. Lastly, the study lacked data on overall staff demographics and the population of students with special educational needs, representing a blind spot in understanding the intersectionality of DEI efforts and student demographics. This limitation presents an opportunity for future research to be explored more comprehensively.

Implications for Future Practice

The findings of this study carry significant implications for the structure of the role of equity leader within PreK–12 school districts, as well as highlighting some of the best practices they should adopt and how their impact can be assessed. While many equity leaders possess high qualifications for leadership, a substantial number find themselves in positions lacking the authority to drive meaningful progress. Districts must prioritize this endeavor by ensuring that

equity leaders are positioned at the cabinet level, granting them the access necessary to effect real change, and providing the autonomy and support required to foster initiatives beyond performative measures. Equity leaders must be empowered to lead effectively by affording them a voice at the cabinet level, influence over curriculum design, and the authority to advocate for policy reforms. Moreover, districts should offer equity leaders the necessary support and resources to enact tangible change this includes accountably structures that hold all staff accountable to the changes in practice, policy and structures that are needed. This work cannot be done without a team of individuals with the ability to interact with each function of a school district.

Establishing a supportive culture and climate conducive to advancing DEI initiatives is crucial. Districts must negate following the status quo and instead embrace courageous leadership to dismantle systems that perpetuate inequitable outcomes for students of color. Equity leaders must persist and continue to engage in culturally responsive leadership practices and use a variety of data to measure the impact of their efforts. Prioritizing human resource practices by giving them access to this department is imperative for equity leaders to foster greater diversity among teachers. Through the implementation of these strategies, district-level equity leaders, educators, and policymakers can enhance their efforts in promoting equitable educational environments by engaging the equity work participating in district wide equity initiatives and hold the superintendent accountable for supporting the equity work.

Implications for Future Research

The insights gained from this study inform the development of future research studies to explore the realm of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in educational settings, such as the

impact and effectiveness of equity leaders on student achievement and racial analysis of current equity leaders within the broader DEI initiatives within educational settings.

Conducting a deeper dive into the performance data of schools with equity leaders could yield valuable insights into the direct correlation between the presence of equity leaders and student achievement outcomes. By examining various metrics such as performance-based test scores, graduation rates, and attendance records, researchers can explain the specific indicators through which equity leaders can contribute to improved students' outcomes.

A racial analysis of equity leaders and their experiences could shed light on the intersectionality of race among district-level equity leaders and the effect on their DEI efforts within educational institutions. By examining the racial demographics of equity leaders and exploring their unique challenges, perspectives, and strategies, future research can identify patterns of racial disparities and inform targeted interventions to support the diverse needs of equity leaders.

Furthermore, analyzing equity statements and/or equity policies issued by educational institutions offers an opportunity to evaluate the alignment between organizational rhetoric and tangible DEI initiatives. By examining the content, implementation, and impact of equity statements, researchers can assess their efficacy as tools for promoting inclusive practices and fostering equitable environments within schools and districts.

Future research efforts focusing on the impact of equity leaders in regard to student achievement, racial dynamics within these roles, and the effectiveness of equity statements or policies can contribute to a deeper understanding of DEI efforts in education and inform evidence-based practices for advancing equity and inclusion within educational institutions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this dissertation has investigated the intricate landscape of district-level equity leadership within PreK–12 educational settings, aiming to shed light on the roles, practices, and impact measurement strategies employed by equity leaders. The study has illuminated critical insights into the challenges faced by educational leaders in their pursuit of fostering equitable educational practices and outcomes for historically marginalized student groups.

The persistent disparities evidenced in academic achievement, disciplinary practices, special education representation, and access to educational resources underscore the urgent need for effective equity leadership within school districts. This type of intentional equity work is still left a bit unclear. As the glamorized intent of equity leaders is to assist with these efforts yet according the findings in this study equity leaders do not have the support, power, or systems of accountability to really foster change in these specific areas. Despite dedicated efforts, these challenges will continue to persisted unless equity leaders are set up for success to better execute the culturally responsive school leadership practices and strategies they are regularly engaging in.

Through a mixed-methods approach incorporating surveys and qualitative analysis, this research has offered valuable insights into the culturally responsive school leadership practices demonstrated by district-level equity leaders. Collaboration emerged as a crucial practice among equity leaders, highlighting the importance of working with internal stakeholders to advance DEI initiatives effectively.

The findings also shed light on the multifaceted nature of the roles of equity leaders, emphasizing the diverse variables that define their responsibilities. While many equity leaders possess high qualifications and experience, challenges related to structural barriers, belief systems, and resource allocation persist, hindering their ability to drive meaningful change.

Moreover, the study explored how equity leaders measure their impact within school districts, revealing the diverse range of metrics and data utilized for monitoring and review purposes. While achievements in professional development and programmatic initiatives were evident, challenges such as limited access to decision-makers and budgetary constraints underscored the complex nature of equity leadership.

The implications of this research extend beyond the dissertation, offering valuable insights for future practice and research in the field of educational equity. School districts and superintendents must prioritize the empowerment of equity leaders by granting them access to decision-making processes, resources, and support necessary to enact tangible change. This means they must be situated at the cabinet level in order to ensure that equity is centered in all decisions being made. Equity leaders must posses' power and support within the institution to mandate new initiatives, professional development and any equity related supports needed to foster change within the district. Ensuring that equity leaders have appropriate access to building and department leadership is key as equity work cannon be done in isolation or left to the sole responsibility of induvial equity leaders. Establishing a supportive culture conducive to advancing DEI initiatives is crucial, requiring courageous leadership and a shared commitment to equity.

Furthermore, future research endeavors should explore the impact of equity leaders on student achievement outcomes, the intersectionality of race among equity leaders, and the effectiveness of equity policies within educational institutions. By delving deeper into these areas, researchers can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of DEI efforts in education and inform evidence-based practices for promoting equitable educational environments.

In conclusion, this dissertation may serve as a call to action towards advancing equity and inclusion within educational settings, highlighting the valuable contributions of district-level equity leaders in fostering equitable educational practices and outcomes for all students.

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INFORMED CONSENT

INTENT VS IMPACT: A MIXED METHODS EXPLORATORY STUDY OF K-12 CENTRAL OFFICE EQUITY LEADERS

My name is Tasia Fields. I am a doctoral student at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. You are asked to participate in a voluntary, confidential research study. I am conducting this study for my dissertation research. The purpose is to explore the role of Equity Leaders at the Prek - 12 public school level in Illinois. I want to understand how this role is structured and what implementation practices are prioritized. I also want to understand how they are measuring the impact of their diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts within a school district, in addition to any variable that may impact this. Participating in this study will involve completing a one-time online survey.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Denice Hood
Department and Institution: Educational Policy and Organization Leadership at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
Contact Information: dwhood@illinois.edu
Contact Information: trf2@illinois.edu

What risks and benefits are there?
Risks related to this research are minimal, and there are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. The benefit of completing this survey will be society and educators around the world leading equity work by gaining a better understanding of best practices and measurements of success.

What procedures are involved?
The study procedures are the completion of a confidential online questionnaire consisting of 26 multiple-choice and four open-ended questions. The estimated time for completing the questionnaire is approximately 35 minutes.

Will my study-related information be kept confidential?
Faculty, staff, students and others with permission or authority to see your study information will maintain its confidentiality to the extent permitted and required by laws and university policies. The names or personal identifiers of participants will not be published or presented.

Compensation: If you choose to, you can enroll in a drawing for a $25 Amazon gift card. Those interested will be asked to provide an email address, and the winner will be contacted once data collection is completed. If you withdraw from the survey before completing it, you will waive your right to compensation.

Can I withdraw or be removed from the study?
If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time. Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate, or to withdraw after beginning participation, will not affect your current or future dealings with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

The researchers also have the right to stop your participation in this study without your consent if they believe it is in your best interests.

Will data collected from me be used for any other research?
Your de-identified information could be used for future research without additional informed consent.

Who should I contact if I have questions?
If you have questions about this project, contact Dr. Denice Hood at 217-244-1886 or dwhood@illinois.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at 217-333-2670 or via email at irb@illinois.edu.

Statement of Consent to Be Included In Survey

Statement of Consent: By clicking on the Start Survey button below and commencing with the questionnaire you are indicating that you have read the information provided above and are agreeing to participate in this research study.

Please print this consent form if you would like to retain a copy for your records.

I have read and understand the above consent form. I certify that I am 18 years old or older. By clicking the "Submit" button to enter the survey, I indicate my willingness to voluntarily take part in this study.

SUBMIT

APPENDIX B:

IRB APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research & Innovation
Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
805 W. Pennsylvania Ave., MC-095
Urbana, IL 61801-4822

Notice of Exempt Determination

November 17, 2022

Principal Investigator	Denise Hood
CC	Tasia Fields
Protocol Title	*Intent vs Empact: A Quantitative Exploration of Central Office Equity Leaders and their Influence on Student Achievement*
Protocol Number	23579
Funding Source	Unfunded
Review Category	Exempt 2 (i)
Risk Determination	No more than minimal risk
Approval Date	November 17, 2022
Expiration Date	November 16, 2027

This letter authorizes the use of human subjects in the above protocol. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) has reviewed your application and determined the criteria for exemption have been met.

The Principal Investigator of this study is responsible for:
- Conducting research in a manner consistent with the requirements of the University and federal regulations found at 45 CFR 46.
- Requesting approval from the IRB prior to implementing major modifications.
- Notifying OPRS of any problems involving human subjects, including unanticipated events, participant complaints, or protocol deviations.
- Notifying OPRS of the completion of the study.

Changes to an **exempt** protocol are only required if substantive modifications are requested and/or the changes requested may affect the exempt status.

APPENDIX D:

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Recruitment Email Sample

Hello,

My name is Tasia Fields and I am a doctoral student at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign working on my dissertation research. I would love to share my recruitment flier with your network of leaders.

My research topic is Prek-12 Central Office Equity Leaders. The purpose of my study is to explore the role of Equity Leaders at the Prek - 12 public school level. I want to understand how this role is structured and what implementation practices are prioritized. I also want to understand how they are measuring success of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts within a school district. Participating in this study will involve completing a one-time anonymous online survey. I am seeking individuals that currently hold a central office level leadership/administration position (coordinator, director, etc.) that leads Diversity, Equity and Inclusion efforts for their school district. They must have a variation of DEI in their job title to participate in this study.

Please feel free to pass on the attached flyer and or share my contact information with anyone whom might be interested or has questions, trf2@@illinois.edu. Thank You!

Sincerely,

Tasia Fields
EdD student, Education Policy, Organization, and Leadership, Diversity and Equity in Education
University of Illinois Urbana Champaign

Recruitment Email for Social Media Groups Sample

Hello,

   My name is Tasia Fields and I am a doctoral student at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign working on my dissertation research. I am seeking permission to recruit in your social media group.

        My research topic is Prek-12 Central Office Equity Leaders. The purpose of my study is to explore the role of Equity Leaders at the Prek - 12 public school level. I want to understand how this role is structured and what implementation practices are prioritized. I also want to understand how they are measuring success of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts within a school district. Participating in this study will involve completing a one-time online survey. I am seeking individuals that currently hold a central office level leadership/administration position. (coordinator, director, etc.) that leads Diversity Equity and Inclusion efforts for their school district. They must have a variation of DEI in their job title to participate in this study.

        Please feel free to pass on the attached flyer and or share my contact information with anyone whom might be interested or has questions, trf2@@illinois.edu. Thank You!

Sincerely,

Tasia Fields
EdD student, Education Policy, Organization, and Leadership, Diversity and Equity in Education
University of Illinois Urbana Champaign

Social Media Post Language

Looking for Educational Leaders in DEI to participate in my research. Please see the attached flier. Thank you!

INTENT VS IMPACT: A MIXED METHODS EXPLORATORY STUDY OF K-12 CENTRAL OFFICE EQUITY LEADERS

Research Questions
● What Culturally Responsive School Leadership practices are district-level equity leaders demonstrating to foster equitable schools? ● How are district-level equity leaders measuring their impact? ● What variables compose the role of a district-level equity leader?

Fields Equity Leader Survey			
#	CODE	Questions	Answer Options (Multiple Choice or Short Answer)
1	DEI_Title	What is your current position title?	
2	DEI_IL_1	Are you located in the state of IL? If yes, go here. If no, go here (conditional questioning feature)	● Yes ● No
		If no, then Questions Outside of IL	
3	DEI_State	What states is your district located in?	
4	DEI_Region	What region is your state located in? Regions are determined by this 5 geographical regions map.	● Northeast ● Midwest ● Southwest ● Southeast ● West
		If yes, then…Questions IL	
5	DEI_IL_2	Enter your school district's full name (including district number).	

6	DEI_IL_3	Select the service area that represents your school district's region. (see region map)	1 2 3 4 5 6
		Questions for all	
7	DEI_V1 V=Variable	How would you best describe your school district?	- Urban - Suburban - Rural
8	DEI_V2	What represents the percentage of Black students in your district?	0-10% 10-25% 25-50% 50-75% - Over 75%
9	DEI_V3	What represents the percentage of Latinx students in your district?	0-10% 10-25% 25-50% 50-75% - Over 75%
10	DEI_V4	What represents the percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander students in your district?	0-10% 10-25% 25-50% 50-75% - Over 75%
11	DEI_V5	What represents the percentage of Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander students in your district?	0-10% 10-25% 25-50% 50-75% - Over 75%
12	DEI_V6	What represents the percentage of White students in your district?	0-10% 10-25% 25-50% 50-75% - Over 75%
13	DEI_V7	What percentage of students in your district are considered Low Income?	0-10% 10-25% 25-50% 50-75% - Over 75%
14	DEI_V8	What represents the percentage of students that	0-10%

		are English Learners in your district?	• 10-25% • 25-50% • 50-75% • Over 75%
15	DEI_V9	Which best describes your race?	• American Indian or Alaskan Native • Asian • Black/African-American • Hispanic/Latinx • Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander • White • Prefer to self-describe_/other
16	DEI_V10	Which best describes your age?	• 25-34 • 35-44 • 45-54 • 55-64 • 65 and over.
17	DEI_V11	Which best describes your gender?	• Male • Female • Transgender Woman / Trans Feminine • Transgender Man / Trans Masculine • Prefer not to say or self-describe:/other
18	DEI_V12	Select all that apply for your level of education completed	• Bachelor's Degree • Master's Degree • Educational Specialists Degree

			● Terminal Degree (PhD, EdD) ● Other
19	DEI_V13	How many years have you held this role?	● < 1 year ● 2-5 years ● 5-10 ● 10-15 ● 15 or more years
20	DEI_V14	Select all that apply for your current role.	● This role is a newly created position (within the last 5 years) ● I am the first to hold this role in my district. ● This role is combined with another role ● This is not a new role and has been around longer than 5 years ● Other, please specify_____
21	DEI_V15	Select all that applies to describe your previous work experience?	● < 5 years of classroom teaching experience. ● 5 or more years of classroom teaching experience. ● Held a previous role as a school, or district/central office administrator ● Previously

| | | | • done DEI or DEI related work in education |
			• Previously done DEI or DEI related work in another field
22	DEI_V16	Are you a part of your superintendent's cabinet or executive leadership team? If not, where does your role fit within the organization?	• Yes, I am a part of the Superintendent's cabinet. • No, I am positioned one level below the cabinet. • No, I am positioned two levels below the cabinet. • No, I am positioned three levels below the cabinet. • No, I am positioned four or more levels below the cabinet.
23	DEI_V17	Select all that apply for your current role.	• I am a department of one • I lead a department with full-time staff • I lead a department that shares staff from other departments. (This includes stipend-paid staff with

			● other responsibilitie s) ● I lead a department that includes shared staff from other departments and full-time staff. ● I do not lead a department, my role is a part of another department.
24	DEI_Budget	Which statements best reflect your current budget allocation to advance diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in your district?	● I do not have a budget to support DEI work. ● I have a budget less than 25k ● I have a budget less than 50k ● I have a budget less than 100k ● I have a budget that exceeds 100k
25	DEI_P…. (DEI_P_1-31) P=Practice	How **frequently** do you engage in the following practices to advance diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in your district? 　1. Collaborate and engage with external stakeholders (parents, community members) 　2. Collaborate and advise the Superintendent. 　3. Collaborate and advise the Board of Education. 　4. Collaborate and advise with internal stakeholders (district and school leadership) 　5. Provide professional development for district leadership staff (principals, directors, superintendent, etc.) 　6. Provide professional development for	● Never ● Rarely ● Sometimes ● Often ● Always Please list other activities you participated in that are not listed here.

		instructional staff (teacher, paraprofessionals, etc.) 7. Provide professional development for district Board of Education 8. Provide DEI curricular resources to schools 9. Host or sponsor diversity celebrations or events 10. Engage in policy work (reviewing, revising, or writing) 11. Respond to racially motivated incidents or reports of injustice 12. Represent and communicate district DEI efforts 13. Conduct or review Equity Audit or equity needs assessment. 14. Collaborate with other instructional departments (teaching & learning, curriculum, and instruction) 15. Collaborate with non-instructional departments (Outreach, Safety, Operations, Family and Community Engagement) 16. Advise and review School Improvement Plans 17. Establish or Implement an Equity Policy 18. Establish or Implement initiatives to improve the culture and climate of the district for students. 19. Establish or Implement initiatives to improve the culture and climate of the district for staff. 20. Establish DEI committees or affinity groups 21. Strategic Planning 22. Budgeting 23. Working directly with students 24. Working directly with school leaders 25. Working directly with other district leaders 26. Develop and Implement DEI programs and Initiatives for students. 27. Develop and Implement DEI programs and Initiatives for staff. 28. Human resources audit or evaluation of practices. 29. Conduct DEI-focused school visits or walkthroughs. 30. Collaborating with outside resources (consultants, etc.) 31. Networking	
26	CRSL_P_…	How **frequently** do you engage in the following Culturally Responsive School Leaders practices to	● Never ● Rarely

	(CRSL_P_1-4) P=Practice	advance equity in your district on a regular basis? 1. Critical Self Reflection 2. Developing and sustaining culturally responsive teachers and curricula 3. Promoting inclusive, anti-oppressive school contacts 4. Engaging students indigenous (Or local neighborhood) community contexts	● Sometimes ● Often ● Always
27	CRSL_A_… (CRSL_A_1-8) A=Attitudinal	How **frequently** do you engage in the following attitudinal traits of Culturally Responsive School Leaders? 1. Courage: A willingness to make leadership decisions knowing that central district administrators, school boards union officials or building staff may not be happy. 2. Connectedness: Feels connected to community base causes. 3. Humility: Constantly looking for signs that she or he is reproducing oppression in the school; will take that information head-on and institutionalize the appropriate anti-oppression reforms. 4. Deference: Constantly looks for ways to lead with community and use community based and indigenous knowledge to inform school policy and reform. 5. Intolerance: Refuses to accommodate any forms of oppression in school. 6. Distributive: Always looking for ways to shift power and set the agenda for school policy and reform toward not just staff but community. 7. Decolonizing- Constantly seeks ways to (a) find, critique and confront historical oppressive structures, and (b) build/promote structures that embrace community-based epistemologies, behaviors and perceptions. 8. Humanizing: Able to reflect on his/her own aspirations, but is also aware that students and communities have their own indigenous/ancestral knowledge and aspiration (desires, dreams and goals apart from those of schools); leaders are willing to place these community-based aspirations at the center of the conversations around school pedagogy, curriculum and leadership.	● Never ● Rarely ● Sometimes ● Often ● Always

28	CRSL_PR_… (CRSL_PR_1-4) PR=practice rateing	How important would you rate the following Culturally Responsive School Leadership practices to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in your district? 1. Critical Self Reflection 2. Developing and sustaining culturally responsive teachers and curricula 3. Promoting inclusive, anti-oppressive school contacts 4. Engaging students indigenous (Or local neighborhood) community contexts	● Not at all important ● Slightly important ● Moderately Important ● Very Important ● Extremely Important
29	DEI_RA_… (DEI_RA_1-8) RA=Resources & Access	How much do you agree with the following statements about your resources and access to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in your district? 1. I have sufficient access to financial resources to make an impact in my role as an Equity Leader. 2. I have sufficient access to human resources to make an impact in my role. (established team) 3. I have sufficient access to principals and schools to make an impact in my role as an Equity Leader. 4. I have sufficient access to the Superintendent as an Equity Leader. 5. I have sufficient influence over instructional decisions to make an impact in my role as an Equity Leader. 6. I have influence over policy to make an impact in my role as an Equity Leader. 7. I have sufficient access to the Board of Education to make an impact in my role as an Equity Leader. 8. I have sufficient access to internal stakeholders to make an impact in my role as an Equity Leader. (staff, students) 9. I have sufficient access to external stakeholders to make an impact in my role as an Equity Leader. (parents, community members)	● Strongly Agree ● Agree ● Neither Agree Nor Disagree ● Disagree ● Strongly Disagree
30		How **frequently** do you utilize the following to evaluate your impact on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in your district? ● ISBE Equity Journey Continuum ● ISBE School Report Data: 5 Essentials	● Never ● Rarely ● Sometimes ● Often ● Always

		Survey Data ● ISBE School Report Data: Academic Progress (IAR, SAT, etc.) ● ISBE School Report Data: Students (enrollment, racial/ethnic diversity, etc.) ● ISBE School Report Data: Teachers (demographics, salary, etc.) ● ISBE School Report Data: Administrators (demographics, salary, etc.) ● Other forms of Achievement Data ● Social Emotional Data Tracking ● Other Forms of Perception Data ● Discipline Data ● Internal Cultural and Climate Surveys ● Internal tracking system aligned to Professional Development ● Other forms of Summative Data ● Other forms of Formative Data ● Other forms of Program Data	Please list other activities you participated in that are not listed here.
31		How **frequently** do you engage in the following practices to measure the impact of your district's diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts? ● Monitor & Review Achievement Data (information on student learning and achievement) ● Monitor & Review Demographic Data (information about the characteristics of students and or staff) ● Monitor & Review Program Data (information on all school programs) ● Monitor & Review Perception Data (information on the attitudes and beliefs of various stakeholders in the school, such as teachers, students, and parents)	● Never ● Rarely ● Sometimes ● Often ● Always
		Open-Ended Questions	
32		Please describe how you are measuring the impact of your work in diversity, equity and inclusion in your district?	
33		Please describe the most critical aspects needed to make an impact as an Equity Leader in your district.	
34		Please describe any barriers that prevent the advancement of diversity, equity, and inclusion in your district.	

35		If your district has an equity statement, please input it below. (you may drop a link here also)	
		Optional Compensation Question	
36		If you would like to be entered in a drawing for a $25 Amazon gift card, please provide your email address below. The winner will be contacted once data collection has been completed.	