EXAMINING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES AND IMPACT OF PUBLIC SCHOOL LEADERS WITHIN CULTURAL PROFICIENCY & EQUITY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education in Education Policy, Organization and Leadership
with a concentration in Diversity and Equity in Education
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2024

Urbana, Illinois

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ABSTRACT

Vulnerable engagement by educational leaders and teachers within Cultural Proficiency & Equity (CP&E) Professional Development (PD) remains vital to leading initiatives that serve to increase educator awareness, foster self-reflection, and evolve practice over time to yield actionable change for all students. To cultivate educational environments where holistic experiences are rooted in equitable opportunity, influences such as race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and (dis)ability adversely impacting marginalized populations must be minimized via intersectionality within CP&E PD. Committed, empathetic intentionality manifested within emotional intelligence and dedication is requisite. Through a blend of a descriptive and interpretive phenomenological methodology, as well as exploratory research – grounded within Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Social Practice Theory (SPT) as frameworks – this Mixed Methods Research Study (MMRS) examines the lived experiences of 18 public school leaders. Participants shared challenges and barriers in institutionalizing cultural knowledge to address a history of inequitable access to education in the community, while stressing that CP&E becomes politicized and is mentally-taxing. Shared stories, paired with opinions of multi-year PD, illustrate a massive responsibility challenged by active and passive resistance towards activism. Findings included misconceptions regarding CRT, differing levels of urgency to strengthen organizational capacity, and progress contingent upon values and beliefs serving to expand CP&E knowledge. Ideas such as bias, culture, diversity, and equity represented discourse topics of comfort, whereas antiracism, disproportionality, inclusion, race, and Whiteness were addressed with reservation. Leaders believe enhanced understanding is attainable through personal growth and targeted PD – which leverages relationships with all stakeholders – yet, various voices still showcased doubtful undertones for change becoming actualized.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation is dedicated to my sons, Vincent and William, who challenge me daily, yet always provide unconditional love and admiration. To my wife, Nikki, your belief in me has never wavered; thank you for your support and for being our family's rock. Know that the moments that we all share bring such joy to my life! You deserve a Ph.T. ("Put Him Through") diploma. Mom and Dad, I am forever blessed that you refused to give up on my potential. Audrey, my sister, thank you for modeling noble ambition and work ethic. And to my nieces, Marisa and Daniella, always maintain your passion and dedication to pursue your dreams.

During my six years of study, I have missed opportunities to make memories with family. Coursework and writing have necessitated sacrifices in my role as a father, husband, son, uncle, brother, and friend. The investment of time during weekends and nights stems from wanting loved ones to stand proud of the man that I desire to become. Vin and Will, via commitment to lifelong learning, growth and potential stands personified in the immense power of education!

This work has also been spurred on by students and families in two educational communities who have supported me for the last 15 years. My leadership and judgment have proven imperfect, but I have always remained committed to doing what is best for children. Per James Baldwin, "I can't believe what you say, because I see what you do." As such, I continue to aspire to make a difference for learners who cannot control their circumstance.

Lastly, thank you to colleagues who invested time within interviews and portrayed vast vulnerability in sharing their emotions and experiences. With that, a variety of educators have positively shaped me through mentorship and/or friendship, such as Anthony, Craig, Danny, Denice, Denise, Grace, Erik, Jeff, Maritza, and Steve. And cheers to those we lost along the way – Joe, miss you, brother!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Description of Problem

An educational institution is a microcosm of society reflecting its diversity of people, values, and epistemologies, so educational institutions are responsible to tackle all forms of prejudice through policy, practice, and systems (Miller, 2021). The Council of Exceptional Children (CEC) outlines that cultural diversity is evident within differences dictated by personal experiences and attributes such as race, ethnicity, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, nationality, language, religion, political affiliation, and socioeconomic background. With each person holding vast uniqueness, identifying barriers, and then developing social and academic opportunities for students to remain engaged is becoming increasingly critical (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2021). Razak (1999) addresses diversity by striving to teach educators how to analyze barriers such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, and (dis)ableism in the classroom.

In the Spring of 2020, the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) virus caused school closures in 190 countries impacting 90% of those enrolled (Gilchrest, 2020). Through statistical models designed to estimate the potential impact of school closures on learning (e.g., learning loss attributed to access to remote learning, quality of remote instruction, home support, and the degree of engagement), Dorn et al. (2020) predict that African American and Latino students, especially those of low socioeconomic status, are substantially more inclined to fall behind – and that the ramifications may have a massively destructive effect on our national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Shifrer's (2018) study concludes that racial minorities are disproportionately more likely to be low-achieving for the entirety of their Kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) years, with racial achievement gaps observed in Kindergarten less likely to close each year. In

respect to overrepresentation of minorities in Special Education (SE), “True social justice requires investigation for truth in the patterns of racial and ethnic disparities, without prejudice and censorship” (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2019, p. 110). Pearman & McGee’s (2022), analysis reveals how gifted qualification processes commonly exclude Black students, particularly males, from access to enrichment programs.

Professional Development (PD) represents an opportunity to address the proliferation of research that showcases a social justice crisis in education, and that it must seek fluid conceptualization of culture and identity in featuring critical reflexivity between thinking and practice that values pedagogical focus on relating cultural diversity of social justice (Szelei et al., 2020). In citing research about the benefits of increased diversity within a school’s teaching, Smith et al. (2023), also notes the challenge of supply not meeting the demands due to antiquated hurting policies and certification systems.

Inclusivity values an individual's identity and encourages relationships between cultural identity and work; “Whereas diversity refers to differences within a group, inclusion speaks to how those members are treated and how they feel” (Puritty et al., 2017, p. 1101). To achieve sustainable learning spaces, the two foremost variables tied to success of inclusive practices in a school are administrative support and teacher agency – both of which can be strengthened through PD (Schaefer, 2010).

Monarrez (2018) articulates that the significant degree of housing segregation in the United States (U.S.) limits the capacity of a school/district to comprehensively achieve demographic diversity. Nonetheless, as diversity grows in the K-12 educational system, intercultural understanding, pedagogical expertise, and learning theory embedded within PD associated with Culturally-Relevant/Responsive Teaching (CRR Teaching) strategies serve to

address sociocultural factors of integration (Wells, 2020). Cultural proficiency is embedded in advocating with ethical responsibility; therefore, responses to differing backgrounds, cultures, and experiences with sensitivity is crucial – particularly when accounting for marginalized subgroups that are disproportionately impacted by trauma (Webber & Mascari, 2016).

In 2021, the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA), the first school boards association in the nation, provided backing to Local Education Agencies (LEA) to undertake equity-focused initiatives to ensure all members of the community receive access to a high-quality education. PSBA affirmed that the framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT) represents tool for leadership to employ CRR Teaching to minimize discriminatory practices, because school districts – under state and federal education laws – are responsible for ensuring that factors arising from race, ethnicity, gender, class, disability, and homelessness do not limit any student's ability to access and benefit from district programs. Culturally Responsive Teaching is a long-term commitment to social justice in education that employs a mixture of cultural knowledge and prior experiences to help provide consideration of differing frames of references in order to build home-to-school connections and plan a wider spectrum of instructional strategies to meet the needs of varied different learning styles (Griner & Stewart, 2013).

The framework of CRT within both research and PD emphasizes outcomes, not solely individuals' personal and professional beliefs, and calls on structures, systems, and practices to be examined, then rectified, to yield change (Sawchuk, 2021). As such, scholarship embedded within CRT serves to seek connections where policy and convention in K-12 education enable racial inequity to persist, and in turn, advocate to transcend unjust ways. CRT should align with administrative advocacy to disrupt structural barriers of student achievement currently in place (Amiot et al., 2019). Within a PD setting, engagement levels (e.g., active versus quiet adoption),

as well as resistant engagement, or resistant deflection, are countered amidst the critical framework of CRT (Perouse-Harvey, 2022).

In addition to cultural proficiency/competence, diversity, race, inclusivity, disproportionality, and CRT, other areas of school leader and teacher learning/discourse are germane in aspiring for educational equity, such as the recognition of historical, socioeconomic, and racial inequities that can be rectified by structural and transformative approaches (Cochran-Smith, 2016). Concepts for organizational growth also include Whiteness, antiracism, and unconscious bias. Leaders must examine collective beliefs about children and their motivation (Beecher & Sweeny, 2008). The priority needs to be both, "Responding to and legitimizing the structural and social logics at work in our everyday professional lives and what the implications are for teaching social justice in these complicated political times" (Elliott the Blair, 2020, p. 230). By raising critical consciousness through addressing issues of social justice and racial inequality, educators can acknowledge societal oppression and push students to examine how these factors impact their daily lives (Byrd, 2016).

Johnson (2017) promotes sharing personal experiences with others to aid in understanding how White individuals can make sense of our nation's past and the implications of white supremacy today, because racist policies, structures, and social cultures intend to maintain white power and privilege. "The application of intersectionality for both critical inquiry and critical praxis in antiracist education is necessary to avoid historical pitfalls of one group fighting oppression (un)intentionally reinforcing the oppression experienced by other groups" (Smalling, 2020, p. 610). Zeisler's (2012) geographic luck theory predicts student success in terms of being born into a family with higher social capital, and thus educational resources. "The problem is

that all the good intentions in the world can't make us immune to biased behavior" (Fiarman & Benson, 2020, p. 15).

Gooden (2012) advocates for leaders to conduct equity audits that drive PD design to help eradicate racism from school, particularly when data is analyzed to develop goals, progress monitor, and to be transparent about both expectations and purpose to the community. "Studies on race and racism indicate that, as a social construct, race has important consequences in US society and significantly affects the life-chances of people of color… Social relations are affected explicitly or implicitly by these racialized social structures" (Savas, 2014, p. 506). "Education on race prevents racist attitudes, dispositions, and policies, before they emerge, ossify, and create adverse racialized impacts" (Ezell, 2022, p. 86).

Educators cannot expect families to adapt to the expectations and culture of the school, and instead they must respond to unique, individualized needs by better understanding and considering the influence of differences such as students' languages and cultures (Nieto, 1999) Critical reflection within PD encourages awareness about identity and race to develop White educators' confidence to interrupt racism (Matias & Mackey, 2015). Educator reflection surrounding instruction can be examined through PD where the presentation of racial disproportionality data prompts cognitive dissonance where assumptions and beliefs are revealed (Irby, 2018). Transformative and action-oriented awareness grounded within antiracist PD serves as a foundation to equip educators with knowledge and skill to mitigate inherently racist instructional practices (Dei, 2014).

As educators use data to drive instructional decisions, leaders who determine the type of data, in addition to the composition and presentation of statistics, must be vigilant about the historical and cultural influences (Lin, 2023). Antiracist pedagogy represents a process of

personal growth and intra-awareness of self, power, and biases that challenge educators cognitively, emotively, and behaviorally (Ng et al., 2023). “Antiracist leadership requires educators to deconstruct the messages they have received about the value of Black and Brown lives, specifically of school-aged students, and together work to learn and develop a shared framework in alignment with the district’s equity commitment” (Lewis, 2023, p. 163). “These are the kinds of questions the other side doesn’t want us to ask because it wants us to be happy with the contemporary distribution of opportunity” (Parish, 2021).

Research Problem

The process of improvement is continuous, thus there is a constant priority to inspire educators to reflect on their instructional leadership in order to maximize student performance in an equitable fashion by employing practices that foster belonging through the utilization of culturally-responsive strategies.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of the research is to study the relationship between school level and district-based leaders’ attitudes, perceptions, and lived experiences towards Cultural Proficiency & Equity (CP&E) PD through common – yet vital – tenets and how intentionality behind instructional practice and school climate can yield outcomes that help dismantle inequitable access to learning that yields disproportionate student achievement.

Research Question

Given learning gaps associated with the variables of race, socioeconomic status, and Special Education widening during the COVID-19 pandemic, what commonalities and disparities exist within the mindsets and practices of educational administrators associated with

CP&E in a large, suburban school district that are primarily revealed by virtue of qualitative reflection and scaled survey quantitative analysis?

Personal Narrative & Positionality

My personal and professional experiences (42 years old, with 15 years in the K-12 public education setting) have influenced my understanding of the topics and importance of cultural proficiency (referred to as competency by many districts), as well as the need for diversity to exhibit equity. Academic pursuits have empowered me to not only better make decisions based on what is best for children, but also to advocate for underserved and marginalized populations and educate/lead practitioners.

During the first half of my educational career, I lacked understanding in needing to be anti-racist as a Caucasian male and push to disrupt structures producing disproportionate student achievement results. Instead, I infused a capitalistic mindset into my seven years of classroom experience where over 90% of my students were Black or Brown. I felt compelled to leave the district and pursue what I believe in (even though these ideals were still newfound, ever-evolving feelings).

Having the COVID-19 pandemic hit during my first year as a principal represented one of many challenges during my tenure. Our building had the highest free-and-reduced lunch enrollment in the district, while over one quarter of the population are classified as English Language Learners (ELL), also commonly referred to as Multilingual Learners (ML). About one-third of our students either registered or unenrolled during a singular school year. The data, specifically student achievement in terms of growth, truly told the story of our students' learning gaps in contrast to peer schools with more affluence and resources.

Leaders must enhance the academic, social, and emotional experiences for all students and model the unwavering belief that what is equitable does not equate to being equal. On June 3, 2020, I penned a letter (Appendix A) to our school community (a risk that after my experience in my previous district I worried about taking). As a testament to such, my former school's core team developed equity goals that were specific, measurable, and timely into our annual goal-setting and continuous improvement process. Children do not choose their financial well-being, race, gender, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, etc. Thus, adults must work to correct a flawed educational system. PD centered around such desired progress, holds immense value; however, how can its effectiveness be measured?

Glossary of Terminology Acronyms

Throughout this study, a variety of terminology features acronyms. Table 1 represents a guide for navigating nomenclature and acronyms.

Table 1

Terminology & Corresponding Acronyms

Term	**Acronym**
Advance Higher Education	AHE
Advanced Placement	AP
A Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance	RM-ANOVA
Augmentative & Alternative Communication	AAC
Child World Model	CWM
Critical Race Theory	CRT

Table 1 (cont.)

Critical Whiteness Study	CWS
Cultural Competence	CC
Cultural Proficiency & Equity	CP&E
Cultural Proficiency Framework	Cultural Proficiency Framework
Cultural Proficiency, Equity, & Inclusion	CPE&I
Culturally-Relevant Education	CR-SE
Culturally-Relevant/Responsive Teaching	CRR Teaching
Diversity & Equity	D&E
Educational Service Center	ESC
Emotional/Behavior Disorders	EBD
English Language Learners	ELL
Equality Challenge Unit	ECU
Grade Point Averages	GPA
Gross Domestic Product	GDP
Handicapped Children Act	HCA
Inclusive Schools Movement	ISM
Kindergarten through 12th grade	K-12
Least Restrictive Environment	LRE

Table 1 (cont.)

Multilingual Learners	ML
Mixed Methods Research Study	MMRS
Multi-Tiered Systems of Support	MTSS
National Assessment of Educational Progress	NAEP
National Center for Cultural Competence	NCCC
National Education Association	NEA
National Equity Project	NEP
National Human Genome Research Institute	NHGRI
New Polar School District	NPSD
Pennsylvania Department of Education	PDE
Pennsylvania School Boards Association	PSBA
Pennsylvania System of School Assessment	PSSA
Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12	PK-12
Professional Development	PD
Racial Formation Theory	RFT
Social Praxis Theory	SPT
Special Education	SE
The Council of Exceptional Children	CEC

Table 1 (cont.).

The Coronavirus Disease 2019	COVID-19
The Equality and Human Rights Commission	EHRC
United Nations Educational, Scientific, &	UNESCO
United States	U.S.
United States Census Bureau	USCB
Universal Design Learning	UDL

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Acknowledging Systemic Inequity

"If we are honest with ourselves about the end of oppression, we must be willing to consider all approaches that do not contribute to the further oppression and marginalization of children of color" (Parker & Stovall, 2004, p. 178). CP&E, as well as Diversity & Equity (D&E), are endeavors that call for all stakeholders in public education to investigate and address their biases and work in partnership with the community to disrupt systemic inequity (Casey at el., 2019). As a result, literature has been culled and organized to reflect common themes that emerged during qualitative interviews with school-based leaders and district-level administrators.

Organizational change focuses on instituting intentional conversations about racism into organizational culture and being process-oriented to yield environmental ethos where individuals reflect to inform action on individual, relational, and community levels (Watt et al, 2021). Given that teaching represents a deeply personal effort, educators demonstrate a propensity to justify their practices. Yet, "African Americans have encountered different ideologies that have legitimized and naturalized enslavement, confinement, and other forms of racial oppression, while simultaneously being blamed for their own racial plight" (Lofton & Davis, 2015, p. 214). Their ethnographic work examines lived experiences that illustrate a substantial lack of cultural knowledge and negative perceptions. As a result, systemic inequality is substantiated with examining one's own cultural practices, logics, and actions. A litany of literature remains available that serves to rationalize such injustice. For example, Patterson (2006) suggests that African Americans experience disparate experiences due to their own cultural practices. Kelley

(1997) links inequitable educational access to poverty in which Black communities remain at fault for continuing.

"Identity and culture impact the experience of becoming literate" (Gotlieb et al., 2022, p. 95). As such, instructional planning and preparation must intentionally strengthen students' needs through efficient pathways built with explicit instruction and deliberate practice. Gotlieb (et al., 2022) preface the recognition of marginalized student groups being the most adversely affected by inadequate literacy instruction in our country and place an emphasis on leaders acquiring an enhanced understanding of the development of said populations in order to actively guide education systems to navigate the realities of students' affective and academic experiences being insufficiently addressed. Daley & Rappolt-Schlichtmann (2018) highlight varied strengths and needs representing only part of the problem for diverse populations because many children are subjected to prejudices correlating to perceived intelligence and work habits. Problematically, educators internalize negativity at the detriment of students' self-awareness and potential.

A requisite of high-quality leadership is an activist approach in building an environment of organizational diversity that affords time for shared learning and development (Cook, 2014). Administrators and teachers must constantly assess how students are performing and what they should change for higher student achievement (Hawkins, 2017). Furthermore, given that reading development occurs in the home and community, as well as school, the extent of COVID's impact on learning gaps was magnified in marginalized communities (Dahaene, 2009).

An organizational mission statement must represent an ethos that impacts curriculum, policies, and culture through ongoing prospects for staff to develop an understanding of sustainable development, reorganizing internal structures, and cultivating norms (Gabriel, 2015).

More so, the desired outcomes of a mission statement should be reflected in PD initiatives; Desimone's (2009) core conceptual framework for studying the effects of PD includes both teachers and students. For example, active learning and collective participation must serve to increase teacher knowledge and change attitudes/beliefs that alter instruction and thus improves student learning. Improvements in teachers' knowledge leads to improved instructional practices, which boost achievement for students (Dash, et al., 2012).

Cultural Competence/Proficiency

Terrell & Lindsey (2009) define cultural proficiency as individuals and organizations being able to assess their cultural knowledge – then consciously strive to strengthen their awareness and understanding of others with differing backgrounds – in order to value and adapt to diversity, and institutionalize cultural knowledge. Competence within these ideals is essential for today's teachers and educational leaders, particularly empowering children to appreciate other's unique backgrounds and experiences. According to the National Center for Cultural Competence (NCCC), "A cultural group is defined as a collection of individuals who share a core set of beliefs, patterns of behavior, and values" where ways of thinking and behaving support group identification. Advocating for lifelong learning to serve the educational needs of a vast spectrum of cultural groups and preserving a vision of a socially-just democracy are essential pillars of cultural proficiency (Lindsey & Lindsey, 2016). Such is actualized when educators are engaged in collaborative conversations and data dialogues as part of district-wide reform efforts that support all students, parents, and community members.

Cultural Competence (CC) for equity and inclusion pertains to living and working effectively in culturally diverse environments and committing to fairness and the full participation of all members (Goodman, 2021). It entails fair distribution of resources that serve

to foster equitable access to holistic learning opportunities so that every child can maximize their potential. “Cultural competence models emphasize knowledge acquisition, while cultural humility emphasizes the need for accountability, not only on an individual level, but also on an institutional level” (Fisher-Borne, et al., 2015, p. 172).

Detailed within Appendix B, Goodman presents five components of self-awareness; understanding and valuing others; knowledge of societal inequities; skills to interact effectively with a diversity of people in different contexts; and skills to foster equity and inclusion. Culturally-proficient educators provide students with greater access to learning opportunities and more meaningful experiences that more positively impact academic achievement (Gay, 2009). Culturally-proficient leaders identify deficiencies associated with attitudes and outlooks, failure to internalize work ethics, instant gratification behavior, lack of parental involvement, and low intellectual abilities (Fergus, 2017).

Cultural proficiency is impossible to attain thus it is a lifelong process (Clifford, et al., 2017). The work should inspire sense of critical consciousness (Martell, 2013). To reap a change in cultural proficiency, systemic change must come via virtue of all students increasing their achievement because diversity represents an opportunity versus a problem to be solved (Nuri-Robins, 2007). Cultural proficiency enables individuals to respond to others with differences via constructs that bolster culture by striving to intentionally value diversity through adapting based on increased cultural knowledge of all stakeholders within an organization (Lindsey et al., 2003).

Using qualitative data, (Brace, 2011) identified a clear connection between cultural competence and academic achievement – specifically that teachers were adamant that a teacher’s cultural competence fuels relationships because students were more willing to work, learn, and be engaged. Participants in Jewett’s (2020) study about cultural proficiency training in schools

stated that their relationships with students improved as a result of what was learned in cultural proficiency training – a byproduct resulting from enhanced self-awareness due to conversations about racism and oppression in America, personal bias, racial microaggressions, and White privilege. Byrd's (2016) work concluded that both constructivist practices and the promotion of cultural competency were positively associated with academic outcomes.

Equity in Education

The policies and practices ensuring access to meaningful learning is equity (Cook-Harvey et al., 2016). Equity refers to access to educational resources (e.g., input – funding and educators) and learning outcomes (e.g., output such as assessment) (Bertrand et al., 2015). Baker & Green (2015) identify educational equity as variations in resources, processes, and outcomes across children.

An equity mindset is a personal thought structure used by individuals to advocate for, and work toward, equitable education for all learners (Nadelson et al., 2019). In meta-analyses of organization/school leadership, context and human agency are vital, since there must be a clear moral purpose of learning to improve students' lives and their capacity to improve society (Kadji-Beltran at al., 2013). Per Jeffries (2023),

> Although the challenges are ample, never in history have we been as well resourced, had so much intellectual capital focused on DEI, and viscerally understood the importance of this work in the world. We understand now, better than any time in the past, this is the time to rise to the occasion. (p. 258)

Jeffries outlines that cultivating the proper environment for learning is as important as to the content – that is sometimes hard to conceptualize – and then the subsequent conversation.

An intersectional self-determination framework prompts educators to, “Identify social identities and culture, teach self-determination skills, and adopt culturally and linguistically sustaining practices” (Stansberry-Brusnahan et al., 2023, p. 326). Self-advocacy starts with an individual knowing oneself, examining needs and understanding resources, and advocating to meet needs. Kalyanpur (2000) posits that educators typically focus on individual rights and freedom of choice within the confines of self-determination; however, those with backgrounds of the non-majority (e.g., cultural, racial, socioeconomic, familial structure, non-English-speaking, etc.), and not sharing those values are put at a disadvantage.

Students bring multi-layered experiences regarding diversity, equity and inclusion; topics that must be addressed with sensitivity, humility, and space to listen and learn (Huff, 2018). To ensure equity and the prospect of all students succeeding, we must recognize that the students most harmed by the traditional system are born into families without a college education and/or who struggle to make ends meet (Sturgis & Casey, 2018). Broad generalizations about culture are widely embraced and deeply embedded in popular thinking about race and school performance; they manage to exist despite empirical evidence undermining validity (Noguera, 2008).

Warner et al. (2019) determined that the value of systemic-minded professional development programs should concentrate on change at the school and district levels. In their study, 13% of the variance in student math scores was between schools, meaning school/district policies paired with teacher practice that involved leaders increased the potential to impact student achievement. Wenglinsky (2000) found that students whose math teachers received PD pertinent to special populations outperformed their peers on assessments in excess of one grade

level. Additionally, teachers who received PD in higher-order thinking skills achieved 40% better results on assessments.

Vulnerability & Empathy

Empathy serves to, "Help educators to recognize a set of outcomes or evidence indicative of effective teaching, not standardizing a set of teacher behaviors" (Warren, 2018, p. 170). It represents an instruction mechanism for adults to seek patterns in their behavior that reveal personalized beliefs, values, and attitudes about race and culture. "Trends in teacher behaviors are beholden to dimensions of the learning environment unique to the local school setting" (p. 172). Per Ziegler et al. (2022),

> Mistakes and failures are foundational to innovation… When you mask and hide your feelings, you teach kids that that is how they should deal with mistakes and vulnerability. By contrast, when kids see authentic adults who are open to sharing their own struggles, failures, shortcomings, and blemishes, they understand that these are 'real people' who are also working through adversity to find wellness and success. (p. 1)

Carter-Andrews et al. (2018) push teachers to reconcile their natural urge to rely on their personal belief system when justifying practice, meaning just because you care and do not hold prejudice does not mean your practice is not ineffective or not meeting the needs of all children. "Remember that what is necessary and sufficient for programmatic change is not simply a commitment to certain ideals, but also enactment of programmatic change" (p.117). Weitkämper (2024), acknowledges that the impact in teachers' understanding their leadership role and supporting children's propensity to initiate learning as a difficult balance between authority and social inequity.

Maddi et al. (1998) posit that vulnerability is contingent upon positive perception of stressful contexts due to the combination commitment, control, and challenge. “Psychological vulnerability and psychological hardiness have been shown to be constructs that influence reactions from stress” (Judkins et al., 2023, p. 2840). The challenge remains the influence of feelings often unshared with others such as self-worth or willingness to exhibit weakness. Elliott & Blair (2020) outline that in doing so, the political, cognitive, and emotional nature of social justice teaching raises questions about how the struggle of work, as well as what is experienced during both learning and subsequent practice, are essential.

Educational discourse is adversely impacted by pessimism, with tension linked to economic, political, and social forces (Giroux, 2003). Kuttner (2018) emphasizes pushing past emotions because intellectual and political superiority akin to an acknowledgment of privilege results in passivity and then its own form of privilege. Normalizing failure and accepting low student achievement prevents schools and student outcomes from changing due to complacency related to racial patterns in achievement (Noguera, 2008). Their results indicated positive interaction between group membership and pedagogical content knowledge. Assumptions about intelligence, ability, and motivation fuel performance gaps, so efforts to ensure equitable learning experiences for students of color cannot be labeled as unfair to those already successful (Pollack & Zirkel, 2013).

The right kinds of professional development for both teachers and school leaders can directly contribute to improved student performance (Holloway, 2006). In examining the effectiveness of PD through analyzing more than 1,300 studies where organizations invested more than 14 hours of PD, there were significant positive benefits associated with student achievement (Yoon et al., 2007). Dash et al. (2012) employed, “A Repeated Measures

Analysis of Variance (RM-ANOVA) technique to ascertain whether there were significant differences in participants' pedagogical content knowledge (pre/post) as a function of group membership (experimental or control)" (p. 17).

Disproportional Achievement

The culmination of inequalities impacting people and their ability to succeed academically define an opportunity gap (Sparks, 2019). Disproportionate achievement gaps are symptoms of an underlying problem: opportunity gaps (Stroud, 2017). Per Sedlacek (2017), the notion of equity must target outcomes. Research on achievement gaps should stress comparisons between Caucasian and students of color that strive to prevent nuanced explanations of the causes of disparity (Gouvea, 2021). More so, achievement gap discourse should not divert attention from systemic problems and solutions by highlighting deficits of individual learners (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Closing the achievement gap should produce proportional rates of success and failure amongst different groups (Au, 2014).

Per the 2017 Race for Results Report, there are 74 million children under the age of 18 in the U.S., including 51% Caucasian, 25% Latino, and 14% African American. Meanwhile, the 2014 results indicated that African American children were placed further from opportunity, with Latino children not far behind. "The data offers an important snapshot of disparity in opportunity and the barriers that exist for different groups of children" (p. 3). Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell (1999) attribute racial gaps in Grade Point Averages (GPA), 53% in math, to socioeconomic status and family structural differences (for example, nuclear, single parent, extended, etc.).

On the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), within-school differences in achievement account for 16 score points of the 31-point gap in 2011 in eighth grade math

scores between 100,000 African American and White students (Sparks, 2019). By virtue of the NAEP Long-Term Trend test – which is intended to gauge 9-year-olds' achievement – during the 2021-2022 school year, the first-ever decline occurred in the test's 50-year history. In contrasting 2022 achievement with 2020, Schwartz (2022) outlined some findings displayed in Tables 2, 3, and 4.

Table 2

2022 NAEP Math & Reading Performance (Two-Year Comparison)

Math	Reading
Across two years, scores fell seven points.	An average regression of 5 points.
A 13-point score decrease among Black students compared to White students' dropping 5 points.	
The White/Black score gap increased from 25-to-33 points	

In contrast from 2020 to 2023, there was a significant decrease in NAEP performance in long-term Math and Reading data across the 10^{th}, 25^{th}, 50^{th}, 75^{th}, and 90^{th} percentiles for 13-year old students. Via an exploratory analysis tool, the NAEP identified subgroup variables such as socioeconomic status, parent education levels, and participation in free/reduced lunch programs. They produced regressed scale scores associated with race/ethnicity. A coefficient accounts for the difference between students of that race/ethnicity and White students. Using socioeconomic status, reading score gaps highlights are denoted in Table 3.

Table 3

2023 NAEP Math & Reading Performance by Race/Ethnicity and Grade (Three-Year Comparison)

Race/Ethnicity	Grade 4	Grade 8
White/Black	12.02	13.55
White/Hispanic	7.07	2.34

When eliminating the aforementioned efforts to investigate socioeconomic influence on student groups, Table 4 reveals an even larger disparity in achievement and subsequent growth across three years.

Table 4

2023 NAEP Math & Reading Performance (Three-Year Comparison)

Race/Ethnicity	Grade 4	Grade 8
White/Black	26.70	27.89
White/Hispanic	21.41	20.45

Early COVID-19 slide estimates that in contrast to previous years, students will demonstrate less than 50% learning gains in math (Kuhfeld & Tarasawa, 2020). Closing out 2021, declines in math (students on grade level) in majority-African American schools dropped more than 50%, with White counterparts decreasing substantially less (Schwartz, 2021). The average Black or Latino student remains two years behind the average White student in terms of achievement (Hanushek et al., 2020).

Diversity

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) outlined diverse variables influencing education (2015):

> All people, irrespective of sex, age, race, color, ethnicity, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property or birth, as well as persons with disabilities, migrants, indigenous peoples, and children and youth, especially those in vulnerable situations… should have access to inclusive, equitable, and quality education. (p. 25)

Diversity is defined through the inclusion of a range of differences such as social constructs – historical efforts attempting to define, and thus interpret gender, race, class, (dis)ability, and sexuality – as well as ethnic backgrounds (Servaes et al., 2021). Due to historical oppression and implicit bias, diversity demands, "Additional attention to attributes such as gender identity, ability, ethnicity, sexual identity, creed, socioeconomic background, age, military experience, learning style, personality, education level, geographic background/country of origin, language, marital status, caretaker status, occupation and appearance" (p. 1708). Shackelford (2003) likens diversity to individuals holding unique perspectives or outlooks – it cannot just encompass race and gender.

The CEC outlines that cultural norms influence said differences and are commonly influenced by family, peer, and social groups, in addition to community values. Nkomo and Vandeyar (2009), reference varied sociopolitical contexts that drive diversity education addressing issues as racial and social class segregation, disproportionate achievement by student backgrounds, and schools' structural inequalities. These realities can be minimized by instructional practices that affirms students' unique identity, create a sense of belonging,

expecting the best from all students through maintaining and modeling high expectations, and teaching learners to be critical about themes such as inequality.

The Century Foundation (2023) posits that diversity is primarily revealed in socioeconomically-and-racially-diverse schools; presently, over 4 million students in the United States attend a public or charter school featuring socioeconomic integration policies. In citing a 2022 National Education Association (NEA) Poll, a disproportionate amount of Black and Hispanic/Latino educators are actively considering exiting the profession, while turnover for teachers of color is nearly 4% higher. However, they outlined that more integrated contexts in terms of teacher diversity, would yield academic outcomes of higher standardized assessment achievement, a greater likelihood of enrolling in college, lower dropout rates, and reduced racial achievement gaps. For example, Black students in in grades PK-3 who are taught by a Black teacher for one year had scored multiple percentage points higher when compared to Black students taught by a White teacher (Egalite et al., 2015); K-3 Black students with a Black teacher are 5% more likely to graduate high school and 4% more likely to enroll in college (Gershenson et al., 2018); and non-White K-5 students taught by same race/ethnicity teachers are 19% less likely to be suspended each year (Holt & Gershenson, 2015).

Diversity must be engaged by developing self-awareness in a scaffolded manner of observation, reflection, and evaluation of personalized biases, cultural beliefs, and feelings about differences (Kohli et al, 2010). “Diversity education requires acuity in reading nonverbal cues indicating student comfort level and certain contextual situations” (Kranz & Sale, 2022, p. 235). Dever (2016) discusses ‘isms’ that negatively affect diverse learners such as race, ethnicity, and language differences leading to over-and-under-representation. This often most significantly impacts children with special needs due to cultural misalignment with curriculum. In order to

create outlets for tacit knowledge to be elicited, people must, “Remain engaged during experiential activities revolving around personal and emotional content” (Craig et al., 2022, p. 816). Via creating alliances between stakeholders, learning theory manifests into skills being deepened within concrete activities.

Additionally, neurodiversity represents a growing field within diversity discussions. Neurologists developed a theory known as the Child World Model (CWM) to explain the effects of the environment on neurodevelopment and skill development. Adverse factors such as disability and COVID-based regressions in learning within an environment can be minimized through more culturally-relevant instruction (Waber, 2010). Neuropsychologists stress immense variability between every child and advise exploring differentiated, personalized, and culturally-relevant opportunities to maximize growth of marginalized learners (Rose & Meyer, 2002).

Technology needs to also be considered in discussion surrounding ensuring equitable access to learning for diverse subgroups, otherwise it cannot be transformational (Kaczorowski et al., 2023). “Technology provides access to instruction and to the world, but is sometimes used in ways that create more barriers and perpetuate systemic inequities for those who experience marginalization” (p. 377). Such was evident during the pandemic when many schools reactively transitioned to virtual classrooms where technological literacy – not just access to an electronic device and/or internet – adversely influenced learning outcomes.

Race

The United States Census Bureau, USCB, (2017) defines race as self-identification with one or more social groups. The word race, while often overlapping with ethnicity, does not share the same definition and is frequently misconstrued (Mcleod, 2021). It involves deeply personal interrelated terms of skin tone, physical characteristics, ancestry, and heritage. Race represents

an arbitrary classification of modern humans relating to social constructs pertaining to ancestry, shared culture, and historical past. Per Conley (2024), it is socially-imposed and primarily unitary since people typically only have one race – but can claim multiple ethnicities. People do not control their race and it is most commonly utilized in how people perceive others.

The National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI) added that race is divisive and used to group people, particularly given that, "Race was constructed as a hierarchical human-grouping system, generating racial classifications to identify, distinguish, and marginalize some groups across nations, regions and the world" (p. 1). The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) referenced the 2010 Equality Act to provide a legal definition of race encompassing a person's color or nationality (citizenship included), as well as an ethnic or national origin that may not align with nationality.

According to Stepan (1982), race is an illusion primarily formed by biologists and anthropologists in an attempt to explain physical observation. Hall (2024) devised, "Five thematic concepts for potential definitions of race often utilized in society as being culturally-based; for personal identification; color classification; biological essentialism; and origin" (p. 12). Coleman (2011) contends that the various uses of race lead to there not truly being a definitive description or explanation of the phenomena, while noting that the most commonly accepted understanding involves genetically-transmitted traits or qualities in the human species. Jones argues (2005) that race represents a constantly revisable concept and definition because it can be categorized from an ontological, linguistically lexical, or political perspective.

Omi & Winant's (2015) Racial Formation Theory (RFT) specifies that race exists in biological and innate characteristics, and that skin color as a physical attribute is a superficial indicator; it is one of the first things we notice related to an individual's appearance. The variable

of race yields inequality via structural racism and discrimination as evident by racial disparities within various facets of education (associated with both opportunity and achievement). Henze (2004) references race to a combination of being shaped by historical and scientific contexts. In noting powerful rhetoric regarding the meaning and use of the word, he emphasizes, "Visible differences of skin color, head shape, physiology, and stature, in addition to the influence of language, psychology, and culture" (p. 312).

Race remains a socially-constructed, learned creation thus racism is learned within children's formal education (Ezell, 2022). It broadly consists of teachers in the K-12 setting, but also, informal educators, such as family members, peers, and social network influences. He added that race pedagogy requires, "Academic vernacular on race ranging from terms like systemic racism, structural racism, White privilege, and CRT" (p. 92). Sonn (2008) notes that education systems are constructed by reinforcing inputs and outputs such as material and symbolic values that heavily contribute to the epistemology of race. Benjamin (2021) encourages educators to view racial literacy the same way they interpret curriculum and instruction pertinent to math and literacy, because learning about race and others' experiences minimize potential struggle later in both personal and professional lives due to a willingness and empathetic comfort within engaging with people from different cultural backgrounds. Meanwhile, those of Black and Brown origin experience a disproportionate amount of emotional stress navigating racial microaggressions, such as peers denying their lived experiences (Evans & Moore, 2015).

Whiteness

Race cannot be examined via race-neutral approaches (Fuller-Hamilton, 2019). Racial ignorance is often usurped by other educational continuous improvement priorities; "The inability to identify the root causes of these problems by not talking about race… it means that

you're not understanding the problem" (Najarro, 2022, p. 1). Power lies in defining the purpose of education where the majority of decision-makers, "Tend to be steeped in a history in which whiteness, as a sort of structural position and an identity, has been structured as and thought of as superior to all of the racialized groups" (p.1).

Individuals with privilege view the behavior of their peers and groups in which they identify with at the norm, with others ways – most often a subordinate group – as being problematic and/or different. "Such inherently influence how teachers view students of differing backgrounds" (Soheilan et al., 2023, p. 53). Per Pollack & Mayor (2024), epistemological foundations of social justice education highlight aspects of people's belief system – particularly being good, moral, or just – fuel people's perspectives. Their study cautions that theory can initiate conversation, but relational components of teaching concepts more commonly positively alter educators' practice. Matias (2023) presents outlets for Critical Whiteness Study (CWS),

> It is telling to see these regular displays of emotionally-resistant behaviors primarily by people who invest in whiteness, especially as they go to great lengths to discredit the field… Because as they show their true colors, they also speak volumes about the importance of the field. (p. 1432)

She pushes practitioners to refuse the normativity of whiteness via educational research, because it is founded in a community's misconceptions linked to the majority.

McIntosh (2001) leverages the idea of scholarship being essential to discussing the ideal of Whiteness – which is unconsciously patronizing – in order to minimize obstinance, as well as race-evasive maneuvering. Such can be done when individuals reference data that support society's justification of racial stereotyping. The notion of superiority is reflected through unconscious bias and Pratto & Stewart's (2012) theory of social inequality forming from the

assumption that dominance is normal and not associated with privilege. “Whiteness is a pervasive problem in public education… Historically, whiteness has been the ideal and the standard against which all public school students’ behavior and academic performance have been judged” (Forrest, 2021, p. 1). The topic causes apprehension by many because power is being threatened, in lieu of a focus on encouraging the field of education to be, “More racially aware in fostering the skills to identify and root out bias and oppression in schools” (p. 1).

Thandeka (1999) references that internal racial logic has been evolutionarily-ingrained in humans due to it representing a societal system substantiated over hundreds of years. “Developmental science needs to recognize that it lags behind and ignores pioneering research on Whiteness from counseling psychology” (Seaton, 2022, p. 940). Wynter (2003) shares a sequence of starting with identity to frame whiteness in contexts such as biological, cognitive, ecological, ethical, historical, and social opportunities; however, individuals must jointly understand the presence of capitalism and dominance. Leonardo (2013) points out the false narrative behind Whiteness in that identifying as, being grouped as, or looking white, does not mean that they are oppressive or have contributed to societal inequities. Highlighting this represents a strategy to reject the concept, the likelihood of feeling attacked by theory, or even the need to exhibit guilt/remorse.

“White racial identity operates beneath the level of consciousness” (Tanner, 2023, p. 1,517). His study about Whiteness yields him seeking affirmation from colleagues of color, and the need for white people to avow white values that harm people of color in their effort to discuss race. He states a habit of, “Seeking impossible atonement for complicity I don’t understand” (p. 1,519). Jupp et al. (2023) equates Whiteness to a falling empire and pious mindset that causes conversations and learning about the concept to be a gut check. “Perhaps our sense of loss is

finally knowing that the empire of Whiteness we lived in all our lives, and whose privileges we experienced, is going to get worse, despite our strivings to be 'good' antiracists or allies" (p. 1,420). Casey (2023) shares that people tend to push to re-center the conversation round Whiteness due to emotional and political tension. He counters against such by writing, "We can't find a moment when Whiteness was ever not central to the social organization of the modern world" (p. 1,443).

Antiracism

The term antiracist pushes leaders to look within through an introspective lens (Kendi, 2019). Its foundation is rooted in acknowledging that racism exists by identifying it. By virtue of such, it can be described within contexts of structures and policies. Next, through a moral conscience, change can occur. In essence, the willingness to view society as racist – meaning, not falling in the middle as admitting such, but not being accountable as part of the system since 'I'm not racist' – reaps antiracist dialogue and actionable effort to come to fruition. It is these moments, opportunities to not just change people's emotions, but dismantle racism through intentionality that serve to benefit public education. Pitts (2020) describes antiracism and its magnitude in schools (in Appendix C) as an exercise of hope.

> Anti-racist educators understand that love and silence are deeply contradictory. The love that underpins our practice is not the form of love often associated with passivity and inaction. For anti-racist educators, love is action. Love is sharp. Love is truth-telling. Love is fighting for what is right. Love is doing what is right. (p. 1)

She refers to schools in the U.S. built to exclude, silence, erase, and promote White Supremacy, thus constant action is necessary to represent healing that is grounded within advocacy and collaboration to reap liberating change.

Livingston (2020) targets organizational change through diversity, equity, and inclusion concentrations aiming to increase understanding conditions, challenges, and corrective action. Design and facilitation team members for antiracism work must express their limitations and welcome all perspectives and personal experiences driven by one's culture. Per Husband (2012),

> Anti-racist education mandates teachers to place race at the center of their decision-making processes. By engaging in anti-racist education with their students, early childhood teachers are unavoidably thrust into situations where they have to confront issues of racial privilege and marginalization in both historical and contemporary contexts. (p. 368)

Growth moments come from discomfort and training should account for a diverse makeup of facilitators – racialized leaders – not just those who identify as White (Brown at el., 2023). White & Wanless (2019) explain that,

> The onus is on all of us, particularly White people, to address racism because White people represent the majority of early educators; experience the systemic advantages that racism produces; and are better situated to promote an anti-racist agenda because of positionality and power. (p. 73)

Smalling (2022) articulates that a socially-constructed system of White Supremacy comes through indoctrination that gives deference – such as privilege, opportunity, and freedoms – to individuals assigned a White identity. Racialization is attributed to broad social processes such as Colonialism and cultural-privileging that yield outcomes of stigmatization and exclusion (Lee & Ferrar, 2014).

Anti-racist policymaking should be race-conscious, explicitly considering how policies impact Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color because the mindset works against a

commonplace trend of there being a social safety net designed to let families of color fall through (Minoff, 2020). Racism is socially-produced and endemic in yielding material/economic stratification, and is defined as, "The beliefs, practices, or structural systems – such as education – that function to oppress racial groups" (Mills & Unsworth, 2018, p. 314). Aversive racism or unconscious bias – such as claiming to be colorblind – can be masked as a more subtle version of racism whereas the impact is just as damning (Williams, 2012).

If working against organizational racism is an ever-evolving, life-long, and personal endeavor, then it remains complex (Theopharis & Haddix, 2011). Wingfield (2015) attests that antiracist activism can be attained by pivoting from the colorblind ideology that sociologist's critique as it being admirable to profess not to see color and problematic to see oneself as part of a racial group. Policies characterized as colorblind are often designed to benefit White children and families; therefore, harming and marginalizing children and families of color (in)directly (Flynn et al., 2017). Evans (2007) says claiming race does not matter and treating all students the same denies the atrocity of racial inequities in the past and allows microaggressions.

Unconscious Bias

Advance Higher Education, AHE, (2013) defines unconscious bias as, "Automatic bias that we are unaware of, and which happens outside of our control to help make quick judgments and assessments of people and situations, and is influenced by our background, cultural environment, and personal experiences." Individuals cannot merely be aware of implicit bias, but instead push to maintain responsibility for them. Within AHE's Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), "We all need to recognize and acknowledge our biases and find ways to mitigate their impact on our behavior and decisions" (p. 1).

Per Quinn et al. (2008) bias encompasses common aspects such as gender, race and ethnicity, age, status, intelligence, social habits, and perceived perception of potential that are often shaped by personal experiences, friends/family, and culture. For example, at three months, babies possess a preference for attractive faces; at six months, they notice skin color and gender differences; and children as young as two are inclined to ask about these distinctions. Biases are inherently unique and individualized, thus Creasey (2016) argues that it cannot truly be defined, but more so described. "The most common are race, gender, religion, class and disability, but then there are also potential prejudices around sexual orientation, and even body shape" (p. 26).

Biases are rooted in stereotypes and prejudices, and, "Because people are more likely to act out of unconscious or hidden bias, knowing that you have a bias for or against a group may cause you to compensate and more carefully consider your possible responses or actions" (Moule, 2009, p. 322). Through bias driven by dominant norms and standards, unintended beliefs and attitudes fuel racist and prejudice practices and outcomes. They are often not public-expressed and subtle because of a lack of self-understanding. Fiarman & Benson (2022) stress that understanding that every person harbors biases can aid in countering intentions, and,

> Is key to unlocking our ability to reduce racial disparities in school and district outcomes. Once educators are freed from defensiveness and realize that no one is questioning their intentions, they can engage in the daily work necessary to ensure students of color are consistently treated fairly with respect, high expectations and dignity. (p. 16)

Teachers' understandings of race and racism in terms of their teaching, their personal experiences with race and racism represent a complementarity between teacher intervention practices through social psychological means (Kempf, 2022). They are revealed during, "The most intimate and invisible moments of operationalized whiteness in the professional and

personal spheres" (p. 4). People with less power (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, income, neurotypicality, and social location) experience negative effects of unconscious bias, but those holding social power in these domains remain privileged. MMRS by Sebastian-Cherng (2017) concluded that teacher perceptions of students' academic abilities vary by student race/ethnicity. As such, exposure to rigorous content and beliefs in potential are revealed, particularly in expectations being lowered for African American students.

(Un)conscious bias associated with student expectations impact educators' decision-making, academic trajectories of learners, and students expectations of themselves (States, 2016). Thought disruption represents an effort of intentional change in addressing perspectives that have historically-constrained liberation, and is rooted in professional growth surrounding unconscious bias is a desire to more frequently consider, then understand, the way the world perpetuates White as normal (Grosse, 2023). "These messages help build our psyche which holds onto biased messages and changes the trajectory of our thoughts and conversations… leading us to become more informed and better humans" (p. 490).

Haslem (2018) contends that bias is informed by understanding of social normal – which are primarily dictated by one's own past experiences that fall in their favor. "Refusing to affirm an individual student's home life, family structure, religious beliefs, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, language, or cultural practices simply because they differ from our own, damages children entrusted into our care." (p. 26). Since physical safety and emotional trust are driven by non-consciously feeling, there cannot be perceived threat from rigid interpersonal structures" (Elliott, 2021, p. 137). She continues in that, if the opposite represents the normal, especially for children who identify within a marginalized group in a classroom

setting, they are prone to rely on their brain's learned process to prioritize survival and self-protection.

"Proactive bias detection requires vigilance to suspect bias when it is not overt, discipline to question oneself without external compulsion, strength to resist becoming defensive, and courage to risk confronting painful motivations in the service of forensic objectivity." (Goldyne, 2007, p. 65). They are emotionally-driven motivations that deter one from an intended objective. There are also influences such as an individual's information-processing style and background. Katz & Kofkin (1997) observed that people are apt to view others as members within group representations and create associations of negative characteristics between differing groups.

Beattie and Johnson (2012) showcase the impact of unconscious bias on hiring practices such as recruitment, in addition to internal promotion consideration. Unintended discriminatory behavior can better be recognized and minimized through an organization's raised awareness, which can be targeted through PD. Schwartz (2019) stresses the influence of implicit biases on opportunities such as gifted, honors, and Advanced Placement (AP) courses, as well as behavioral consequences evident within disproportionate data pertaining to referrals and suspensions. Barker's (2021) study reveals a direct correlation between unconscious bias yielding lower expectations for students, particularly Black children. As a result, lower academic performance occurs, in addition to higher likelihood for exclusion.

Inclusion

Inclusion is a byproduct of diverse student groups, specifically, as noted by Razacka & Philibert (2019),

> Attributes of individuals along socially meaningful dimensions of difference. In different societies, meaningful dimensions may vary, but typically include ones such as race,

> ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, religious beliefs or other attributes. Inclusion, diversity, and equity are abundantly proclaimed aspirations, and… are rooted in an ethos of fairness and respect in learner-teacher, learner-learner, and learner-colleague relationships. (p. 380)

Inclusion serves to recognize uniqueness and promote belonging in spacers that are co-creative (e.g., policy development minimizing hierarchies and respecting a variety of voices).

Many educators view the Inclusive Schools Movement (ISM) as a recent trend in schools; however, many advocates have noted that, "All children with learning problems, whether they be 'special education' students, 'at-risk' students, or otherwise regarded as disadvantaged in schooling, belong in regular classroom environments" (Laski, 1991, p. 412). Muscott (1995) referenced a continuum of services and support being challenged by virtue of the Handicapped Children Act (HCA) in 1975 in order to provide students with special needs the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) for their holistic development. "While the emphasis of school restructuring has been aimed at students with mild disabilities and those with severe intellectual limitations, the ISM reshapes policy and service delivery for all students with disabilities, including those with Emotional/Behavior Disorders (EBD)" (p. 370). In doing so, not enough focus encompassed social competence and friendships.

Focusing on inclusion serves to change institutionalized culture and address effects of prejudice and feelings that will remain unrecognized and underestimated; inclusivity values an individual's identity and encourages relationships between cultural identity and work (Puritty et al., 2017). The balance in managing a culture of high expectations, meeting the needs of a diverse enrollment, and maximizing learning for all, produces tension around the concept of inclusion (Leo & Barton, 2006). Leadership must model well-informed and critical decision-

making that remains cognizant of the potential for social exclusion of students. “Involvement in a school providing the highest possible standards of achievement helps to protect students against future risk of social exclusion” (p. 174).

Systemic reform essential to inclusion is grounded in acknowledging that no singular aspect of instruction or learning can be changed in isolation due the need for alignment of supports (Smith, 1997). Volonino & Zigmond (2007) outline that when special education moved into the general education setting through models – such as research-based schema like one-teach/one-assist, station division, parallel planning, intensive instruction in an alternate format, and team teaching through lead role transitions – new expectations and responsibilities for special educator staff emerged. “Proponents continue to argue that co-taught classrooms provide an unparalleled venue for the integration of the complementary skills of the general and special educators” (p. 295). The qualitative study of Minke & Bear (1996) concluded that general education teachers hold unfavorable attitudes towards the premise that educational needs for Special Education children can be met in the regular education setting. As a result, more frequent negative judgment about self-efficacy and satisfaction in their teaching were evident.

Kauffman et al. (2021) caution against unconditional insistence on inclusion for every individual since it may produce a preoccupation on the place of learning. They acknowledge barriers to effective practices such as adequate funding, sufficient training for providing direct services, and a commonplace lack of public understanding/support. “Illogical ideation and unsubstantiated theories are harmful to special education… Sustaining the right to appropriate education for children with disabilities requires anticipation of the consequences of policies and addressing rhetoric that leads to adverse effects” (p. 22).

The 2015 work of Fuchs et al. examined the difference between specialized intervention and inclusion models. They denote the subjectivity of an array of aspects associated with inclusion. For example, the understanding or meaningful instruction in terms of access to general education curriculum. They posit that specialized intervention can occur in general education settings typically labeled as inclusive. “Location, nor exposure, is synonymous with access” (p. 154). Furthermore, there is a misconception within inclusive mandates that students with disabilities receive all of their instruction in an inclusive environment through the misnomer that the construct yields exposure to shared, high standards. Gilmour (2018) adds that Universal Design Learning (UDL) must be featured in an inclusive setting to ensure that children possess multiple means to showcase mastery and socially-contribute in whole-group contexts. With that, leaders must cease in using the location of learning as an indicator connected with access. “With inclusion as the dominant model in special education, it is imperative that researchers also focus on whether and how these students influence the experiences of peers and their teachers in order to make schools effective for all children” (p. 16).

Ultimately, inclusive education requires minimal distractions and an ecological perspective (Wang & Zhang, 2021). School-wide inclusive practices must stand out within a school development plan and be driven by empowering staff to service students with special needs (Schaefer, 2010). Kulkarni & Parmar (2017) caution how cultural beliefs pertinent to a student’s disability category manifest within perceptions regarding Augmentative & Alternative Communication (AAC) devices and corresponding linguistic acquisition skills. For example, Asian and Latino families do not always interpret a disability as being rooted into medical and/or social genesis. “Gauging the understanding and inclusion of disability in student diversity can

inform subsequent decisions related to programming, advocacy, and support of students with disabilities outside of just receiving required accommodations" (Aquino, 2022, p. 1566).

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Racism is essentially a culturally-sanctioned belief, and CRT theorizes race and uses it as an analytical tool to understand school inequity (Williams, 2019). CRT trains educators to understand systems that, "Reproduce, reify, and normalize racism in society in particular for individuals of lower social classes and persons of color" (Lopez, 2003, p. 83). Amiot et al. (2019) highlight the need for administrators to promote an interrogation of their racism, then unpack and challenge decisions linked to policy. "These school administrators proceed to walk teachers and staff through a racial equity pathway, and then put in place direct actions that lead to specific achievement and school context change results for students of color" (p. 216).

The focus of CRT is to develop tools that describe, analyze, and empower people of color (Parker & Stovall, 2004). Duke (2017) argues that when we try to frame a problem – a highly politicized and controversial process – it influences our search for reasons why problems exist. As an analytic and theoretical framework, CRT incorporates race, racism, and racialized citizenship via idealist interrogations of race, as well as allows for enhanced understanding of educator mindsets towards learning how to teach about race (Busey et al., 2023).

CRT can influence the culture of schools when it links experience to ways of thinking, believing, and knowing racial communities' struggle for self-determination and equity (Parker & Stovall, 2004). Per Ladson-Billings & Tate's (1995) second meta-proposition, "Race continues to be significant in explaining inequity... Although both class and gender can, and do, intersect race, as stand-alone variables they do not explain all of the educational achievement differences apparent between Caucasians and students of color" (p. 161). CRT attacks deficit notions and

aims to develop pedagogy, curriculum, and research to account for the role of race and racism (Solorzano & Yasso, 2001). “Teachers may experience dissonance when there is misalignment between their previously held assumptions and new learning” Perouse-Harvey, 2022, p. 52).

CRT aims to challenge the race-neutral thinking that embolden obscured structural racism (Lin, 2023). “Racist ideologies are often hidden behind discipline-specific vocabulary or technical language” (p. 1086). “CRT has become an eye-catching term, co-opting the language of CRT for researchers’ own purposes may become a common tactic that requires careful scrutiny to ensure that the potency of CRT is not compromised” (p. 1097).

Since a racial structure is created and maintained via racism as a system of oppression, CRT scholars understand that racism is not limited to only willful acts of aggressions against people based on skin color (Parker & Lynn, 2002). According to DeFino (2019),

> Teaching is not unilaterally determined by any single actor or influence; teachers’ intentions depend on students and the environment to be realized... there is no guarantee that all students will similarly interpret or experience a teacher’s words and actions. Drawing on CRT, the social and historical context of schooling includes nominally colorblind policies that disproportionately impact people of color, as well as assumptions of Whiteness as the norm. (p. 232)

Per Capper (2015), leaders can evaluate the quality and effectiveness of PD to the extent to which race-based CRT tenets are addressed by conducting equity audits that disaggregate race data, establish measurable goals, action plan, and measure progress. In doing so, efforts are grounded in the premise of not being colorblind since treating all the same (e.g., not seeing color) is inherently racist. Within Capper’s six tenets of CRT, the theory most notable remains the pervasiveness of race, because when disproportionate achievement is evident, progress must

be made by students of color, otherwise leaders are complicit in enabling the permanence of racism.

Social Practice Theory (SPT)

"Practice is the site of the development of the theory" (Barrage et al., 2010, p. 22), and SPT focuses on how each person's experiences influence how they engage, learn, and communicate in interpreting the world. It is not just about oneself, but how they influence others – such as colleagues – and more importantly, students/children. Similarly, when practice is cyclically described, interpreted, and theorized (Carpenter et al., 2000), it follows an SPT structure that is recursive and transformed through a combination of reproducing varied learning and creating new practices (Kemmis, 2021).

Within equity-based SPT, organizations dictate structures and demands, but each day staff make choices and should aspire to seek fresh avenues for action within practice where each individual adjusts their own contributions to alter an organization as a whole (Pennuel et al., 2016). Improved social justice conditions are attributed to research that considers intellectual and cognitive drivers to produce moral change since each person has an uneven capacity and motivation to act (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2021). Praxeology can be leveraged in public education by undertaking a reflective, reflexive, and collaborative mindset of academic scholarship to strengthen relationships between individual actions and the social world where they take place (Coghlan & Coughlan, 2018).

Through SPT, each PD session and/or topic represents a new element that, according to Hagreaves (2011), provides new examination of seeking out why practices are being reproduced, maintained, and stabilized – or conversely, challenged and surpassed. SPT affords practitioners outlets to interact, to learn what is – and is not – working across a wide array of practices to

identify common challenges being encountered and thus make stronger meaning within their daily activities and environments (Eiseman et al., 2020). Binns (2015), suggests employing SPT from a curricular lens, with Frost (et al., 2020) encouraging it as a framework to guide and analyze the results of instructional intervention. Meanwhile, Hordern (2022) cautions against the misnomer of SPT creating an outcome of normative practices with too much shape and structure predetermined, in lieu of SPT being a framework insight for cyclical change and adapting to needs. As such discussions must, "Contribute to the definition of what is 'at stake' and how it can be beneficially pursued" (p. 203).

Using school psychology as a foundation, Sullivan et al. (2023) discusses participatory approaches via SPT-oriented professional activities such as strengthening one's understanding of how their practices interact with normative structures such as the unique settings of multiple elementary schools within a community school district. An individual's learned knowledge and emotional connection is assigned to a particular practice within SPT and is normatively judged by colleagues in an effort to respond to challenges within their craft (Reckwitz, 2002). These practices are, "Enacted in ways that people are not necessarily aware of" (Read et al., 2023, p. 608); therefore, social structures and historical transgressions influence holistic instructional practices such as academic, behavior, and social-emotional outcomes. Reflexivity embedded into SPT enables critical analysis of how an adult's identity, experiences, and values impact their planning and instructional delivery (Arora et al., 2023).

Given that SPT encompasses the dichotomy of objective and subjective perspectives, it can be exemplified through traditional assessment that Holman et al. (2023) discuss as representing a historically-racist problem in the U.S. For example, mastery of content can be determined subjectively through written or verbal response, or objectively via multiple-choice,

true/false, or matching tasks. A teacher can demand a singular definition or shared strategy to be showcased (subjective), or allow learners to make an assertion and then reason (objective). Through objective optionality, higher-order-thinking skills can be prioritized. Questioning during instruction can be differentiated for each child to minimize the influence of subconscious expectations that may not presume competence and/or reflect congruent expectations for all students. SPT was exemplified for math by Cavalcante et al. (2024) to revise instruction to become more language-friendly because numbers and symbols are formed differently, sometimes even interpreted differently, by varied cultures and multiple languages.

Embedding Race into Practitioner Professional Development

PD that is grounded in sociocultural and organizational learning represents a self-efficacy tool for educators to harness self-confidence to positively improve motivation, behavior, and performance through expanding belief systems and practices that drive student learning (Lumpe, et. al, 2012). In designing PD, leaders aspire for meaningful, interlocking change to align with identity formation, with efficacy determined by measured change over time (e.g., quantifiable outcomes) and members of an organization's ability to retrospectively understand how they have changed during a specific time frame in order to truly enhance equity in terms of student development (Schwab, et. al, 2021). PD experiences are often adversely-influenced by structural biases commonly evident via a, "Flawed prioritization of needs of professionals in the field over students, a limited view of who adult educators are, and an assumption that most adult educators' highest and most valuable skill is their passion rather than their teaching abilities" (Harrison & Patterson, 2023, p. 10). "Teachers' belief in their capability to overcome problems and influence students' performance develops their willingness to engage in professional learning and using new practices to enhance their effectiveness" (Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2023, p. 86).

Institutional, safeguarded risks maintained by the majority are ill-equipped and ignorant of the impact of race in education (Stewart, et. al, 2023). Both PD and pedagogy must inform understanding and build agency of teachers to challenge threats – for example, productivism as an ideology prioritizing production (regardless of social value or harm) – and pursue public and democratic values that build cultural institutions, such as schools, that remain centered around care and security (Saltman, 2024). Matias & Mackey (2015) concluded that,

> Through professional development, individual educators may experience profound shifts in thinking, attitude, and action in regard to addressing inequities concerning race, ethnicity, and other social issues; however, some teachers experience varying degrees of success as they attempt to translate their new learning into practice in individual classrooms. (p. 356)

Thus, individuals within an organization that are working towards achieving equity via a social justice lens for marginalized student groups that are often linked to race, class, and language must evolve through advancing prior values and topics outlined in the learning and personal growth opportunities manifested in PD (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016). In studying efforts of educational leaders to address racial issues in schools, Valle (1997) found common barriers during PD discourse to be risks not taken without school board support – which are exacerbated by rationales that the enrollment is not very diverse, there remain other priorities, or that problems don't exist because everyone is treated the same.

From a pedagogical perspective, Kishimoto (2018) specifies a commitment to activism that is showcased by PD which bolsters educators' competence in developing critical consciousness and then pushes for the topics of race and racism to be embedded into curriculum. In using a community of practice conceptual framework, participants recognize that knowledge

is a byproduct of direct experience where learners grow through social processes that demand thinking and deliberating with peers who share similar experiences (Buysse, 2003). In a study (Smith et al., 2024) surrounding teacher preparation efforts and the facilitation of critical PD – which was guided by a theoretical construct of critical consciousness in refining people's perceptions of oppression fueled by social, political, and economic influences that overlap with education – facilitators must emphasize the role that racialized identity and positionality play when anticipating the potential for tension between staff and establish agreements in advance to address conflict.

Ensuring that staff possess a fundamental understanding of the historical substantiation of racism in the United States represents an initial aspect of PD, particularly contextualizing that antiracism is not fueled by a political endeavor such as liberalism (Sealy-Ruiz, 2021). "Scholarship suggests that leaders develop teachers' capacity for antiracist teaching by leading learning and self-reflection about race and racism" (Forman et al., 2022, p. 354).

Educational Leadership for Antiracism & Equity PD

Sociocultural theories of learning – such as an onto-epistemological view encompassing philosophy, ethics, and an agential realism of small units of phenomena – influence antiracist teaching where outcomes are leveraged through analyzing an educator's practice, as well as their personal and professional disposition, that is first developed through preservice education programs and can be enhanced via subsequent PD throughout one's career (Madkins & Nazar, 2022). Furthermore, the tandem emphasizes the requisite of antiracist PD aiming to seek political clarity through efforts of unlearning and relearning within a space where participants are brave in not assuming that everyone has good intentions; and when paired with literature that ensures

people are not reifying stereotypes or perpetuating deficit narratives, content empowers dialogue driven by opportunity gaps versus achievement gaps.

To help dismantle deficit mindsets associated with culture, an integral aspect of an antiracist framework requires practitioners to acknowledge the power and historical context of social and systemic influences within education (Chambers & Spikes, 2016). Antiracist PD on a personal level requires reflection about actions, assumptions, biases, and beliefs that harm individuals of color; and at the system-level, it necessitates examining policies and practices that perpetuate racism (Solomon, 2002).

There is an attribution of an antiracist approach being more accepted due to the politicized misunderstanding of CRT in the media, despite the merits providing a similar entry point for critical conversations about race and racism in our country (Galligan & Miller, 2022). Facilitators of antiracist PD must be cognizant that disengagement is influenced by authoritative discourse tied to legislation or administrative directives (Kent, 2023). Those guiding antiracism learning and complementary conversations benefit from collectively designing experiences that consider the grouping of participants in order to help unlearn myths, particularly in regard to racism being conceptualized systemically, in contrast to individualized conceptions driving the dialogue (DeLeon, 2006).

Antiracist PD explores implicit and explicit deficit narratives – ones that often intersect with colorblind ideologies that erroneously fail to connect systemic racism as a foremost contributor to racial inequity that is shared by societal experiences and outcomes – such as sentiments that marginalized students need repair and/or that educators subconsciously lower their learning expectations for certain subgroups (Davis & Museus, 2019). Kincheloe (2004) stresses naming oppression through open discussion about the social problems of racism and

classism, then supplementing these realities within organizations by specifically acknowledging groups benefiting from racial oppression.

Reflective discourse among colleagues represents a starting point for meaning change towards antiracist practices that require an investment of time (e.g., quick workshops on implicit bias and microaggressions rarely reap lasting change pertaining to teaching practices) because classrooms cannot be culturally-neutral spaces due to students' experiences being racialized in subtle, interpersonal ways (Ng, et al., 2023). For example, (Cohen & Lotan, 1997) reference racial inequity during classroom participation that can be addressed through intentional support stemming from positive attention that is planned and designed for marginalized students as a proactive strategy to sustain motivation, diminish disproportionate discipline data, and directly address implicit bias about participation tied to specific instructional activities – while jointly affirming the need to presume competence in every child in a classroom. Classroom participation directly influences a child's learning and various facets of their development of identity, including racial identity (Nasir & de Royston, 2013).

In considering the outcomes of affirming identity and creating/sustaining deficits, Radd & Grosland (2018), push antiracist PD efforts to examine the underlying social construction of power through text and peer discourse. They term results from this work as discursive practices (e.g., themes pertaining a set of actions and ways that, while invisible, solicit tangible, pervasive impacts), such as school leadership that manages in a technical manner, promotes whiteness as being desirable, and excuses institutional failure. In her study of white teacher perceptions of racism in schools, Kailin (1999) highlighted a contradictory consciousness whereas interactions between White staff featured coded language and illustrated how attitudes influence decisions in identifying, interpreting, and responding to racial inequity. "In a profession where much of the

workforce is white – 78% principals, 79% teachers – 82% of educators have received no antiracist PD… the work of creating antiracist schools cannot be left to Black and other educators of color" (Superville, 2020, p. 24).

District-Designed CP&E PD

The study illustrates a desire to better understand the outcomes associated with CP&E PD principles delivered by leadership by examining candid attitudes and feelings shared within interviews. The New Polar School District (pseudonym, NPSD) determined the multi-year pathway of CP&E work. Brown University's Cultural Proficiency Framework (CPF) which utilizes core elements of Lindsey's et al. (2009) publication entitled *Culturally Proficient Instruction*. Facets include planning and evaluating geared to the following:

1. Assess Culture: Identify the cultural groups present in the system.
2. Value Diversity: Develop an appreciation for the differences among and between groups.
3. Manage the Dynamics of Difference: Learn to respond appropriately and effectively to the issues that arise in a diverse environment.
4. Adapt to Diversity: Change and adopt new policies and practices that support diversity and inclusion.
5. Institutionalize Cultural Knowledge: Drive the changes into the systems of the organization.

The CPF framework targets barriers shaped by reactive behavior, in comparison with shared principles that aim to be proactive. As such, efforts can be described along a six-part continuum of change (e.g., growing organizational capacity by starting with tolerance-oriented

need for change and pushing towards intentional change that can produce transformational outcomes) as reflected below:

1. Eliminate differences: The elimination of other people's cultures.

2. Demean differences: Belief in the superiority of one's culture and behavior that disempowers another's culture.

3. Dismiss differences: Acting as if the cultural differences you see do not matter or not recognizing that there are differences among and between cultures.

4. Respond inadequately to the dynamics of difference: Awareness of the limitations of one's skills or an organization's practices when interacting with other cultural groups.

5. Engage with differences using the essential elements as standards: Using the five essential elements of cultural proficiency as the standard for individual behavior and organizational practices.

6. Esteem and learn from differences as a lifelong practice: Knowing how to learn about and from individual and organizational culture; interacting effectively in a variety of cultural environments. Advocating for others.

In progressing within this continuum, each individual works alongside colleagues towards proficiency needed to drive organizational change through phases such as destruction, incapacity, blindness, pre-competence, and competence

This work remains a topic widely debated throughout the local community and neighboring districts. As a result, the focus on CP&E is not one that was identified per individual building values and needs, but a requisite of hours of PD. Essentially, the NPSD Educational Service Center (ESC) delivers CP&E to leaders, who in turn, apply fundamental aspects to their respective buildings. Through systematic inquiry within the linear design of PD, the District

desires to improve outcomes and create connections between mindsets and actions by strengthening the depth of teacher's empathetic awareness and knowledge to more effectively reach every child.

Without directly referencing SPT, the framework is embedded in the District's CP&E PD approach due to the use of public discourse to change attitudes, in addition to the recognition that individual agency either maintains, or disrupts, social structures. Stakeholders, especially educational practitioners and teachers can either continue to reinforce existing norms or push for dissensus – the latter of which serves to cultivate transformative change. As leadership coach and strategic business advisor, McCallum (2023) advises, "The first step is admitting you have a problem. Recognize the problem, then shift to talking about the opportunities" (p. 1). CP&E PD represents a progressive starting point to closer examine the disproportionate results of students often marginalized due to their culture, race, class, and/or (dis)ability.

District CP&E Background

New Polar has a three-year cultural proficiency plan, which is led by a Director of Curriculum and Equity (a newly-created position in the summer of 2019). Each year, 20 hours is dedicated to CP&E PD via in-service days, early dismissals, etc. NPSD's vision statement, per their online Fact Sheet (2017) is as follows:

> Seeks to develop a community that values and adapts to diversity. We strive to acknowledge, respect, understand, and celebrate the dynamics of racial and cultural differences. Through the development of a culturally proficient staff, the establishment of structures that promote equitable opportunities, and partnerships with families and students, our school district will create an environment of respect where all members of the school community are empowered to learn, grow, and appreciate one another. (p. 2)

NPSD's call for equity is predicated upon every individual's needs, as well as the emphasis that students' identities do not predetermine success. The District defines the achievement gap as differences in academic indicators, and opportunity gaps as how educators systematically educate different groups. Furthermore, the district stresses that they cannot value and adapt to diversity without regularly assessing its culture and soliciting feedback from the community, as well as individual schools. Not only will more positive school climates emerge, but learning environments will realistically depict the diversity in our country today.

External Influences & Changes Between 2021-2024

In April of 2022, Chapter 49 (Certification of Professional Personnel) of Pennsylvania Code Title 22 mandated the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) to identify standards for educator training encompassing Culturally-Relevant Education (CR-SE). Higher education colleges and universities were required to infuse nine competencies into their educational programs involving teacher induction for 2024-25. LEAs had to formalize, then sustain, PD for all employees beginning in 2023-24 (Appendix D).

District Priorities

While the district already had ideals of cultural proficiency and equity embedded into formal vision and mission statements, their approach became more regimented during the two-plus years of this study being conducted. Culture was outlined to encompass sets of beliefs and practices that are shared and distinguish one group from one versus another. While legally-obligated to formalize their PD to fulfill nine Pennsylvania-mandated CR-SE competencies, leadership asked for more structure within their work. In essence, as qualitatively-expressed later in this research, leadership sought increased organization of efforts to mirror scope-and-sequence expected to be provided for students within instructional. As facilitators of the work and

conversation, correct vocabulary, key concepts, and a visual continuum of ongoing work was targeted.

To begin the 2023-24 academic year, New Polar pivoted from consistently using the terminology of 'equity' in conjunction with cultural proficiency. Instead, they encouraged staff to employ the words 'inclusion' and 'belonging.' Although not conceptually-interchangeable, in doing so, administrators were encouraged that these two ideals are less divisive and afford more chances for all community members to participate in dialogue. Per the New Polar vision statement, the notion of belonging is revealed through students feeling that they are part of a group, and are byproducts of a sense of security and intentional support. Belonging aligns with the inclusive principles of each individual's identity being acknowledged, then accepted. Without these attributes of a high-functioning organization – which is revealed through dynamically-impactful learning contexts – people are not comfortable to be themselves. And as written by Singleton & Linton (2006), performance and personal lives of both students and employees are negatively influenced when they do not feel that they belong. In referencing the National Equity Project, NEP, (2018), the New Polar District described CP&E PD as pushing,

> To achieve equity in education, organizations must develop leaders who can transform our institutions by eliminating inequitable practices and cultivate the unique gifts, talents, and interests of every child so that success and failure re no longer predictable by student identity (e.g., racial, cultural, economic, or other social factors). (p. 1)

Standardized Assessment

In the Spring of 2020, due to COVID, the district decided not to assess students using the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA). The following year, LEAs had the option to assess learning that spring, or wait until the fall to test – with the latter choice meaning that

students would take two standardized assessments during the 2021-22 school year. New Polar decided to administer the PSSA to students in the spring. In an effort to ensure consistency with the aforementioned NAEP scores, in disaggregating the updated data for the state of Pennsylvania, four trends emerged within Table 5.

Table 5

2022 NAEP Math & Reading Performance in Pennsylvania (Two & Three-Year Comparison)

Math: 4th Grade	**Reading: 4th Grade**
The average score for students in Pennsylvania in 2022 (274) was lower than their average score in 2019 (285) and in 2003 (279).	The average score for students in Pennsylvania in 2022 (238) was lower than their average score in 2019 (244) and was not significantly different from their average score in 2003 (236).
Math: 8th Grade	**Reading: 8th Grade**
The average score for students in Pennsylvania in 2022 (259) was lower than their average score in 2019 (264) and in 2002 (265).	The average score for students in Pennsylvania in 2022 (274) was lower than their average score in 2019 (285) and in 2003 (279).

Community Demographics

The study took place in the NPSD – an area located near a large metropolitan area in Pennsylvania. With over 100,000 residents, there are 13 elementary schools, three middle schools, one high school, and one credit recovery school. Approximately 2,000 staff members educate nearly 13,000 students annually. A breakdown of the student population is provided in Table 6.

Table 6

New Polar School District Percent Student Enrollment Demographics (2020)

Subgroup	Percentage of Enrollment
Caucasian	77%
African American	11%
Latino	6%
Asian	3%
English Language Learners (ELL)	6%
Free/Reduced Lunch	33%
Special Education	17%

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In a suburban school district where affluence and student populations significantly vary between buildings, school and district leaders continue to hone their understanding of CP&E and guide PD with staff. Aside from staff feedback, what concrete results are sustained from hours of training and follow-up work? A combination of descriptive and interpretive phenomenological methodology, as well as exploratory mixed methods research, was employed in an effort to gain insight about specific schools, as well as overarching ideals at the district level. Within qualitative work from an administrative lens, first-person perspectives can be examined in regard to the ways leaders experience PD and strive to inspire change. The goal was to better understand, then measure, the impact of leaders' subjective experiences to better understand how motivation and action serve to counter long standing assumptions and responses to systemic inequity in education.

Subjective experiences were revealed via an interview setting where participants reflected on PD and daily leadership experiences yielded emotional and cognitive impacts. Amongst the leadership group, measured commonalities were sought within the confines of prior knowledge and conceptual descriptions. The viewpoint of the researcher strived to remain minimized through placing emphasis on participants' learning, involvement and engagement. The nature of the work was also explanatory from a sense of seeking to understand an issue more thoroughly; however, the problem of marginalized students receiving inferior access to education has been prevalent in the United States for decades – despite substantial study. More so, due to District updates pertaining to PD, goals, and prioritization of additional terminology – as well as two

sets of interviews occurring in the Summer of 2022, then a year later in Summer of 2023 – the approach of research, specifically the creation and subsequent ordering of questions, needed to be amended.

As a school-based administrator, it is vital to be heavily invested in the success of both adults and children. Many teachers are expressing a negative sentiment towards their work. Staff are burned out, overwhelmed by the intense demands of their job, and underappreciated by the community. Through interpretivism – a paradigm rooted in phenomenology that motivates researchers to learn about experiences to interpret social contexts in order to gain further depth (Chen, 1996) – CP&E requisites and common themes such as awareness, vulnerability, and empathy push to appreciate the differences of people who share a goal of how to best prepare children to fully contribute to society in the future.

Furthermore, a researcher's background, education, and beliefs, "Inevitably result in interpretation of phenomena being undertaken from a stance" (Rapley, 2018, p. 189). Interpretivism embraces subjectivity and acknowledges results that are impacted by socially-created ideals such as confirmability and (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). Interpretive study identifies norms that can be explained by behavior as it serves to examine how social groups and individuals formulate their realities to give them meaning (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022).

A mixed methods approach in synthesizing qualitative and quantitative data regarding the promotion of principles of diversity can interpret relationships and their meanings associated with an epistemological perspective of interpretivism that is informed by sociocultural theory (Adam, 2021). Through research that collects narrative data, interpretivism intertwines truth and knowledge that is influenced by people's realities that have been created by history and cultures

(Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007). Given that CP&E represents a mechanism to potentially improve practice and empower teachers, underlying motives can lessen its potential.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) & Social Practice Theory (SPT) as a Theoretical Frameworks

Using the Theoretical Framework of CRT, Capper (2015) outlines six tenets within the framework of CRT. Both sets of scripted, qualitative interview sessions aligned with multiple CRT tenets. A crosswalk of questions and tenets is denoted in Appendix E.

SPT holds value as a framework because everyday actions of principals, teachers, paraprofessionals, related service providers, etc., shape social structures. Essentially, each individual contributes to equitable opportunities for children within schools; yet, individualized feelings drive one's daily impact and can be better understood through a qualitative interview setting, as well as quantitative scaled survey responses. Other SPT dualisms and previously-accepted relationships are evident in CRT. For example, educators justifying norms within a social structure by reinforcing the notion that every child possess the ability to maximize their education through a Capitalistic mindset entailing work ethic and self-discipline versus decades of data and legislature reflecting Determinism and CRT Tenet I (Permanence of Racism), Tenet II (Whiteness as Property), and Tenet V (Critique of Liberalism). Another SPT dualistic connection is when practitioners believe that disproportionality reflects an achievement gap, versus an opportunity gap – meaning the recurring problem is deemed to be a societal deficit, rather than an opportunity for a teacher to transcend a child's education via individualized agency. This misconception reflects CRT Tenet III (Counter Storytelling and Majoritarian Narratives), Tenet IV (Interest Convergence), and Tenet VI (Intersectionality).

Given SPT's push to establish meaning through interconnected significance, social order lends itself to instructional best practices that are scaffolded each day and are standard-bases

year-to-year, student groupings for various content skills, and the personalized design of Special Education IEPs. As such the human actions represent how educators address these responsibilities through collaboration, progress monitoring, UDL, pairing of student learning styles, etc. responses. Non-responses or an inability to close gaps can be attributed to justification that the public education sector cannot – versus aspiring to – undertake new approaches, and these deficit mindsets are frequently contained within at least one CRT tenet.

Mixed Methods Research Study (MMRS) Rationale

How practitioners obtain information to solve problems is science or research, with the former including, "Many process stages generally conducted in two main areas including quantitative and qualitative research" (Ezer & Aksüt, 2021, p. 15). Interpretive inquiry must consider the philosophical assumptions of research that provide a foundational, conceptual basis for methods (Poulin, 2007). "Analysis of qualitative data organizes, summarizes, and interprets nonnumerical observations… quantitative research is strong in inductive reasoning, building and expanding theories concerning relationships among phenomena" (Verhoef & Casebeer, 1997, p. 65).

Qualitative methodology allows for participants to share their experiences in teaching to support critical reflection that focuses on challenges faced and steps needed to overcome them (Ibrahim et al., 2023). According to Tenny et al., 2024,

> Phenomena such as experiences, attitudes, and behaviors can be difficult to accurately capture quantitatively, whereas a qualitative approach allows participants themselves to explain how, why, or what they were thinking, feeling, and experiencing at a certain time or during an event of interest. (p. 2)

Qualitative study can guide quantitative endeavors – such as by analyzing word choice in regard to shared occurrences and/or correlations – to understand what participants are thinking and feeling (Atske, 2020). Blalock & Akehi (2018) term qualitative methodology a multi-vocal approach for researchers to explore, unpack, and synthesize shared experiences from an individual perspective, as well as collective encounters.

A researcher's commitment to continuous improvement is bolstered by theoretical and practical knowledge/skill that must be developed to lead change and be supported by statistical theory embedded within quantitative study (Paufler, 2023). Quantitative means address the magnitude and frequency of a phenomenon, generate knowledge, and create understanding about a particular group of people (Burrell & Gross, 2017). It collects, then analyzes, data using statistical methods to present measurable, objective, empirical data. Scaled surveys represent one example of practical application of statistical theory to support leaders utilization of, "Analytic techniques to explore local data related to the problem of practice (p. 11). Quantitative surveys can help depict active learning and responses related to strategies when the design of qualitative interviews aligns to reflection about prior work, while assessing resistance within instructional initiatives (Shekhar et al., 2019).

For this study, the frameworks of CRT and SPT remain crucial. MMRS allows for questions that are posed differently – such as in a narrative format via qualitative means or quantitative scaled survey replies that also seek participants to justify their numerical value — to be integrated due to the combined technique (Matovic & Ovesni, 2023). Mixed methods research remains a powerful tool to reflectively expand understanding of targeted practices and inform future decision-making by a concerted effort to integrate an organization's processes and procedures with underlying philosophical assumptions and priorities (Love et al., 2023).

Quantitative and qualitative methodology represents a process for a study to employ three layers as follows (Greene et al., 2008):

1. Complementarily deepening understanding obtained by two mechanisms.
2. Further development through using results from methodology to prepare the next phase of the research that uses the other methodology.
3. Initiation in redefining the content of research based on patterns of potential observed contradictions in the qualitative and quantitative results.

Merchant et al. (2021) denotes the significance of the descriptive characteristics of MMRS design to comprehensively frame research questions that are typically formulated due to a problem of practice.

Using Tashakkori & Creswell's (2007) guidance, MMRS needs at least one explicitly-formulated question to link or integrate findings. "Such a question about the nature of integration follows qualitative and quantitative types of questions and emerges from the specific need to use mixed methods" (p. 210). According to Onwuegbuzie & Collins (2007), a pair of criteria can be applied to research samples (the time orientation of methodology cycles and the relationship between the results – for example, pursuing the same set of respondents in both quantitative and qualitative components). Using this outlook, as well as Greene's (2008) critique of social inquiry research, responses to quantitative questions can be compared to more detailed, open-ended, qualitative responses. The approach is manifested in this study to contrast individuals holding a school-based position as an elementary school principal versus a district-oriented position supporting multiple buildings within differing areas of the local community.

Furthermore, following the first set of interviews in the Summer of 2022, some of the 2023 questions were revamped to concentrate more intently on participants' attitudes, beliefs,

and feelings associated with certain topics that were first met by participants with reservation. In 2022, three scaled survey questions were posed. And although the number of participants was lower in 2023, one additional question was added. As such, the data such was influenced by attrition. These alterations aimed to gauge the District's initial efforts to infuse topics in PD under the Pennsylvania Code Chapter 49, Title 22 CR-SEs. For example:

1. Competency 1's Standard CRSE1.C: Engage in critical and difficult conversations with others to deepen their awareness of their own conscious/unconscious biases, stereotypes, and prejudices.
2. Competency 2's Standard CRSE2.C: Identify literature and professional learning opportunities for themselves to understand more about the manifestations of racism and other biases at institutional and structural levels that can result in disadvantaging some groups of learners.
3. Competency 5's Standard CRSE5.E: Assist learners in valuing their own and others' cultures and help them develop a sense of responsibility for recognizing, responding to, and addressing bias, discrimination, injustice, and bullying.

Matta (2022) emphasizes that solely a qualitative perspective typically discusses normative terms that are frequently fueled by philosophical paradigms and may restrict the depth of descriptive results. Lincoln et al. (2018) notes a flaw of qualitative research yielding subjective findings that are counterbalanced by the prospect of obtaining a stronger sense of historically-shaped values (e.g., often attributed to social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender influences) that have crystallized over time. More so, since CRT and SPT considers the attitudes and beliefs of individuals in an organization, per Gilstrap (2013), the complexity of

mixed-methodology within theoretical and applied human research can be bridged by combining qualitative and quantitative means.

Application of MMRS

The study features both qualitative and quantitative attributes. The qualitative-orientation targeted language – specifically descriptions, essential CP&E vocabulary and topics, and included open-ended prospects to hypothesize the impact of the work; therefore, this data was interpretation-based. In respect to quantitative measures, commonalities and disparities were examined in respect to numerical data such as the percentage of responses that articulated common themes of positive change, degree of emotional commitment, and shared understanding of implementation and/or teachable moments. The quantitative facet strived to unpack the why or how behind PD – especially the perspectives and beliefs exuded in school-specific communities' climates.

Qualitative interviews were scheduled and conducted virtually through the Google Meet platform. Sessions, ranging from 19 to 61 minutes in the Summer of 2022 and 36 to 80 minutes a year later. From the aforementioned qualitative perspective, research examines how the New Polar School District's targeted focus on CP&E is experienced (e.g., what is it like, what does it mean, how is the lived experience perceived in terms of thoughts, emotions, and feelings). Using an administrative lens, first-person perspectives were examined in regard to the ways leaders acquire information within an administrative PD setting – then turnkey their new learning across 18 separate school locations via leading PD – and potentially illustrate commonalities surrounding assumptions and motivation.

Anticipated Outcomes

The research serves to garner a stronger understanding of the following:

1. What is the relationship between CP&E PD and student academic growth?

2. How, if at all, have leaders changed through CP&E PD?

3. Are those in charge of leading hundreds of educators maximizing the purpose and influence of the fundamental drivers of CP&E?

4. What are leaders such as elementary school principals and district-based administrators feeling during the work?

5. What situations and barriers have leaders encountered and worked to navigate?

6. With many false narratives being spread about CRT, do leaders understand its intent and how many of its core tenets fuel the work surrounding CP&E?

Participants

Interest was solicited via email inquiry sent Blind Carbon Copy (BCC) to all individuals holding a title as an elementary school principal (13 invitations), supervisor (14 invitations), or director (six invitations), in addition to assistant superintendent (two invitations). After the first outreach, follow-up emails were sent after intervals of two weeks and one month, respectively. Correspondence shared the study's purpose to examine the district's ongoing CP&E work and its individualized impact on their own leadership.

Once a participant expressed interest to be interviewed, a thank you reply was sent acknowledging appreciation for willingness to share their lived-experiences as an educational administrator. Consent forms assuring the confidentiality behind responses were provided for signature, and prior to conducting a virtual interview. In consideration of factors that may interfere or influence the collection of voluntary informed consent, it was also reiterated that the study represented an academic effort unaffiliated with the District. Interviews would follow a

rigid structure and adhere to the scripted questions. More so, replies would not be discussed in any context outside of the interview setting or revisited.

Additionally, no participant represented a subordinate. Initially, the first eight individuals to reply that worked as elementary level principals, as well as the first eight that were school-based administrators would be chosen for interviews. When an Asian female principal responded ninth, the participant group was expanded to minimize the influence of a predominantly Caucasian, white male set of interviewees.

Educational leaders of varied ages and experience levels agreed to participate in qualitative interviews. No personal requests were made via in-person conversation to administrators; however, some individuals called to ask about the process, scheduling, and to confirm its anonymous fashion (the latter was reiterated for 15 of the 18 admin through phone call or email reply and represented the most common question). While there remains a greater prevalence of female employees within the district, more men agreed to be interviewed. Selection criteria was restricted to certificated administrators who hold highly-qualified status per the state of Pennsylvania.

Fortunately, every individual who agreed to participate in 2022 followed through. Without seeking an explanation after three emails without a response in 2023, 5 of the 18 did not participate the ensuing summer (two individuals, both principals, left the district during the 2022-23 school year).

Interview Protocol

In the interest of ensuring confidentiality, the letter provided by the New Polar School District has been omitted as an appendix item. Approval to conduct research in the district across two years (2022 and 2023) was granted on Nov. 5, 2021 by the Assistant Superintendent with the

condition of participation being voluntary. Institutional Review Board (IRB) written approval was provided to his office and outlined the protocols and methodology of the study. Research is unfunded, with the University of Illinois IRB approval date of Dec. 14, 2021 (Protocol #22521).

Drafts of 2022 (Appendix F) and 2023 (Appendix G) district administrator and school-based principal questions were submitted for IRB review. An estimated 30-45 minutes per interview was anticipated (15-20 questions each year); however, some sessions were shorter and longer. An interval-oriented survey scale of 1-10 (questions #18, #19, #20 in Appendix F, and question #14 in Appendix G) was utilized for quantitative purposes in lieu of the more traditional Likert Scale. The interviews were audio and video recorded using Google Meet.

Quantitative Scaled Survey Responses

Four of the interview questions featured measurement statements regarding the impact and consistency of PD, with patterns about responses lending themselves to better learning strengths, needs, and concurrent understanding across multiple elementary schools and leadership roles. These four questions were posed within the qualitative setting featured a 10-point survey scale (10=most important; 1=least important) and allowed for quantitative analysis. Though representing a broad spectrum of potential replies, granular concepts pertinent to CP&E were posed to conclude interviews in an effort to gauge leaders' understanding and implementation of the district's value and understanding of diversity. Jointly, leaders shared their opinions relating to the effectiveness of the time committed to the ongoing, formalized PD alongside colleagues in terms of changed outcomes. As such, the intent was to incorporate a degree of quantitative analysis via operationalizing complex topics embedded within leaders' lived experiences amidst the abstract phenomena of CP&E PD and ongoing work.

In consideration of older participants, and potentially those with different gender identifications, holding unique experiences and/or standpoints, four categories spanning six years of age groups were established to determine the potential impact of age on responses. Scale-related data was disaggregated for the 18 participants in 2022 and 13 interviewees in 2023, then again each year for the principal and district administrative subgroups.

It is imperative to acknowledge that attitude-oriented measurements may be influenced by the social desirability of response bias, as well as fatigue/inattention. For example, participants may be inclined to answer how they internally perceive that they should, versus how they actually feel/believe. People are more cognizant than ever to know what not to say and aim to be politically-correct. This reality is essential to outline because a qualitative setting lends itself to interactions that serve to provide participants with a sense of comfort to be open and honest – especially in regard to powerful questions and self-examination associated with race and student performance within a specific school. Rhetorically, the study must also consider the impact of the interviewer being a White male and if replies may have changed if the individual posing the questions was a minority or perhaps female.

The constraint of scripting both interview settings during the Summer of 2022, and then again in the Summer of 2023, must also be acknowledged (as the intent was to limit potential probing that could unintentionally shape logical and/or emotional, verbal-and-numerically-scaled scores). In hindsight, the intensity of feelings and personal backgrounds that drive an individual's perspective were sometimes narrowed into a linear format by seeking definitions to reflect academic and professional understanding – in contrast to a guided qualitative context grounded in an open-ended format.

Given the effect of one's job responsibilities, data was disaggregated based on age and gender. Participants answered as identifying as Asian, African American, or Caucasian. Reflective of the district's administrative demographics, 83% of interviewees were Caucasian. Due to this, quantifiable conclusions could not be made in respect to the variable of race within survey data and were thus omitted from quantitative analysis.

The quantitative premise was to gather descriptive statistics (e.g., frequency, mean, mode, and range) through scaled responses to measure behavior that is strongly driven by attitudes and opinions by obtaining interval data. As a result, inferential statistics emerged to help analyze samplings to aid making predictions about a larger population of principals and district-based administrators and garnering an increased understanding about traits that may simultaneously be revealed through a qualitative perspective. Interval data exhibited below includes the mean, mode (indicating a central tendency), and standard deviation (e.g., variability).

Research Security Protocols

To ensure confidentiality of data, once recordings were downloaded to a personal laptop, as well as a back-up external hard drive, they were trashed in from Google Drive. Calendar invitations also deleted. Electronic recordings remain on this laptop, which is protected via a password and fingerprint log-in. The desktop folder has a third layer of security and is encrypted with a password.

Each elementary school received a number (1-9). They were alphabetized based on the second letter in the building's name and then sequentially numbered. Those with a district-based position were numbered 10-18, based on the second-to-last letter of their job title. Next, for

interview participants, last names were alphabetized. They were assigned a letter (A-R) to enable each individual to be coded via a letter identifier.

Identifiable data (e.g., participant codes were printed and stored in a lockbox in my home office). The original Google Doc was deleted after this physical storage. Electronic Word Documents stored within the above referenced folder on my personal laptop's hard drive were first saved using these codes. They have since been deleted with printed hardcopies remaining in the aforementioned lockbox. Upon depositing the dissertation, these items will be shredded. De-identified data will not be stored in a data repository.

Data Analysis Procedures

Interviews began by requesting that each participant provide their job title, age, gender, race/ethnicity, and years experience in education. Probing for follow-up content was not implemented. Prompting was minimal and primarily as a reminder that replies would remain confidential and that individuals could use brevity at their discretion. When a scaled score (1-10) was essential for quantitative work, participants were asked to specify a number. Additionally, to remain cognizant of not potentially guiding conversations, upon request, questions were repeated, but not rephrased.

Each question was presented in an identical sequence for each participant. Annotations were taken during the interview sessions; however, looking for patterns in responses – whether they encompassed shared vocabulary or emotions – was not done until interview responses were transcribed. The transcription process proved the most arduous aspect of the research, with recording replies often taking at least five times as long as the actual interview itself. Adjectives, such as emotions shared, as well as topics – for instance District values and goals – were placed on a blank graphic organizer for the full group, in addition to respective roles. Next to a tally, a

notation was made to record an attribution for a reply. For example, a grid entitled 14-S2–P-Frustration was marked as CM54 to indicate a Caucasian male, aged 54, serving in a principal role stated the emotion of being frustrated by the estimated percentage of teachers embedding CP&E into their weekly work – a formal reply to question #14 posed during interviews in the Summer of 2023 (interview session #2), "What percentage of your teachers actively embed CP&E into their weekly work? And how does this estimate make you feel?" This schema afforded the ability to provide a synopsis of commonalities to begin each subsection of the qualitative findings chapter. Later, in reviewing the generated transcripts of interviews, highlighted perspectives and unique experiences that were poignant were drafted into written format. When needing clarity, the actual recording was listened to for review.

In recording interviews annotations, graph paper was utilized for scaled score responses with the number for each of the four questions posed tallied on its own sheet per categorization by age, gender, and race/ethnicity – first for the entire group. This process was conducted a second time depending on an individual's position as either a principal of a district-based administrator. The effort enabled a cross-reference for accuracy in maintaining validity in the disaggregated raw data. An Excel sheet was developed to formally run the descriptive statistics. The formula sheet was also utilized to disaggregate the transcriptions of qualitative questions via the find feature and input into new rows based on an identifier or theme.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Demographics of Study Participants

In the Summer of 2022, 18 school leaders in the district voluntarily participated in this study. Via scripted interviews, nine elementary school principals, five directors, and four supervisors engaged in discourse. Directors support all schools across the District, overseeing Curriculum & Equity, Elementary Education, Pupil Services, Secondary Education, or Special Education Departments. Supervisors work within one of these Departments with a specialization in a particular content area such as Reading, Math/Science, or Multilingual Programming – or are assigned to facilitate facets of Special Education such as Early Intervention or Specialized Classrooms for Autism for a few schools.

One year later, a total of 13 people agreed to continue with the study (five decided not to participate in the Summer of 2023). Table 7 features a demographic breakdown of participants inclusive of their respective years of experience in public education as of 2022.

Table 7

Sumer 2022 Participants' Position, Age, Gender, Race and Years of Experience

Position	Age	Gender	Race	Years of Experience
Director	55	Male	Caucasian	30
Director	54	Female	African American	32
Director	43	Female	Caucasian	15
Director	42	Male	Caucasian	21
Director	42	Male	Caucasian	20
Principal	54	Male	Caucasian	33

Table 7 (cont.)

Principal	52	Male	Caucasian	28
Principal	48	Male	Caucasian	24
Principal	46	Female	Asian	22
Principal	42	Male	Caucasian	20
Principal	40	Male	Caucasian	17
Principal	39	Male	Caucasian	16
Principal	36	Female	Caucasian	14
Principal	34	Female	African American	10
Supervisor	57	Male	Caucasian	28
Supervisor	44	Male	Caucasian	20
Supervisor	37	Female	Caucasian	15
Supervisor	36	Female	Caucasian	14

Table 8 represents reflects the job title, age, gender, race/ethnicity, and years of experience in public education for the 2023 participants – minus five individuals who opted-out.

Table 8

Summer 2023 Participants' Position, Age, Gender, Race and Years of Experience

Position	**Age**	**Gender**	**Race**	**Years of Experience**
Director	56	Male	Caucasian	31
Director	55	Female	African American	33
Director	43	Male	Caucasian	22
Principal	55	Male	Caucasian	34

Table 8 (cont.)

Principal	49	Male	Caucasian	25
Principal	47	Female	Asian	23
Principal	43	Male	Caucasian	21
Principal	40	Male	Caucasian	17
Principal	37	Female	Caucasian	15
Supervisor	58	Male	Caucasian	29
Supervisor	45	Male	Caucasian	21
Supervisor	38	Female	Caucasian	16
Supervisor	37	Female	Caucasian	15

In the Summer of 2022, the average age of principals was 42 (ranging from 34-54). The average amount of educational experience was nearly 19 years (extending from 10-33 years). Of the group, five people had previously been employed outside of the school district, with two individuals having earned a doctoral degree. Six males (all Caucasian) and three females (one African American, one Asian, and one Caucasian) engaged in interviews. Between the Summer of 2022 and 2023, three opted out of participating a second time – one African American female and two Caucasian males. Note, this female participant left the District for promotion during the 2022-23 academic year.

Within the participants with a role encompassing the entire district in the Summer of 2022, five were male (all Caucasian) and four female (one African American and three Caucasian). The average age of the district-based employees was 45 (range: 36-57), coupled with an average of nearly 22 years of experience in the field of education (range: 14-32). Those with experience beyond the school district were six individuals, with four people holding a doctorate.

Two district-level admin opted to not participate in a second round of interviews in 2023, both of whom held the most senior leadership positions in the district amongst the full contingent of participants.

CP&E Outcomes

During the summer of 2022, participants were asked how they professionally defined CP&E. All but two individuals spoke about the two concepts in isolation – either defining one without the other, or focusing on speaking about separate aspects. As such, the concepts are broken down into two subsections.

Participants were asked to identify the key aspects of the district's vision and commitment to CP&E and how they are evident in schools – the latter concentrating on work within their respective buildings. As previously noted, four district goals are etched into the framework of a formalized vision and mission statement. Table 9 showcases the number and percentage of participants with qualitative responses in the Sumer of 2022 that specifically featured these elements.

Table 9

Number and Percent of Participants with Qualitative Direct References to District Goals

Goal Statement	Principal Group (9)	District Administrators (9)
Increase the knowledge, skill, and practices of all staff related to cultural proficiency/cultural responsiveness which will reduce the achievement gap.	66%	55%

Table 9 (cont.)

Reduce the number of African American, Hispanic, and Multiracial students who are disproportionately represented in special education programs and disproportionately suspended from school so that the risk ratio for these subgroups is no greater than 1.5 times more likely.	22%	33%
Implement practices that promote an increased pool of diverse applicants for positions across all employee groups.	22%	33%
Increase student, staff and family engagement in cultural proficiency efforts.	55%	44%

Analytical Quantitative Trends

In terms of the value of CP&E work changing teacher practice, the highest average between the four groups fell at a 9.0 (on a 10-point scale) for those ages 52-57, with the overall mean being an 8.5. The most common answer proved a score of 10.0 (most important). Ultimately, there were no differences by age range across the 23-year differential between the youngest and oldest interviewees. Admin collectively concluded on a scale of 1-10 that teachers have been changed by CP&E work (mean of 9.0) and thus utilize its basis within weekly lessons. In respect to potential positive outcomes (e.g. student achievement and growth stemming from CP&E emphasis), all participants shared that it represents a driver for students to grow, with 72% indicating a score of 10 and the utmost importance.

When asked about the pervasiveness of racism in the organization, a significant number of interviewees were reluctant to provide an answer. Many were hesitant and when pressed to estimate, provided an answer of a 5.0. There was a palpable sense of discomfort where 44% people felt that a score of 5.0 represented a safe answer with the median being noncommittal to either magnitude. The second most frequent reply was a score of 2.0. Overall, the average score (4.22) leaned towards the spectrum of the pervasiveness – not necessarily the existence of – racism in the organization's structures. Age did not represent significant disconnect across the comprehensive group.

In a larger context, the average of 4.84 fell below the median for whether teachers are embedding CP&E work into their weekly instruction (Summer of 2023 and 13 versus 18 participants). Between those ages 34-39 and 46-51, the older subgroup's average was 4.5 points lower. The underlying message was that the value of CP&E PD was not being maximized through instruction in elementary classrooms on a weekly basis.

Tables 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, and 21 reflect an organization of variables such as role, age, and gender for the three scaled-survey questions posted in 2022, as well as the one question in 2023.

Table 10

Comprehensive Group (Summer 2022): Descriptive Statistics for Quantitative Items by Age Group

Question	Total Participant Group (18)	Age 34-39 (5)	Age 40-45 (6)	Age 46-51 (2)	Age 52-57 (5)
Where do you value CP&E work in terms of changing teacher practice?	Mean: 8.5 Mode: 10.0 High: 10.0 Low: 5.0	Mean: 8.6 High: 10.0 Low: 5.0	Mean: 8.1 High: 10.0 Low: 7.0	Mean: 8.0 High: 10.0 Low: 6.0	Mean: 9.0 High: 10.0 Low: 7.0

Table 10 (cont.)

Where do you value CP&E work in terms of improving student performance?	Mean: 9.27 Mode: 10.0 High: 10.0 Low: 5.0	Mean: 9.0 High: 10.0 Low: 5.0	Mean: 9.2 High: 10.0 Low: 7.0	Mean: 9.5 High: 10.0 Low: 9.0	Mean: 9.5 High: 10.0 Low: 7.0
How pervasive is racism in your school's organizational structure?	Mean: 4.22 Mode: 5.0 High: 10.0 Low: 2.0	Mean: 3.16 High: 5.0 Low: 2.0	Mean: 5.6 High: 10.0 Low: 3.0	Mean: 5.0 High: 7.0 Low: 3.0	Mean: 3.8 High: 5.0 Low: 2.0

Table 11

Comprehensive Group (Summer 2023): Descriptive Statistics for Quantitative Items by Age Group

Question	**Total Participant Group (13)**	**Age 34-39 (4)**	**Age 40-45 (3)**	**Age 46-51 (2)**	**Age 52-57 (4)**
To what extent do teachers actively embed CP&E work into their weekly instruction?	Mean: 4.84 Mode: 5.0 High: 9.0 Low: 1.0	Mean: 6.5 Mode: 7.0 High: 8.0 Low: 4.0	Mean: 4.0 High: 6.0 Low: 1.0	Mean: 2.0 High: 3.0 Low: 1.0	Mean: 5.75 Mode: 6.0 High: 9.0 Low: 2.0

Score ranges varied across the principal group, with raw score responses broken down into four age ranges. In respect to CP&E work being valued as a mechanism to change teacher practice, the average principal score was a 8.22, with the most common replies of a 9.0 and 10.0. Age held minimal influence on participants' scores.

The most common response to the pervasiveness of racism in the organization's structures, was a 2.0. Both the oldest and youngest groups shared similar sentiments in scores falling on the lesser side of the spectrum.

When assessing the extent to which teachers actively embed CP&E into their weekly instruction (Summer of 2023 and 13 of 18 responses), the average was 5.0.

Table 12

Principals (Summer 2022): Descriptive Statistics for Quantitative Items by Age Group

Question	Participant Group (9)	Age 34-39 (3)	Age 40-45 (2)	Age 46-51 (2)	Age 52-57 (2)
Where do you value CP&E work in terms of changing teacher practice?	Mean: 8.22 Mode: 9.0 & 10.0 High: 10.0 Low: 5.0	Mean: 8.0 High: 10.0 Low: 5.0	Mean: 8.5 High: 10.0 Low: 7.0	Mean: 8.0 High: 10.0 Low: 6.0	Mean: 8.33 High: 10.0 Low: 7.0
Where do you value CP&E work in terms of improving student performance?	Mean: 8.88 Mode: 10.0 High: 10.0 Low: 5.0	Mean: 8.33 High: 10.0 Low: 5.0	Mean: 9.5 High: 10.0 Low: 9.0	Mean: 9.5 High: 10.0 Low: 9.0	Mean: 8.5 High: 10.0 Low: 7.0
How pervasive is racism in your school's organizational structure?	Mean: 3.44 Mode: 2.0 High: 7.0 Low: 2.0	Mean: 3.0 High: 5.0 Low: 2.0	Mean: 4.0 High: 5.0 Low: 3.0	Mean: 5.0 High: 7.0 Low: 3.0	Mean: 2.0 High: 2.0 Low: N/A

Table 13

Principals (Summer 2023): Descriptive Statistics for Quantitative Items by Age Group

Question	Participant Group (6)	Age 34-39 (2)	Age 40-45 (1)	Age 46-51 (2)	Age 52-57 (1)
To what extent do teachers actively embed CP&E work into their weekly instruction?	Mean: 5.0 Mode: N/A High: 8.0 Low: 1.0	Mean: 6.5 High: 8.0 Low: 5.0	Mean: 6.0 High: 6.0 Low: N/A	Mean: 2.0 High: 3.0 Low: 1.0	Mean: 7.0 High: 7.0 Low: N/A

The average reply was a 9.0 for the nine participants holding a district-based position. The lone disparity remained the age groups of 40-45 and 52-57, with the latter holding the strongest value behind CP&E work yielding change within teacher practice. It should be outlined

that the oldest participants mostly held higher positions in the district. Additionally, district administrators' average score was 0.78 ahead of the principal group. This data illustrates a disconnect in respect to the evaluation and/or understanding of classroom happenings. Participants holding a district-based leadership role were resounding in their average score of 9.66 that CP&E work has a direct correlation to the growth of students. All but one of nine replies stated it held the maximum score possible along the scale with district admin's mean proving 0.78 points higher than principals.

The range in scores (across the scale from a 2.0 to a 10.0) is important to note for interviewees holding a district level position. Two thirds of this group shared the numerical reply of a 5.0 in respect to the degree of pervasiveness of racism in the district's organizational structure, including everyone in the oldest categorization. Given one score of an admin in the age range of 40-45, that group's average score doubled (6.66 versus 3.33) in contrast to the same number of participants ages 34-39.

For teachers embedding CP&E into their daily practice, principals score 0.71 higher than district admin. For the question posed to 7 of the 9 original participants, the mean was less than half of the potential points.

Table 14

District-Based Administrators (Summer 2022): Descriptive Statistics for Quantitative Items by Age Group

Question	Participant Group (9)	Age 34-39 (2)	Age 40-45 (4)	Age 46-51 (0)	Age 52-57 (3)
Where do you value CP&E work in terms of changing teacher practice?	Mean: 9.0 Mode: 10.0 High: 10.0 Low: 7.0	Mean: 9.5 High: 10.0 Low: 9.0	Mean: 8.0 High: 10.0 Low: 7.0	N/A	Mean: 10.0 High: 10.0 Low: 10.0

Table 14 (cont.)

Where do you value CP&E work in terms of improving student performance?	Mean: 9.66 Mode: 10.0 High: 10.0 Low: 7.0	Mean: 9.5 High: 10.0 Low: 9.0	Mean: 9.0 High: 10 Low: 7.0	N/A	Mean: 10.0 High: 10.0 Low: N/A
How pervasive is racism in your school's organizational structure?	Mean: 5.0 Mode: 5.0 High: 10.0 Low: 2.0	Mean: 3.33 High: 5.0 Low: 2.0	Mean: 6.66 High: 10.0 Low: 5.0	N/A	Mean: 5.0 High: 5.0 Low: N/A

Table 15

District-Based Administrators (Summer 2023): Descriptive Statistics for Quantitative Items by Age Group

Question	**Participant Group (7)**	**Age 34-39 (2)**	**Age 40-45 (2)**	**Age 46-51 (0)**	**Age 52-57 (3)**
To what extent do teachers actively embed CP&E work into their weekly instruction?	Mean: 4.29 Mode: 4.0 High: 8.0 Low: 1.0	Mean: 6.5 High: 8.0 Low: 5.0	Mean: 2.5 High: 4.0 Low: 1.0	N/A	Mean: 4.0 High: 6.0 Low: 2.0

Participants were asked which gender in which they identified, with about twice as many males participating compared to females. Given the group of 18, there was less of a range of scores for females. Across both genders, the most common score was a 10.0. The range in female scores being greater than male responses was noticeable for whether CP&E work drives student growth (caused by 86% of responses scoring it a 10.0). While more participants allowed for increased variability, males' average score was 0.76 lower and featured over half of the replies denoting a score of 10.0.

As to the influence of gender when assessing how pervasive racism remains in the district's organizational structure, there was no statistical disparity. Males averaged a stronger

score (0.45) versus female participants. Meanwhile, 55% of males responded with a 5.0, with 44% of females also doing so.

In respect to teachers embedding CP&E work into their weekly efforts, there was distinct disparity between female and male replies for the 13 of 18 responses in Summer 2023, with females believing that it is occurring frequently (an average of 0.90 points higher).

Table 16

Comprehensive Group (Summer 2022): Descriptive Statistics for Quantitative Items by Gender

Question	**Female (7)**	**Male (11)**
Where do you value CP&E work in terms of changing teacher practice?	Mean: 9.28 Mode: 10.0 High: 10.0 Low: 8.0	Mean: 8.5 Mode: 10.0 High: 10.0 Low: 6.0
Where do you value CP&E work in terms of improving student performance?	Mean: 9.57 Mode: 10.0 High: 10.0 Low: 7.0	Mean: 8.81 Mode: 10.0 High: 10.0 Low: 5.0
How pervasive is racism in your school's organizational structure?	Mean: 4.0 Mode: 5.0 High: 5.0 Low: 2.0	Mean: 4.45 Mode: 5.0 High: 10.0 Low: 2.0

Table 17

Comprehensive Group (Summer 2023): Descriptive Statistics for Quantitative Items by Gender

Question	Female (5)	Male (8)
To what extent do teachers actively embed CP&E work into their weekly instruction?	Mean: 5.4 Mode: 8.0 & 5 High: 8.0 Low: 1.0	Mean: 4.5 Mode: 3.0, 4.0, & 6.0 High: 9.0 Low: 1.0

For principals, female answers were again significantly higher in contrast to males, with an average score providing 2.66 points higher on the 10-point scale. The data revealed that the majority of males rating the importance of CP&E work positively impacting teacher practice in the entire group did not come from principal input. Furthermore, principals expressed that CP&E work was directly linked to student growth, with one third of male replies feeling it held a value of 10.0.

Within the principal group, there was minimal statistical incongruence when comparing female and male responses pertinent to the pervasiveness of racism in organization structures. Half of the male contingent provided a score of a 5.0.

In respect to CP&E work being actively embedded by teachers each week (answered by 6 of 9 participants in Summer 2023), neither gender shared a common number response, although their male average was 1.25 higher.

Table 18

Principals (Summer 2022): Descriptive Statistics for Quantitative Items by Gender

Question	Female (3)	Male (6)
Where do you value CP&E work in terms of changing teacher practice?	Mean: 9.66 Mode: 10	Mean: 7.0 Mode: 7

Table 18 (cont.)

	High: 10 Low: 9	High: 10 Low: 5
Where do you value CP&E work in terms of improving student performance?	Mean: 10.0 Mode: 10 High: 10 Low: N/A	Mean: 8.33 Mode: 10 High: 10 Low: 5
How pervasive is racism in your school's organizational structure?	Mean: 3.33 Mode: N/A High: 5 Low: 2	Mean: 3.66 Mode: 5 High: 5 Low: 2

Table 19

Principals (Summer 2023): Descriptive Statistics for Quantitative Items by Gender

Question	Female (2)	Male (4)
To what extent do teachers actively embed CP&E work into their weekly instruction?	Mean: 4.5 Mode: N/A High: 8 Low: 1	Mean: 5.75 Mode: N/A High: 9 Low: 3

While there was a disparity between female and male replies for those holding a district-oriented position, it was not as significant as the principal group. In respect to a district level's leadership lens, both male and female responses were as low as a 7.0 and up to a 10.0. Additionally, about 78% of answers provided the highest possible scaled score.

District male admin rated the pervasiveness in organizational structures almost a point higher on average than their female counterparts; however, this can be attributed to one participants' reply of a score of 10. Given the collective, district-based admin's high percentage of the median score, limited conclusions can be justified.

There was a large dichotomy in gauging how teachers are implementing CP&E work into their weekly instruction (posed to 7 of 9 participants in 2023), with females sharing an average

of 5.66 in contrast to a 3.25 held by males within district level capacities. The latter group clearly influenced the comprehensive group's data the most.

Table 20

District-Based Administrators (2022): Descriptive Statistics for Quantitative Items by Gender

Question	Female (4)	Male (5)
Where do you value CP&E work in terms of changing teacher practice?	Mean: 9.25 Mode: 10 High: 10 Low: 8	Mean: 8.8 Mode: 10 High: 10 Low: 7
Where do you value CP&E work in terms of improving student performance?	Mean: 9.25 Mode: 10 High: 10 Low: 7	Mean: 9.4 Mode: 10 High: 10 Low: 7
How pervasive is racism in your school's organizational structure?	Mean: 4.5 Mode: 5 High: 5 Low: 3	Mean: 5.4 Mode: 5 High: 10 Low: 2

Table 21

District-Based Administrators (2023): Descriptive Statistics for Quantitative Items by Gender

Question	Female (3)	Male (4)
To what extent do teachers actively embed CP&E work into their weekly instruction?	Mean: 5.66 Mode: N/A High: 8.0 Low: 4.0	Mean: 3.25 Mode: 3.0 High: 6 Low: 1

Cultural Proficiency/Competency

Some ideals specified by interviewees encompass students needing to feel safe at school and that there are different ways of learning. Another trend was referencing that the community must understand that equality is not the same as equity. Within the work, it is essential to

minimize assumptions and stereotypes (which are barriers that are directly associated with bias). Two principals noted growth being needed by adults and the requisite of modeling such for students, as well as planning engagement opportunities to both share and learn in order to understand other cultures. The same two participants noted that culture is personal, while three discussed the impact of Special Education needs and considerations.

The most common shared perspectives were students being welcomed into the school, with that premise not merely being spoken about, but felt by students within physical learning environments. Seven of nine comments noted the significance of knowing what cultures are represented in their building, with three principals also sharing that each year populations change through transience. Knowing the cultures of students allows staff to encourage them to share with others, plan homework and projects that do not interfere with home life when holidays do not align, and ensure that the school embraces an array of traditions. While transience provides a challenge due to a larger range of abilities and potential trauma, just denoting this caveat represents more of an excuse unless Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) are employed. Four specifically honed-in on it being imperative that leaders support their staff in, "Getting all learners what they need," to best meet the needs of a dynamic student body. None of the principals referred to our nation's history or the impact of educational trends that serve the majority of our country (e.g., White students).

One year later during the summer of 2023, interview topics were revisited. The focus on the first question centered around creating a connection between cultural proficiency and equity, as well as gauging potential, open-ended growth about the topic's facets. Participants were asked about the value of CP&E work and how they leverage it within their leadership. In doing so, the intent and purpose of equity was examined. In conjunction, administrators were asked if they

believed that CP&E work is associated with a political agenda. Of those holding a district-based position, 71% cited the importance of having diversity within a group of decision-makers to ensure representation is intentionally accounted for.

The comprehensive group felt (77%) that CP&E work holds merit and value; therefore, it should be prioritized by the district. Of the collective, 53% believe CP&E to be impacted in some fashion by politics. Numerous responses indirectly alluded to, or openly discussed, CP&E being politicized versus driven by an agenda. While one principal noted the premise of belonging being a core component of CP&E work, 71% of district-based admin specifically employed the word in responses.

Principals

In 2022, all but one principal specifically employed the ideal of students being acknowledged and/or welcomed in school. Two principals did not directly attribute any of the district's four goals into their responses, with one believing the district's CP&E work to be, "Overly disjointed." Common themes of CP&E PD being too generalized (versus representing a school-by-school effort) were expressed, in addition to being primarily foundational versus targeted. One third of replies shared that resources were widespread, but challenging to implement with fidelity given barriers such as time for PD and collaborative planning, in addition to generating staff (and sometimes even community) buy-in. The same percentage made connections to the curriculum, such as trying to choose more multicultural texts to enable a larger contingent of students to read about a culture similar to their own, 'see' a character with similar beliefs to their upbringing, or a nonfiction text where the highlighted historical figure aligns with their heritage. Often, specific examples were lacking via generalized references.

Hiring practices were touched upon in minimal fashion, as was the acknowledgement of staff being predominantly White staff (two replies for both topics).

One Caucasian male principal, referenced the district's four pillars of CP&E being tied to the community/parents, students, teachers/staff, and curriculum, and then supplemented by PD. He noted that the challenge in each school is comprehensively understanding, “What that looks like and how cultural proficiency weaves its way into those areas. It’s a palpable presence and feeling. It’s there from our board. It’s very evident, and I think there is a good reason for pushing it.” Given a diverse community, his staff needs to raise its collective awareness, though he has also been intentional in inviting his Home & School Association (H&S) to be more open in celebrating all populations versus remaining steadfast to mainstreamed traditions, themed events, holidays, and fundraiser locations/partnerships.

An Asian female principal expressed the belief in making everyone feel welcomed, in addition to seen/heard. As a result, her building’s teachers have been more cognizant in the literature selected, the stories read aloud, and the intent/content within writing prompts in an effort to, “Get to know students on a deeper level.” One Caucasian female prinicpal pointed out the need for additional resources to be added to our district’s internal Canvas website, while a male counterpart added a desire for CP&E work to be less based in theory. “I mean, we definitely have to understand the root of things, the origins of things, but I wish they were a little more applicable to the day-to-day of teaching.” She shared that what works for one building is not always applicable to another school, while another Caucasian male principal highlighted the priority of providing a variety of experiences and celebrations for students, but did not expand further on other concepts.

One Caucasian male principal is proud that the community has, “A voice in educational programming and the mission and vision of the district.” He referenced reaching out to community groups and other stakeholder groups – such as mosques, the local American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) chapters, the African American Reserve Bookstore, etc. – to invite them to participate in the Parents in Equity (PIE) forums. There was doubt in there being a measurable link between New Polar’s guiding principles highlighted within comprehensive planning across multiple school years. “Without that, it’s really just something that we talk about. Having it established inside those documents or critical pieces of an organization makes it very clear to everybody that this is the direction we’re headed.” Conversely, another Caucasian male principal agreed that the goal is to provide structure for all groups to attain equity; yet, there is, “Seemingly a stronger priority placed on previously underperforming student groups.” (Disclaimer: as of Winter 2024, that school’s data continues to reflect disproportionate achievement results for numerous marginalized populations, which makes the word choice of ‘previously’ interesting..

The lone African American female principal was one of two participants to reference hiring practices. She shared minimal diversity within her staff, specifically Black and Asian employees. Doing so helps, “Students see themselves within the instruction” in order to foster increased “Mirrors and windows” that reflect the diversity within the community, but not necessarily within the composition of adults/educators. “Cultural Proficiency and Equity work helps create spaces where all students feel welcomed as though they belong. They can receive the same access and opportunity to education that their non-White, non-diverse counterparts.” She added her core team’s intent to, “Minimize the external control of families,” and influences that seemingly cannot be influenced during the school day. Additionally, she created an

expectation for teachers to develop classroom goals featuring disproportionality data or overrepresentation within Special Education programming.

A Caucasian male principal agreed with the Human Resources Department's effort to have interview panels inclusive of representation from different backgrounds and, "Trying to hire minority candidates." During his tenure, his school – which features the highest Asian population in the district – added three Asian teachers to the staff.

An African American principal affirmed that everyone is always on a continuum of cultural proficiency while another individual referred to the work being a continual path. In her answer, she outlined the priority of being, "Able to support and engage with cultures other than your own… changing your worldviews or mindsets to meet the needs of the community." Responses also referenced the need to consider ethnicity, race, skin color, and country of origin associated with culture. One Caucasian male principal talked about the need to find balance between knowing children both personally and instructionally. In conversation about the awareness and inclusion components of culture, a Caucasian female principal discussed family dynamics, such as a lesser likelihood today for children to be raised in a nuclear family. As a result, their participation in social opportunities beyond the traditional school day can be limited. She stated a focus on, "The integration without forcefulness… naturally-integrating other cultures, ethnicities, languages." For example, personalized outreach efforts from staff – even by her as the principal – such as trying to find transportation for the child through a friend or another family in the neighborhood can serve to encourage extracurricular engagement.

Revisiting Principals One Year Later

In 2023, per an Asian female principal's response, "Cultural proficiency and equity is truly about leveling the playing field for everyone through access and opportunity." She cited

understanding the needs of marginalized populations who historically may not have had such. “When there is equity in education, there’s opportunity for everyone.” Barriers must be identified, with solutions integrated because all students deserve to realize those goals – ones that they set, their families expect, and educators advocate for. However, she is disheartened – and frequently feels somewhat sabotaged by – political influences, specifically conservative parties, adversely creating more newfound barriers in attaining equity. They either overtly, or subconsciously, substantiate an unwillingness to learn about others or truly examine their own ineffective practices. Nonetheless, she strives to persevere in that, “CP&E gives students a sense of belonging and purpose in a school… if you don’t feel you belong somewhere, you’re not going to be successful.” She contends that self-worth comes by virtue of being seen and feeling heard.

A Caucasian female principal shared that equity comes from recognition and respect. For example, learning the effects of religious practices and traditions for children. “We’re doing our job as educators when we shift previous trends and treatment of people.” She sees no parallel between CP&E work and politics and desires for PD to be taken from collaborative settings back to the classroom with more fidelity. “I have a hard time feeding into that notion… I think if you’re not on board with celebrating, recognizing, and appreciating – just coming together as a community – then I’m not sure what that agenda is.” One Caucasian male principal addressed CP&E serving to align with learning types, cultures, and races in terms of accessing curriculum. The focus should be instruction and recognizing outliers, especially when/if they fit a profile of kids that traditionally underperform. “Some need more support to have a chance to learn. For others, we need to design the curriculum to push them.” He reinforced a need for rigor in helping children to achieve their potential, then conveyed that CP&E is tied to political

agendas. “Maybe it’s an idea that’s overdue, but teaching and learning should be the top priority at every meeting and everything we talk about.”

One Caucasian male principal stressed that equity is contingent upon educators recognizing students’ needs. He referenced learning from colleagues whose classes regularly yield less disproportionality in achievement. There was an association between MTSS mindsets to view every child. “Many teachers ask ‘what about the student causing the problem?’ But really, we need to think about the interaction of the curriculum and instruction with the learner and environment that needs to be altered.” He continued sharing that political agendas overlap with opinion, but an abundance of qualitative data proves the merit of New Polar’s CP&E PD concentration. “When you take a look at who’s providing instruction, I mean, in our district we have between 90-95% of people delivering instruction who are White, and yet 50% of our students are not.” He concluded that it comes down to recognizing gifts of people – students and their families, as well as staff.

A Caucasian male principal finds it disgusting that CP&E is combined with politics. “It’s important that we’re changing. We have to because we have new children coming into the country.” For him, CP&E work is becoming more aware of who we are, who we work with, and the children/families coming to our schools. “It’s about how we adapt and learn in order to give back to the community.”

Administrators Across the District

District administrators in 2022 honed-in on being intentional in leading CP&E PD and thus impacting instructional practice and assessing educational atmospheres. The majority of replies specified a feeling of responsibility and obligation to accomplish such, which results from a blend of being supportive of staff in order to promote accessibility for students. One third of

participants referred directly to the influence of curriculum. However, that same percentage did not infuse any of the four district CP&E goals into their answers.

One African American female director believes that being grounded in the work of CP&E is a prerequisite in order to frame the idea of ensuring that all students have positive, high-quality school experiences. She noted student performance data as an integral indicator as a starting point, with a need to deepen conversation surrounding perceptual data, as well as social, emotional, and behavioral feedback. “Participation needs to reflect the demographic composition of our district; and if it doesn’t, why is that the case? What things are we able to be more intentional about to make sure that people are able to engage?” She acknowledged that our staff’s demographics do not reflect the diversity of students and the community. Concern was expressed in that, “Some immigrant families trust everything that you’re going to do;” therefore, people must be well-informed to get their child’s needs met through varied engagement prospects.

A Caucasian female director noted the intent for, “Every child to see themselves in the classrooms they’re in, and with the teachers that teach them.” She added that Special Education must have a continued role in this respect. “In order to provide equity, everyone cannot get the same thing,” and that the entire organization needs to refine their understanding of such. A Caucasian male supervisor explained committee work surrounding disaggregating data within the Special Education identification process, as well as disciplinary rates per the district Code of Conduct. He was intrigued by, “How they manifest themselves in the organization’s data, and as leaders trying to develop action steps and strategies to address them.” From a PD lens, a need was noted to shift from educating staff to improve awareness and then alter environments and structures. With that, engaging the community via visiting centers and varied places of worship

represent unique learning tools that also aid in forging community partnerships. A Caucasian female supervisor reiterated that awareness of diverse cultures yields a stronger likelihood to understand the community in order to fuel decisions about norms, curriculum, and engagement.

Revisiting Administrators Across the District One Year Later

In 2023, an African American female director referred to CP&E's philosophical framework and its foremost tenant pertaining to how students see themselves in learning settings, in addition to experiencing authentic and meaningful social, emotional, and academic interactions. "Students enter content with the information that they have, so we need to consider access points, instructional strategies, scaffolding experiences, and valuing student voice/choice." She believes that everything around education is political. "I think we are naive to think that schools are not – there's just too much research… yet when we know better, we do better." Adults shape the way kids navigate experiences in school. Additionally, equity requires people getting what they need and when they need it, and that is a byproduct of examining systems and structures that leaders cultivate amid learning variabilities such as language, race, gender identity, and socioeconomics. "It is about producing productive people in society and not necessarily breaking their spirit or preventing them from being able to access good instruction and skills they need to kind of move on with life."

A Caucasian female supervisor's response also referenced CP&E to serve as a lens for educators to view different student groups and push to meet individual needs. For example, it can be applied within staffing, scheduling, curriculum, discipline, transportation, extracurriculars, language, Special Education and school nutrition. Meanwhile, equity mandates getting students what is needed as opposed to giving all students the same thing. She equated public school educators to being community servants and stressed that local communities more than ever

reflect the world's extensive diversity. CP&E work is, "Unfortunately, definitely tied up in a political agenda and oftentimes miscategorized."

A Caucasian female supervisor outlined that our cultural lens influences decision-making, noted the impact of bias, and that public education has historically lent itself toward privileged groups in which many staff are part of. "Equity is about equal opportunities for all students to be as successful as they can." To do so, barriers need to be identified by leaders such as access to resources. While CP&E is politicized, she does not feel it's fair. "It's detrimental and can create tension around politics because some people could automatically assume that a Republican wouldn't want to be part of this work, and I'm a Republican and I want to be part of this work." The outcome is to foster belonging for all learners through maintaining the best intentions for all kids. Such stems from PD being a journey fueled by personal learning, not just PD. It's vital to acknowledge that while students come to school without possessing the same experiences, designing instruction and planning intervention opportunities remain key for productive engagement. For example, leveling background knowledge must be intentional, as well as selecting materials that share multiple perspectives of historical events. She added that our goal cannot be to, "Write the narrative."

A Caucasian male director explained that while CP&E is politicized, it is ongoing work serving to help leaders understand different backgrounds – socially, racially, ethnically, and culturally – and knowing our own identity, too. "When you talk about equity, it's not everybody getting the same; that is equality." He continued in that when students need something different, staff are responsive to help each learner reach their highest potential. "It is not one size fits all... there are ways that we can design instruction, scaffold interventions, and thoughtfully manage expectations to deliver individualized support." For example, in respect to discipline, there must

be a mindset of fair not always being equal and what is equal is not always fair. “No matter what your political affiliation is, if you’re in education, you should be in education to make sure that all students have what they need to be successful… The job is to make sure students succeed.” He added it should not be evaluated by a legislature like No Child Left Behind. “Again, look holistically, ethnically, socioeconomically, culturally, racially, behaviorally, mental health-related, and provide the support, provide what they need to get them to where they need to be.”

For CP&E to be meaningful, a Caucasian male supervisor discussed the impact of differences such as cultural components, race, ethnicity, gender identification, and how they mesh into other groups. “It’s about how we as individuals become aware of those influences on learning processes, and how we work in a growth mindset towards a self-reflection component.” He noted the need to grow one’s knowledge to build capacity, owning a willingness to understand others, and considering how potential personal biases represent barriers. Specifically, he pinpointed the idea of dignity being the root of cultural proficiency. “As human beings, dignity is something that can’t be taken away… there is an innate desire for all of us to belong.” He dismissed CP&E as being associated with a political agenda because it pertains to increased access, validation, and participation of marginalized populations. “The problem lies in a sense of loss of control and threatening existing power. Politicians try to tap into that potential passion and fear to leverage votes. It is not a tenant of any particular political party.”

A Caucasian male supervisor spoke to CP&E’s theoretical framework used by institutions to improve stakeholder understanding regarding academic, social, emotional, extracurricular, and co-curricular decisions, in addition to helping families, staff, and students to be valued and respected. “It’s about equal representation in what is being taught, being

celebrated, and the perspectives and backgrounds of everyone." He remained candid in that he often uses the terms of equality and equity interchangeably, but should not. "To be a better leader, you ask questions to make sure that everybody has a voice. However, that means all must be represented within decision-making processes." He referenced political connections such as platforms board members utilize during elections, literature selected, and certain consultants preferred for PD. "CP&E is a priority and I think that is politically-driven by some of the members of the board." And, while CP&E is relevant, he does not feel it's the most important thing.

A Caucasian male director does not believe that CP&E work is influenced by politics in the district. "It's another pressure point that we're dealing with in society." This individual worries that CP&E is being prioritized, "At the expense of everything else." Instead, he desires to see it become emphasized within the context of an overarching goal. An explanation likened CP&E work to making school environments comfortable for all stakeholders. "Everything that we do should be from the lens of what's going to ensure that everybody is pulling in the same direction." For educational equity to transpire, leaders must examine instructional and curricular practices, as well as hiring.

A Caucasian director added that a critical feature of CP&E remains welcoming different cultures and backgrounds and being collaboratively reflective to remove barriers to access. "Equity is providing kids and families with what they need, not necessarily with the same things for every student across the board as some kids and families will come in with different needs." He added that when undertaking an umbrella concept angle, leaders cannot fully understand intellectual and socioeconomic trends. It's about a team response to, "Get them to that point where they can learn without those scaffolds and can access education in the same

manner that your typical student would without impediments." Meanwhile, his primary gripe about CP&E remains that there is no clear goal from the district – no measurable outcome or anticipated change desired. "That's where I think it gets murky. I think it is incredibly important, but I don't really know what our official goal is." He was adamant in that there is a political push behind CP&E work. "If the direction isn't clear here, then the political push to put it into place becomes a checkbox."

Equitable Access

A plethora of answers spoke to the value of providing support as needed. Specifically, 77% of district admin denoted the importance of staff understanding that more time dedicated to an intervention, re/pre-teaching, or small-group leveling does not mean that one student is unfairly receiving more instructional attention or help than another child. Meanwhile, principals went deeper in referencing the same misconception and frustration when scheduling supports. Over half of individuals leading a building mentioned needing to discuss unique learning profiles and starting points to families who see MTSS or Special Education has providing an advantage to students in need. Principals (44%) also noted complaints stemming from teachers who feel that additional time spent with students with more significant learning gaps takes time away from other kids. Additionally, one third of principals spoke to parents with friendships or neighbors outside of school who seemingly compare what their child receives on a regular basis in relation to targeted support.

Of the entire group, 83% discussed the impetus of time spent seemingly justifying practices and systems designed to get students what is needed, with pushback founded in a mindset of all everyone should get the same thing. Of this group, 39% added that regular data analysis should determine these decisions, while all but one principal equated more staff

allocated to buildings to provide access to support across multiple classrooms within a particular grade level.

Principals

One Caucasian female principal discussed the need to provide students, their families, and the community what is needed to be successful, because that, "May not be the same for everybody else, but providing what is needed so that they can get to where they need to." Despite believing that equity is hard to define, a Caucasian male principal also stressed the necessity to get children what they need at the right time and that support is not the same for everyone. As the principal of a Title I school, he noted more need in contrast to other schools in the district. He also pointed out being "downright annoyed" that while preparing to present to the school district's Board of Education during a Curriculum Practice, & Instruction (CPI) session, that his desired to discuss Culturally-Relevant Teaching in terms of pushing towards equity, but was advised against such due to the potential for some in the community to misinterpret a potential CRT acronym as Critical Race Theory. Another colleague at a more affluent school spoke of seeking to know students and families – their backgrounds, home lives, traditions, etc. Said reply broke it down to, "Making sure that all of our kids have what they need to succeed, and that can be different from one kid to another. It's up to us as the educational leaders, specifically recognizing and understanding differences brought to school." He equated that connections/relationships stem from trust built by individually taking the time to understand where a student is coming from, and that knowing needs is not enough, with being responsive the key.

One Caucasian male principal discussed equity as needing to go beyond culture and exuding a holistic approach to maintain fairness and equality. For example, buildings can strive

to value, appreciate, and celebrate diversity cultures represented within their students' enrollment, but meeting their needs represents a more in-depth process. An Asian female principal connected Cultural Proficiency with Equity in that, "Programming for all students in a way that makes all facets of school accessible to them and making sure that kids feel represented regardless of what their background is." A Caucasian male principal expressed a similar mindset in that there needs to be, "Equal access for all students with special attention into the different needs of our demographic groups and making sure that we are inclusive of all groups." For him, that means acknowledging and highlighting differences of groups, celebrating them, and educating students about differences.

Administrators Across the District

Leaders with a district-based role encompassing 13 elementary schools created more consistent connections between CP&E, with six of nine replies tying the two together versus in isolation. While only one reply broached the topic of inequity in our country's past, varying thoughts encompassed ensuring schools represent a welcoming place that strives for fairness via supportive measures.

The two most common themes were pushing towards making holistic aspects of a child's educational experience accessible for all, in addition to leaders possessing an obligation and responsibility for staff to personify cultural responsiveness and equitable approaches to practice via reflection and ongoing conversation and/or PD. For such to occur, awareness is needed, and is driven by recurrent characteristics such as inclusivity and meaningful academic and social engagement.

An African American female director believes CP&E to be an opportunity – versus a PD topic – in which both teacher and student identity remains at the center of learning. More so,

understanding culture and proficiency can be viewed through two lenses. For culture, "We acknowledge it, we honor and value that diversity, and use it as a tool through which we kind of navigate kids' experiences." And then for Proficiency, "It's the degree in which we honor, recognize, and embed really authentic and meaningful ways for kids to actually see themselves. That window mirror concept is really important."

One Caucasian male director shared that CP&E lends itself to an individual reflecting on one's own race, gender, and culture and should be leveraged to, "Learn to understand the people around them, not only physically, but globally." He spoke to gender identities being newer to his generation and the obligation to grow as both a person and educator in order to engage in, "Multiple perspectives and conversations to develop relationships."

The notion of students and their families feeling welcome remained a prevalent response. For example, the hallway visuals, school efforts to impart knowledge about holidays, food options familiar to them, and how people are greeted make a daily difference. One Caucasian female supervisor likened these habits to, "Equity – with a lowercase E." She elaborated on curriculum representing entry points for discourse surrounding content, visuals, and rigorous, supplemental intervention – particularly for English Language Development (ELD) students. "It's language, in terms of opportunity, registration, and food service." A Caucasian female director stated it needs to be defined as, "My lens in which I make decisions, in the way in which I approach situations, the way that I think about my work, and the decision-making process that we use to influence curriculum." There must be consideration in respect to data analysis in order to drive instruction based on varied, multicultural materials.

One Caucasian female supervisor believed that, "Her sheltered experiences and access to the world," negatively impacted her understanding of cultural proficiency early in her career,

because, “My cultural proficiency was really only pertinent to the experiences I had lived.” She contends that her pocket of equity is mostly aligned to, “Students with disabilities, and when you’re fighting an equity civil rights conversation.” A Caucasian male supervisor noted the significance of needing to move along the continuum of CP&E. In doing so, the premise of honoring the dignity of diverse individuals is essential. Another admin noted that it’s about,

> Providing the resources and means to ensure that everyone has an equal playing field. And, for certain students that may be minimal resources and for others it might be a lot based on their needs or where they're coming from – whether they don’t speak English or are Special Education.

In such situations, leaders must be very intentional by continuously analyzing disproportionality pieces.

From a Special Education angle, a Caucasian male supervisor emphasized that equity is evident through specially-designed instruction, accommodations, and modifications. Such is exemplified through equity versus equality. “At our most basic level, human beings want to belong, and that's on us as leaders to create that sense of belonging, so you have to be aware of cultural components.” Another perspective outlined the need to “Tear down barriers for students and for staff… so that all students have the opportunity to learn from each other and access the same level of education.” Lastly, one Caucasian male director stressed the need to problem-spot in order to remove obstacles or barriers for groups of people based on their respective backgrounds.

Codifying a Cultural of Equity, Not Equality

Participants were presented with the phrase, ‘what is equitable is not always equal.’ They were asked what that meant to them. Replies pertained to variables such as field trips, interventionists, Title I fund eligibility, Special Education, and ELD deficits.

Principals

Two principals (one Caucasian male and one Caucasian female) referenced the common image of children needing different sized stools in order to see over a fence to view a game at the same height (rather than dealing with their sightline being obstructed). One Caucasian male participant openly shared that he could not answer and/or did not know how to reply.

One Caucasian male principal denoted that the premise represents a courageous endeavor. Different supports and programming is needed, but is attributed to where children are starting when they first enroll at a school. “Our district is at a point where we want to talk about those things and want to get into it, but I don’t know if our community is ready to have those conversations and to really go there.”

An African American female principal replied that, “There are times when students may not get the same thing as another because they don’t need it… A child may already have what’s needed to be successful. So, it’s not going to be equal.” It pertains to materials, materials, programs, and services. “What’s equitable is making sure that another student who doesn’t have the support or what they need, can actually attain what someone else is able to do without the support.” A Caucasian male principal concurred that everybody should be given what they need to achieve. “The goal, based on the baseline, is the same. When students can’t get to that level, there is a need to change the way information is being delivered in order to maintain high expectations for every child.” Two other Caucasian male colleagues added that it is not about a child, “Having more, or walking away with more,” but about how they get to an outcome.

A Caucasian female principal stated that it's about teaching and planning. "You can't just create a lesson and say, 'Well, this will work for everybody.' Nothing works for everybody, so learning needs to be personalized and student-centered." Meanwhile, an Asian female principal used brevity in that, "I say this to my own kids, equal doesn't mean fair; it's getting what you need." When there is a need for a targeted program, "It's because they've been identified that they're lacking in a certain area such as prerequisite skills or background knowledge." A male Caucasian principal shared that families worried about other schools and questioned why, as Title I buildings, they received extra funds or employed interventionists, despite having a smaller enrollment. Leaders, "Really need to describe that to parents. In order to be equitable, those students need more resources in order for them to be successful like our learners."

Administrators Across the District

Over half of the participants used the analogy of leveling the playing field for students, with about one third also referencing the aforementioned graphic of students striving to see over a fence. Almost every response contained an emphasis on equity not being about fairness – which is commonly misunderstood as equal.

A Caucasian male director outlined that the phrase represents, "The heart of equity." He noted the equality needing to come via resources and support. "I came from an English-speaking, college-educated household. I didn't need as many resources to be successful through school, and I was fortunate. My advantages were already built in for equal access." A Caucasian male supervisor believed that the ideal has become too contrite. "Equity is everybody having the ability to be offered the same thing, but equal means may be having it done differently." He supported his perspective by stressing the importance of knowing both a child's data, but their personal journey. Otherwise, "We cannot scaffold to meet with success – and that may not be

equal to what another student needs, but that is fair." Educators must push to understand a child's language, culture, family background, economic situation, and their mental health. "We need to understand their whole story, their full picture, and do our best as a system to mitigate problems."

Another Caucasian male director highlighted that subgroup is irrelevant to the conversation. "Everybody has different needs and we have to make sure that we are meeting those needs," despite what generalization that may originate from. An African American female director added that there needs to be, "Goals for every kid and we want to give them what they need." For example, some learners have language support gaps, while others may just need additional help in navigating the community's social systems. A Caucasian female director correlated the premise to Special Education in that, "Equal is not fair, and fair is not equal. Every student must get what they need to be successful." She stressed an intent to provide equal access, but a more open mindset across the community when it's via a legal context such as an Individual Education Plan (IEP) versus other situations.

A Caucasian female supervisor questioned why some field trip transportation for students from one elementary school features a private coach bus versus a traditional, district-provided school bus. A Caucasian male supervisor equated equity to discipline. "Giving two people the same thing doesn't create an identical impact… No matter where a student starts, making sure we're giving them what they need to get to the same end result" because teams have identified current barriers. "It's about the tools we identify and then work to provide." A Caucasian female supervisor spoke to communication efforts, particularly translations and interpretations. "I can call my son's school to advocate for him, and very easily ask questions. Others need resources in order to be able to do that, especially time and money."

A Caucasian male supervisor extended equity to religion. In knowing a student's faith, options can be provided to honor their beliefs – which fosters acceptance in schools in lieu of assimilation and/or disregard. "Every group deserves to have a place to pray. Schools should seek to understand that practicing Muslims pray at specific times of day and being able to do so socially supports their education." A Caucasian female supervisor a simplified her response as to students in need of prescription eyeglasses or an extra meal are more frequently accepted, but when needs encompass Special Education support, behavioral plans, supplemental social/emotional skills groups, families have a propensity to focus on what their child is then not receiving.

Driving CP&E Leadership Initiatives Through Confidence and Knowledge

Given the district's values and goals, leadership's ability to drive change stands imperative. Capacity is evident by imparting knowledge, engaging in difficult conversations, and explaining decisions through CP&E tenets to model belief in the ongoing work featured in the district's mission and vision statements. Nonetheless, confidence, belief, and vulnerable self-reflection represent pivotal realities necessary for school leaders to navigate. Participants were asked to reflectively gauge their comfortability in driving CP&E work, inclusive of the direction of PD.

Principals

Of the nine participants, four felt comfortable, and three partially. Two others do not feel so. Over half of the group expressed that time limitations of PD – specifically them being spaced apart and having limited intervals to engage with staff on a weekly basis – represented a barrier. One Caucasian male principal believes that his comfort is derived from having a strong core team for building support. He hypothesized that his theory and philosophy that every child

deserves to feel safe and welcomed remains embodied by a wealth of CP&E ideals. This approach enables him to guide open conversations about subgroup assumptions and rushing to predisposed tendencies of judgment and/or conclusions. Another interviewee contends that him being in a biracial marriage with multiracial children gave him credibility.

Another Caucasian male principal shared that, "Being a Caucasian male, it is harder to reach people, and I often feel that insecurity when speaking with staff." He noted that via enthusiasm, energy, and excitement, challenging conversations are best navigated. A Caucasian male principal, stated, "I'm still doing my best to learn everything I can and have come to terms with the understanding that I'm going to be uncomfortable in these situations when you don't have the perspective of a minority." He believes that CP&E is, "Driven top down," and that while he needs to evolve each day, there needs to be balance in "Understanding of my limitations."

An African American female principal felt that disproportionality data must drive the PD being planned/needed, as well as reinforcing the need for a district Equity Policy. She expressed being limited by district policy in the flexibility to pilot work and desiring to go more granular with school improvement possibilities. She expressed frustration with the tendency for all 13 schools to follow the same guidelines, which represent an impetus in discussions where staff seek to justify their practice by adhering to a curriculum's whole-group instruction, pacing guides, intervention constructs, etc. To her, the data reveals gaps and where missed opportunities remain. A Caucasian female principal disagreed with that, "The district has given us autonomy. We filter what is needed as a building. It needs to be tailored."

Another Caucasian male principal added that while he feels comfortable, "He's not 100% there," indicating that the reaction of the community is tough to manage at times. He

acknowledges wanting to, “Be a little more bold sometimes,” but is mindful of media repercussions. “I’m sort of at the infant stage still in terms of the development of my own cultural proficiency.” A Caucasian male principal stated that being 100% transparent with staff and families bolsters his comfort level. “There’s nothing that's been put out there by the district that I disagree with.” He contends that being tactful to seek meaningful conversation, versus information imparted representing a directive, is helpful in his approach and outlook. As a result, he strives to minimize, “Fake buy-in and a group of teachers who will just nod their head during PD. We have to lead people down the road of new information, and it’s up to them to make connections and grow as a human.” In doing so, the priority remains to tweak the delivery, but not the message.

Meanwhile, an Asian female principal appreciated the accessibility of the district’s Director of Curriculum and Equity for support, as well as the principal group as a whole for retrospectively assessing PD delivered to her staff. She noted the dilemma that, “Teachers don’t actually know how to implement this on a day-to-day basis. I don’t think they understand how to make it actionable.”

Administrators Across the District

Two thirds of individuals with district-oriented positions felt comfortable with leading CP&E work, with one person not sharing that sentiment. There was an emphasis on common work and goals, which represented a dichotomy in contrast to those with school-specific posts.

A Caucasian female director participant stands proud of her contributions to the district’s CP&E work, particularly given her role in selecting professional learning consultants. A Caucasian male supervisor expressed feeling more comfortable in the work when he held a building level position – versus his current district post – because there was greater frequency to

engage with staff and understand the community's ever-changing dynamics. Another colleague added that while comfortable leading conversations, "My position affords a small piece of influence" (in comparison to a prior position as a building principal).

A Caucasian male director stressed the importance of common language and the message of PD being universal across 13 schools to promote consistency and push for common goals. A Caucasian female director colleague said, "Everyone thinks automatically about Special Education when we really need to step back and talk about belonging – not just the inclusion piece." An African American female director asked, "What does our collective understanding of what Cultural Proficiency and Equity really look like and how does that shape all of our decisions?" She emphasized that it cannot fall all on one leader or committee, as it boils down to problem-solving. "Sometimes we choose to say it'll be okay, or I think sometimes kids feel like we've dismissed them. And, so how do I practice and model that?" One Caucasian female supervisor participant feels the need to caution herself during CP&E work, specifically the language that she uses. By virtue of such, she feels that she is, "Staying very neutral, respectful, and open," and attributes these feelings to her upbringing and limited exposure to diversity.

The Emotional Impact of CP&E Work and Preponderance of Vulnerability and Empathy

Utilizing the compass of CP&E Professional Learning, participants were asked what approach they most identified with when encountering challenges and/or resistance. For example, per Moore-Williams (2019), an intersectionality compass of emotion (feelings); intellect (seeking additional information and/or context); morality (holding deep-seated beliefs such as right versus wrong) and relations (reacting to specific behaviors and/or actions). Consequently, a probe was conducted in regard to their emotions when engaged in the work to navigate moving beyond information to action.

Additionally, interviewees were asked to assess why people struggle with CP&E work, and if they felt that equitable access to learning consistently occurs across all 13 elementary schools. Overall, 23% believed that this is occurring, with 17% of principals in agreement and 43% of district-based admin feeling so. CP&E poses a challenge for leaders, reflected by the most common perspectives held by leaders is that the work is both hard (46% of participants, including 57% of those in a district-oriented role) and makes participants feel uncomfortable (69% of administrators and 71% of district-based personnel).

The most common compass perspective was an emotional viewpoint, with 31% of leaders highlighting this. Meanwhile, 23% of replies chose a moral lens, with the identical percentage unable to select just one aspect of the compass. In respect to the challenge of CP&E work, the three most prevalent descriptive themes (23% each) were frustration, guilt (all Caucasian interviewees), and motivation. The lone African American participant spoke to the power of her passion in balancing the difficult dichotomy of interactions being joyful, yet painful. The other individual of color interviewed spoke about her family's background representing an empathetic outlet.

Principals

An Asian female principal believes that the district is missing the mark with its work, because CP&E represents, "A heavy topic… I don't actually know what has been done. We've been given this professional development, PowerPoints to deliver, and it's looking at who the district is. There are very disjointed activities." For example, she referenced touring different schools with fellow admin during an Equity Walk, but no there was no subsequent follow-up. "I just don't think it's been meaningful or necessarily actionable to teachers. It hasn't raised their understanding when it comes out in their instruction." She does feel there has been an intent to

raise awareness by encouraging adults to build relationships with students and prompting people to be accepting of everyone. Selection of novels was an instructional aspect that bothers her. Additionally, her passion stems from her lived experience, so she cannot find one aspect of the compass that stands out to her because each conversation remains situational. “We were really poor immigrants growing up. I didn’t look like others in my school and the only ESL students – long before ESL was even on people’s radar.” As such, she leans towards holding high expectations for all students. Being reflective, she shared that she has been reactionary and felt compelled to provide feedback to staff that, “This isn’t how we treat people; this isn’t the way we speak to parents,” especially when hearing teachers pass judgment or make generalized statements.

> Some have absolutely no understanding of what my parents’ priorities were. They didn’t move halfway around the world to do nothing with us. It was to give us a better life and an education, but they were so busy managing life and trying to make sure they could pay rent and for food. They didn’t go through my backpack and couldn’t read it anyway. They were relying on us to learn in school and to educate them on how to do school in America.

She cautioned that too many teachers still possess a closed minded outlook about having a traditional upbringing. More so, the turnover of elementary principals influences a building’s culture, instructional priorities, and buy-in for PD. The latter has featured a commonality of, “Information to keep in mind, and caring for all students. But, I don’t think it’s been translated into how they do that.” She viewed the district’s CP&E as not being actionable and primarily aspirational and inspirational. “It moves you emotionally, especially when you hear a student’s

voice. But I don't think people actually know how it manifests when writing or delivering a lesson. What questions should they be asking? It's not concrete."

A Caucasian female principal shared that she didn't enjoy the conversation at first because she felt the message was that she was racist. "Initially, the reaction is, 'No, I don't believe you. I treat all people with respect.'" She mentioned that hearing people's experiences and learning about historical indiscretions have been the most powerful opportunities. As a result, she leans into the emotional component of the CP&E compass. With that, students' backgrounds and family situations yield specific feelings and outlooks. "For many of our teachers, the kids don't look like them. Some of those children feel like teachers treat them a certain way because they're Black or Brown." Her response about equitable access to learning referred to being uncertain as to the extent that what remains in place to promote access to the core curriculum being maximized. "You still have a large spectrum of people that are not going to be all in. They're going to refuse CP&E until they retire." She equated CP&E to being uncomfortable since it's, "Unknown, yet real." Prior to PD, she never had, "The wherewithal or the interest to understand where other people are coming from. That makes you feel guilty, which isn't a good feeling. It also makes you realize that you excluded people based on their differences." Lastly, she pointed out that anything in need of growth means it will be hard work. "If you're not dedicated, then you can't do it."

A male Caucasian principal felt that the start of CP&E was offensive and believed he was being unfairly labeled as a racist. "When you understand more, you realize that we're just sharing perspectives and trying to gain a common understanding of where we've been to allow us to move forward." His desire to understand stems from him exuding an intellectual approach within the CP&E compass. In terms of access to learning, he denoted at-home influences that are

detrimental to school preparation. His primary concern remains equity issues pertaining to Special Education students. The struggle is that people don't, "Realize that the school system is a system within a larger system. They feel blamed when society's problems or challenges are seen in our schools. And we can't fix that." He highlighted underperforming subgroups and feeling a premise of intentionally excluding certain groups from quality instruction.

> It certainly feels like an exaggeration and I don't think that's happening. When we put this data out there, teachers can feel put off by it. When we don't look at the fact that our achievement lines are very congruent to the family structure, the nuclear family, the divorce rate or fatherless homes in Asian families, versus Caucasian, African American, and Latino families, it almost mirrors our achievement data."

He discussed public assistance and welfare and a time when eligibility involved having a male in the household. "It kind of backfired and created this. If I move out, you get a monthly check to cover our living expenses… You have three generations who could take advantage of that."

A Caucasian male principal began by clarifying that, "As a white male, I think it'd be harder for me to have the same emotional attachment as somebody who has experienced racial discrimination," hence utilizing the moral component of the CP&E compass and leveraging data into conversations. Due to differing school communities, he does not believe that all students receive equitable access to learning in the district. "The socioeconomics are totally different, and the needs of the two communities are totally different. So, it is not possible to serve them in the same way." A Caucasian male principal articulated that PD is too centered around presenting research and theory, as well as giving information. He referenced the district's hiring practices. There is a desire to attract diverse candidate pools, but no effort to identify where they are coming from and posting/offering positions earlier than nearby school districts.

> We never get to those people because they're gone right away. So, if we're truly invested in that, and we want to say that, then we need to do everything that we can to try and find those people right away. There are a lot of times in which we say one thing, but then when it really comes to it, we're not fully invested in it.

Additionally, when CP&E becomes publicized then people's opinions become stronger. "If you're trying to get all students what they need, it really should be very simplistic, and yet it's super complex." His personal CP&E journey correlates to an intellectual approach due to how he was raised. "I really wasn't exposed to a lot of things at an early age… So, I think I come from it from that standpoint where I realize that I've been given a lot and I have a lot to learn." As such, he acknowledges the moral impact associated with CP&E work, too, while also confidently saying that equitable access to learning is not consistent across every school in the district. He spoke to the data surrounding course placement and suspension rates. "We judge way too early instead of setting up our primary grades in a way that allows us to be able to target needs early on." His responses reinforced that change is difficult, especially when needing to question oneself.

> When you start to change, then that means that what you were doing before wasn't the right thing. And, I don't think people like to admit that… When you bring in cultural proficiency and equity work to make people feel that they've been doing something the wrong way for a number of years, or thinking about things the wrong way, you're going to be met with a lot of resistance. So, it's hard.

In closing his interview, he wanted to make a point that while things might not be openly stated in 2023, the undertones are still there. "There are a lot of actions and microaggressions that are difficult to truly change."

A Caucasian male principal noted the discrepancy between district admin learning/reading, engaging in discourse, and understanding within the confines of CP&E PD versus building leaders living it. He equated smiles of children reflecting a feeling of being safe and welcome in their school. With that, CP&E should not be a choice, but a duty. “We have to do it.” It was stressed that less affluent elementary schools do not experience the same access to learning as students that he sees on a daily basis. While that might showcase starting levels/abilities when entering school, it is also evident as to why the district is actively engaged within a CP&E continuum. He added that the discomfort experienced by staff during PD is because, “It brings out things we don’t think about, and it might categorize you in a place you don’t want to be in. However, once recognizing who you are, your beliefs, then that’s when the true learning begins.”

Administrators Across the District

A Caucasian female supervisor articulated that CP&E makes her feel sad and guilty that people have experienced racism. At other times, she is frustrated by a lack of acceptance. “But, if we can look back, we’re further along than we were when we started. So, I do also feel hopeful.” Her reply noted a moral obligation to serve children. Her propensity to take an intellectual angle stems from her belief in data. With that, it’s hard for her not to be impacted by the emotional aspect, too. “Because I’m a White female, sometimes there’s assumptions made about white people in this work, and I have to remove my emotions from those comments sometimes and just try to seek to understand perspective.” As such, she is mindful to work through not being defensive. She continued that equitable access to learning does happen across schools in the district. “It’s hard because I don’t think that all the schools are on the same playing field even when doing their best and working really hard to make sure that instruction is

equitable for all students." She acknowledged that the work is hard, particularly due to there not being quick or simple solutions. "It's not like you can create a policy and things will change. It's talking about human existence and the way that people operate. And you can't change people." She fears that her contributions only represent one person and are thus limited in advancing the district's mission.

An African American female director outlined that it's about children and families. She referenced joyfulness in striving to break down barriers that allow people to feel valued. "The idea is to have hard conversations to try to explain to people why maybe the structures or the systems we have in place are not really beneficial for a lot of kids, and navigating how and when people push back." She continued about coded language that redirects their obligation being emotionally-taxing. "If we don't advocate on their behalf, who will? That can be painful." In respect to the CP&E compass, her reply explained that moments within the work are extremely personal and that it's important to be poignant in moving through lenses based on both the topic of conversation, as well as the participants involved. "It's emotional because of the sense of urgency to continue pressing the idea of thinking about the experiences of others and how hard it can be, and trying to rely on my feelings of being motivated and inspired." Without providing a rationale, she was firm in her response that equitable access to learning does not occur in every elementary school. Due to this, all educators should be, "Pushed to challenge ourselves and our beliefs. I don't know that we always believe really in our hearts that the poor kid from wherever really has the ability to be amazing. I just don't think we all believe that." She added that it becomes a narrative. "It is difficult. We inadvertently create a system that's hard for them, see them as being broken, or are more harsh with them around discipline." She continued in that it's not always intentional, but nonetheless still the outcome. More so, we cannot continue practices

that are proving to be ineffective. “That’s why, for me, Universally-Designed Learning is so powerful. It focuses on what we are doing, not what the kids are doing. And, how do we make it more accessible?”

A Caucasian male director colleague is excited by CP&E because it is worthwhile work, particularly the intellectual components, even though it makes some staff uncomfortable. “If I can experience discomfort, that’s a good thing… I think it makes us all better – even if you have a disagreement.” His view of the CP&E compass is driven by a moral imperative to learn and refine understanding. “We need to know where kids are coming from and how we can reach them to get them to where they need to be.” He noted that equitable access to learning occurs in every school, but then digressed in that it’s better in certain buildings. “If it were 100% percent, then we wouldn’t have to do the work and devote nearly as much time to PD.” The demand of CP&E work is because, “It causes us to question who we are and what we believe… That may mean confronting the fact that we have some things about us that need to change, and that’s uncomfortable for people.”

A Caucasian male supervisor feels that CP&E work is strained by a reactionary cycle and frustration tied to a lack of progress in respect to data disparity. He cited disproportionality in terms of suspension and course enrollment that counters a desire for educators to come from a common sense of love. With that, the power of relationships serve to support understanding, although the provided responses remain primarily applicable to the logical lens of the compass. “We must potentially resolve challenges by leveraging relationships.” Data was referenced that reveals inequitable access to learning across multiple schools. “There is a lack of diversity of different student groups for our rigorous courses.” These secondary education statistics were attributed to being created at the elementary level. “We see a lack of progress in

terms of a level of belonging, inclusion for different groups." He expressed that cultural proficiency work requires uncomfortable conversations.

> You are talking about things that are very personal and intimate. There are individuals in our leadership group, teacher group, and student group, that don't feel valued or that they belong. Some have experienced racist or exclusionary acts. That's tough to not get defensive about and be willing to examine.

This admin concluded that most leaders were educated in a system that they enjoyed because they prospered. "They came back to it as a profession because they found success and power. They found it to be rewarding."

Another Caucasian female supervisor said that an intellectual viewpoint is vital since there is, "An inability to understand CP&E." As such, there is a need for individual extension beyond the PD and not just knowing definitions. The degree to which this follow-up becomes natural dictates its impact on a school's climate and student success. For her, CP&E is a foundation for problem-solving. It must be systems-driven and it's difficult to negate the emotional influences. She does not think that equitable access to learning is consistent across every school. "The communities are just too different. But, I don't think there's one building that's significantly behind another." She added that variables like personal experiences drastically impact CP&E work. "People who tend to struggle with it come from a place or time that wasn't accepted. It's ingrained in how they think and do things. They struggle with the 2023 way of doing things and what society is like."

A Caucasian male supervisor articulated that people being open about their feelings requires vulnerability to minimize discomfort within CP&E efforts. "I want to be corrected if I say something that's offensive or inappropriate. I don't want it to end when I retire because these

conversations help me to grow as a father, as a husband." While undertaking an intellectual perspective within the CP&E compass, he emphasized intentionality behind finding balance with empathy. When disaggregating academic, behavioral, or socioeconomic data, "This is who we are. Here's the problem; these are our kids. What is our solution?... We are very slow in putting action into place, an old-school system scheduling by period, curriculum based on age versus ability." He characterized public education as always being reactive with minimal creativity. Due to this, students across numerous buildings lack equitable access to learning.

> Not every kid has an individual pathway to know who they are as a learner – academically, socially, and emotionally. So, their background and learning style needs a unique fit… We push them through the system so that the system fits the kids; yet, the kids don't fit the system.

He punctuated his thoughts in that CP&E work overlaps with political and religious affiliations, gender identification, personal backgrounds, and socioeconomic status. "When you start questioning that, it's talking about trying to unify a lot of different people, and that's impossible. What we really need to do is to learn to show empathy, respect, ask good questions, and not be judgmental."

Another Caucasian male director felt that CP&E has become tiresome and overdone. "It's taking it away from other important discussions like programming." Replies were fueled by the emotional and intellectual subsects of the CP&E compass. "What often makes sense to me is an initial, emotional reaction." While only feeling confident to speak about certain schools, this participant contended that the district is being successful in providing equitable access for everybody.

> The struggle is a microcosm of what's happening in society. We're human beings. It's not a blank slate when you walk in. There is not a level of playing field in between your ears. You're going to bring baggage with you from society that you're inundated with day in and out.

He continued that CP&E is an emotional topic, but ultimately the outcomes remain a personal decision. "You shouldn't have to be told how, or encouraged why, to do it. It should just happen. That's why we have programming to meet needs across the organization. But, how we get there, is where conversations can get dicey."

Leadership Challenges

Staff were asked to share their biggest challenge(s) in leading the district CP&E work, and if a beneficial change(s) stood out. About half of responses referenced surface level efforts and benefits. One third shared the requisite emotional investment and it being an exhausting process to push for change. A similar percentage of answers keyed-on the strain of post-pandemic education, with the same share specifically referencing gender identification topics being complicated, and the time needed for completing district-mandated initiatives and/or school-improvement plan goals.

Principals

An African American female principal shared the hardships that she endured. "The question is loaded because I'm always honest." She shared that her staff was resistant, but performative, in that there was compliance instead of commitment. Due to such, "Work didn't go beyond the surface and create change for kids." This outlook created discomfort in her staff. Being African American, "Threats on my life were made" (e.g. anonymous emails and voicemails shared with the community during a School Board meeting). The situation forced her

to work backwards and consider ramifications in a "Daily self-preservation state" (which led to her leaving the district after three years in the principalship). "When you have people in the community who are systematically working to dismantle everything you are doing in the building and within the district – using you as target practice – then you get distracted, you can't do the work." She spoke to herself and staff impacted, specifically, their mental space and the psychological Maslow Hierarchy of Needs. "If you don't feel safe, and you don't feel cared for, you can't do anything else. We say students can't learn, but some teachers can't teach. Educators can't educate when they're there." She wanted to disrupt the community's state and push for educational change for students in need. Via a strong voice of advocacy, she connected with community members that, "Held some social capital within my direct catchment area that was able to mobilize people within and outside of the district – nationally – to put pressure on the district with the work that we were trying to do."

A Caucasian male principal identified, "A misunderstanding as to why we were doing the work and a feeling that the work was either unnecessary or not that important." He struggled in getting staff and families comfortable in conversations for facilitation, as well as the vitriol contained in numerous emails. In these too frequent situations, he strived to hold firm in that, "It's not competing against one another. We're trying to have our students learn more about their fellow students and our staff learn more about the students that we serve." Often, staff questioned, "'Why is this the only thing we ever talk about?'" He pushed for an understanding of where kids came from. Staff were only, "Instructing one set of students – which only serves about two thirds of our building."

A Caucasian male principal replied that he feels, "We're going overboard on it… We have so many sessions of it that I feel sometimes we're watering it down. We don't balance our

professional development. It's always CP&E. I don't feel like we're doing it in moderation." He believes it has resulted in PD becoming uninviting for his staff. It was noted by staff responses of, "'Here we go again'... People are getting burnt out." Another male doesn't find a challenge in CP&E work. "The school community is supportive of differences and wants to learn in order to secure equal representation – as opposed to just opposition."

One Caucasian male principal expressed frustration with dismissing traditions/activities that have historically been largely attended because of equity. "I feel like we weaponize the term." For example, rather than no longer holding a father/daughter dance, the title can be changed to include everyone. "From the parents' side, I do see the value of getting something specific with my daughter. We don't have to live in this world where everything has to crossover. We're not talking about educational programming, we're just talking about a night out on the town." He continued in the disparity that Girls on the Run nonprofit program for girl empowerment continues each year, but that boys are excluded from participation's physical fitness and social benefits. "When you just use the blanket statements of this can't happen, because we don't have that, it's dangerous."

Another Caucasian male principal stated,

> My biggest challenge is the assumption that's out there that if this person's a certain race or gender, then they have to be treated a certain way. We can't discipline them, or they'll always get a passing grade because we're not going to hurt our disproportionality data.

He continued that not every student is achieving, so staff must collaborate as to the reasons why and respond, rather than staying ardent to, "Preconceived ideas of what equity is all about."

Inequity in transportation and family means was also presented by a Caucasian male principal. "When we can't do something because some of our kids can't get to school; well, then

everybody loses. Just dismantling programs and situations based on people's situations that we assume or hyperbolize, is dangerous." A Caucasian male principal likened CP&E PD to, "Being courageous enough in myself to not only take a stance, but have an idea and vision and follow through – and be okay with taking some of the backlash that might come."

An Asian female principal noted that she sees surface level effort in lieu of substance (e.g., holiday celebrations/recognition and name pronunciation versus it being embedded into curriculum). "We have the mindset that you accept all students, but they don't know how to actualize it." A Caucasian female principal countered that it's about, "Rallying teachers," particularly coming out of the pandemic. We don't need to have them make intentional changes if they were already doing it."

Administrators Across the District

Given the scope of job responsibilities and departmentalized focus, congruence was lacking in replies, which showcases the depth of how district leaders apply CP&E work. Curriculum was not frequently referenced. Increased engagement in order to more consistently influence practice was articulated. Most expressed a desire for continuity across various district departments. They shared wanting staff to rely on one another to foster growth, as well as accountability, but feel lessened empowerment to do so given a large district and not being in all schools on a regular basis.

An African American female directornnoted her recent learning of, "A dysfunctional cycle of cultural proficiency professional development." It needs to be about being honest in how, "We engage in our work; it's not 'another thing.'" She shared that commitment results when we acknowledge the work that's been done, but accepting that it's never over. Individuals holding said belief do not truly understand that, "Our work hasn't been as effective as we've

wanted it to be." A Caucasian male director simply stated that, "It's hard to change people's opinions when trying to arrive at the same end goal." Another Caucasian male director noted that focus is the biggest challenge due to there being too many priorities across the district. Without such, only partial effort and time is feasible. He noted committees for MTSS, Restorative Practices, and Responsive Classroom that result in, "An umbrella mindset" that forces things to be piled-in together. He also touched upon progress being made administratively in respect for hiring more diverse candidates; however, could not speak to that claim from a teacher standpoint.

A Caucasian female supervisor admitted that, "Not all of our leaders are 100% confident in where they're strengths and weaknesses are." In a district of over 1,000 staff members, there is then trickle down. Regardless of a job title, "They all need skills to properly interact with all of our student populations. Yet, their hours and scope of work is definitely challenging to meet all those needs." A Caucasian male director agreed that the size of the district poses a barrier. A difficulty is, "Building capacity without enough facilitators that you trust, that will do a good job to get the message across – not just read the plan or follow along with the slides, but really facilitate critical conversations." It was shared that more teacher leaders were desired to support the work, particularly to help rid the organization of CP&E work being a top down value. The mentality of staff can, "Turn the corner when they realize that we're all part of the solution and not just admire the problem."

A Caucasian male supervisor directly referred to student achievement data. "When you look at the disproportionality of math or science results – test scores or course placements – we're constantly seeing students of color, and those of lower socioeconomic status, doing poorly and not making the progress that they need." He feels that the administration talks about it and

acknowledges the problem, but lacks a plan to develop and implement, “Measurable action steps to mitigate.”

One Caucasian female supervisor aimed to create correlations between CP&E work and curriculum, particularly for English Language Arts (ELA). “I’m very aware of where the district wants to go, but when things come up in my area, I still need a lot of guidance in terms of through it.” For example, how to handle a guided reading book about Emmett Till that contained a graphic photo. “Do we keep it because we’re not trying to hide history, but where do we draw the line in terms of content being developmentally-appropriate or just making people upset?... I’m still not comfortable making those decisions on my own.” Other instances pertained to family uproar about a character believing in God and that the notion of God’s presence on earth represented a conflict to their religion. Students within the Rainbow Alliance are, “Pushing for more texts at the elementary level that show homosexual parents.” The struggle remains making sure every population is represented and feels responsible for making intentional, educated decisions. One Caucasian male director added that, “We’re getting better at connecting CP&E to instructional practice, curriculum, and assessment.” Prior to his arrival in the district, he proffered that there was a lack of connection and relevance to classroom practice. “We need to move forward with talking about best practices in the classroom, high quality programs, and interventions.”

Disproportional Achievement in the District

Across the district, there are disproportional results for Black and Brown students. Specifically, math performance is lower. Participants were asked to posit as to why these data trends continue, despite the district’s CP&E PD. Over half of district-oriented admin emphasized that trends begin at the elementary level and that it’s often too late to remedy when students are

so behind as teenagers. Interviewees were also asked to identify the strongest variables associated with disproportional achievement in elementary schools. Aside from topics such as Whiteness and CRT, this topic seemed to cause the most tentativeness as evident by disclaimers to begin thoughts, haptics, and most individuals asking to repeat the question.

Principals

Overall, principals remained unsure in answering the questions, with most openly sharing a lack of confidence as to the reasoning. With that, most exuded a sense of discomfort within their replies. Others presented a feeling of being guarded in the request to hypothesize.

Two Caucasian principals, one female and one male, pointed out that the problem is evident across the state and country, not just the district, with three creating a connection to said subgroups having historically-less access to a high-quality education. There were singular responses entailing qualifying for free/reduced lunch and/or social economic status, prior preschool and/or enrichment opportunities, and attendance rates.

In total, 77% of the replies resorted to a child's home life, specifically family dynamics such as single-parent households, with only one response citing research about such claim. Two of those answers (Both Caucasian principals – one female and one male) delineated homework completion. Problematically, only two participants directly referenced instructional practice, with no one discussing the best practice of data disaggregation essential to meet individual needs.

A Caucasian male principal wondered if disproportionality results in subconscious teacher habits and instruction.

> I can guarantee you they're not trying to focus on maybe one subgroup of kids more so than others… How a parent experiences school, such as math class, that shapes how their raise their child now, their knowledge of math and being a comfortable in helping them at

home."

He admittedly referred to being curious about the stereotype surrounding Asian and Indian families and their tendency to achieve higher in math, specifically what is going on at home. A similar peer added, "I don't think my teachers either knowingly or unknowingly are treating people that differently. There's definitely some built-in bias. We all have that, but I just haven't witnessed it." In referencing research, he relayed that the Asian population has the highest math achievement data and the lowest likelihood of having single-parent homes. "It is almost miraculous to me that the line of our achievement gap almost mirrors exactly the national averages for single parent homes in our country." He continued that as a parent of three children, "I know how difficult it is to give my kids every opportunity that I want them to have."

An African American female principal thinks that, "Black culture sometimes looks at math a little bit differently. It's a lot more practical. So, when students can't apply in a practical way or see a connection to life, they can sometimes stumble." She believes that many Black children need something different than just a math book and/or curriculum provided to teachers in order to make stronger connections. A concerning trend was that some of her teachers focused more on discipline for Black students versus instruction, building relationships via authentic conversation, or redirection, versus mainly feedback about performance and/or behavior. Historically-speaking, "The Black student didn't always fit the mold behavior. They wanted to stand and move around in class."

An Asian female principal believes that too many variables impact student achievement and that there is, "Just so much to unpack around that." A Caucasian female principal asked, "Are they less educated because historically they've been oppressed?" One Caucasian male principal was quick to label it,

> A deep question where there are some factors that we're not allowed to talk about that absolutely influence student outcomes unrelated to race. There's plenty of demographic data out there that says that in American households, Black families are less likely to have two parents.

He acknowledged inherent problems in our system, as well as being ignorant to different backgrounds and circumstances of children throughout his career. "I don't know that schools are inherently racist, but lack cultural proficiency across the board. We need to own the fact that things aren't always equitable due to predominantly White staff looking through their White lens."

A Caucasian male principal added, "The majority of the staff are White. They don't know how to teach Black or Brown students. They think all children learn the same and expect them to learn the same… It takes time to change that." He referenced needing more teachers of color, "More teachers our students can relate to and build those relationships. CP&E only goes so far." He extended that the district has a significant amount of White privilege. One Caucasian male principal noted that Black and Brown students represented a small percentage of his enrollment, thus data can be misleading. He stated, "Home life. Students are responsible for more than just themselves, so homework plays a role." A similar colleague agreed that, "Some of it has to do with a lack of supportive nature of home. I think how our teachers approach their math education is another variable."

Administrators Across the District

The leveling of children in specific math tracks represented the most recurring topic for administrators, with over half of participants discussing referencing district disproportionality data about elementary-to-secondary transitions. The same number outlined the impact of

maintaining high expectations and standards to support a rigorous curriculum. More so, four individuals spoke to bias training and how implicit bias negatively influences learners possessing traits of specific profiles. Three responses reverted to socioeconomic variables, with two addressing historical inequity and instructional practice. One person discussed Pre-Kindergarten programming/enrichment, with one other peer number speaking to data disaggregation associated with personalized learning pathways

One Caucasian male supervisor quickly stated that nobody knows the answer; otherwise, we wouldn't have disproportionate results. "Statistics tell us that Black and Brown students are not only underrepresented in academic profiles, but they're underrepresented in socioeconomic status… There's only so much that a school can control." Through unconscious bias, she wondered if teachers lower expectations and standards for students of color. "High expectations and holding kids accountable are both extremely important." Another Caucasian male director pointed to one piece being expectations, and then compounded by hidden biases. "You see it within that culture's community too, unfortunately. I don't really have evidence to support that... but, maybe it's even more pronounced in certain groups." Yet, a Caucasian female supervisor answered that, "Disproportionality is not a trend unique to our district because of teacher implicit bias and transient populations." She shared being aware, but there was a more urgent need as an organization to move forward to address these issues.

An African American female director attributed concerns to instructional strategies inclusive of relevance, connectivity, and engagement. "There's data that if kids do not start in Kindergarten through second grade with solid math skills, it becomes really clear that the gap just widens." She referenced students who struggle and that their norm remains remedial instruction. "There's nothing fun, exciting, and jazzy about that experience. So, math looks

humdrum." Summer booster opportunities become essential for students at risk, as well as potential tutoring check-ins. Belonging data also helps to ascertain who is feeling comfortable in classes, particularly comfortable taking risks. This feedback is, "Really powerful regarding unintentional comments and body language that gives kids the impression that they're not really supposed to be there, or they're not as capable as other kids… Though not intentional, those messages build over time." Given this outlook, providing the same, common experiences of belonging and varied engagement helps to address students who don't always start out with the same skills.

One Caucasian female director stated that, "Historically, the African American population has done poorly in math…. Curriculum has not been written in a way that's tangible for Black people. Their personal experiences and backgrounds didn't relate to some of the ways that things were displayed." She continued that math is a harder subject and that school is generally difficult. More so,

> Black people aren't going to college to be teachers is because their experience was with a White woman telling them what to do was not good. They've been scarred. So, a combination of their educational experience, coupled with the way that the curriculum is accessible, really probably hindered their achievement.

One Caucasian male director individual stated that expectations emerge unintentionally for many educators due to bias. Once students leave elementary school, their access to higher level courses is limited. He hopes that a new universal gifted screener at the elementary level can help combat current data, as it "Provides equity in that sense to ensure that we're providing those advanced level opportunities for all kids." Another Caucasian male supervisor countered that, "Honestly, if I knew the answer to that, I would be rich." He referenced a comorbid correlation

with both socioeconomic status and race, thus a strong need for teachers to uphold high standards and expectations. In admitting that this approach is not working, he questioned if the district is using the right quantitative measures to place kids into courses to eliminate staff making less judgments based primarily on assessment results. “We try to create classes based on levels or age, not based on kids’ needs or their cognitive level. We need to do a better job meeting individual needs, not trying to fit students into a box.” A similar peer acknowledged frustration in that, “For the most part, many of our traditionally underserved students end up in a track where they can never attain Calculus. They never attain the highest levels of math offered because of what happens before the high school level.”

Stakeholder Perceptions & Shifting Mindsets of School Communities

The time required for PD to be meaningfully commonplace within Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) is essential. An often overlooked aspect influencing productivity is staff buy-in, which can be supported or minimized by community interest. Staff were asked to assess teacher perceptions regarding CP&E, as well as the attitudes and beliefs held by the community and families. Nearly every response strived to tackle the ‘why’ behind PD content often being adversely received from a variety of stakeholders within the organization.

While not directly referenced, various replies alluded to concern about the growing Right to Know Records Requests pertaining to CP&E PD. The district did not provide a specific number, but shared this trend with administrators during the 2023 Summer Leadership Academy. For example, community groups were interested in ascertaining the percentage of PD time dedicated to the topic of CP&E, the professional backgrounds of hired trainers, and the fiscal amount invested in these sessions.

Almost every principal attributed a lack of understanding of the work and the requisite for a district to service a large and diverse population of student needs as areas of impetus. The palpable fear of change and combination of slighted awareness or education fueled such feelings and apprehension in respect to growth and ensuring a sense of belonging.

Principals

A Caucasian male principal openly shared that he, "Doesn't like answering these questions. I just don't know." When reminded that the process is anonymous and he may opt to skip any question, he continued in that he believed CP&E to be overwhelming for his staff and desired an equal focus in respect to PD time invested in entering the second year of a new math curriculum. "They're running with it, learning, and applying it. I do know that parents can call here and they will get results… They know that if something's going on, it will be dealt with." He confided that he does not think people truly understand what CP&E is and that ideas such as White privilege hurt upon first exposure. "I am White, but I wasn't privileged. But over time, listening and learning, it made sense. I think some of the terminology can steer people in the wrong direction… They shut things down or they're scared." There was a feeling of needing to join a journey with others, in addition to the White population being more willing to be disturbed. "It's not meant to degrade who we are. It's meant to help us given the changing population that we have seen," over the past two decades. Another Caucasian female principal believes that PD is a hard entry point, no matter the content. Staff always want more time and feel that CP&E is now another layer. She hesitantly shared, "I don't want to just throw it all into the auspice of CP&E," that half of her staff truly engage in PD where they push to learn and then build opportunities and lessons to utilize in their instructional setting. More so, "Parents are aware of what we're doing," even citizens who are close-minded. "Some people believe it just

shouldn't be in public school. This is probably our biggest barrier – the political piece and the divide is difficult as a country, community, and school district."

An African American female principal shared that staff may write or say something; however, their body language and/or dialogue in a smaller context following the meeting prove contrary. Staff felt like it's, "A checked box, not a continual learning… We have better things that we could be doing." She estimated that about 60% of families were open to CP&E work, but, "Within interactions, they weren't fully comfortable. They robotically repeat things to make it like they are working on themselves." About 20% disagreed with CP&E, plus another 20% that contested it. For example, they would alternate filing Right to Know requests with the district. She expressed that pushback typically arose when families felt the work, especially the ideal of equity, prevented their child from success in contrast to what another student needed and thus received. Within the above 20% who were intentional in hindering CP&E initiatives, she believes that 10% were unrelenting in that, "I need equality, not equity," with another 10% that were "Staunchly racist – not seeing other races as human."

A Caucasian male principal stated that, "Initially, the staff thought it was important, but people have kind of checked out." He cited the emotional effect of the pandemic, as well as the result in increased learning gaps of students entering a new grade each year. The active participation level for PD has simply lessened. His staff was "Hungry for other types of professional development opportunities such as more curriculum-related training and ways of handling behaviors in the classroom." Meanwhile, the school community (the most affluent building out of 13 elementary settings) was fractured by CP&E. "It was bad. I saw it brewing, and tried to bring it to the attention of the district admin. They didn't want to acknowledge that it was going to be an issue." He felt no middle ground within emotionally-and-politically-charged

opinions and equated that pocket of the district to being, “A microcosm of the country. It got nasty and turned parents that were often once friends against each other.” A lack of understanding attributed to his perspective. “White families felt they were being picked on for being White. Black families then felt that White families didn’t care about them. Either way, the community was always pointing the finger.”

Another Caucasian male participant shared that staff shifted from interest in disproportionality statistics to a mantra of, “I get it. I get the point. Let’s get to the part where I can do something about it.” There was a desire to talk less about CP&E and push towards action steps driven by the data presented, the values emphasized, and the learned concepts. He senses frustration within his staff because feedback indicates the message is repetitive, and he hypothesized that presentation could be influencing such. “It’s time to move on with building-based action steps. Each school’s population has their own set of challenges.” He noted a survey conducted with families reflecting that families feel welcome and part of a team, but acknowledged that those with concerns about CP&E work are merely ignorant in that they, “Have that perception that life has always been fair for every group.”

A Caucasian male principal referred to CP&E PD, “Being hardcore. The PowerPoints are all the same. They all have a shtick. It just feels a pre-programmed – the exact same template and emojis, responding via Padlets, turn-and-talks, etc.” He believes these concerns distract from the intended value to learn and dialogue. “It’s becoming trite for too many.” It was estimated that about 40% of the entire district community think CP&E, “Is ridiculous. They can’t see past the CRT stuff.” Meanwhile maybe 20% are undecided or more cautious. He noted fear and denial; influencing people’s opinions. “If you admit that we need to do better, you’re admitting to being racist. Going back to White privilege or unconscious bias, they imply that your thinking is

skewed because of somebody's skin color, ethnic background, and/or religious belief." People are afraid to be associated with problems such as inequity or injustice, or, "They know that their child is benefitting, so why help stop that favorable reality."

An Asian female principal has received staff feedback about the value of gaining historical understanding for all to utilize as a foundation for CP&E work. They also have found fishbowl activities that promote student voice about lived experiences to be helpful from an emotional standpoint. Nonetheless, a contingent of staff, "Are not necessarily getting what central administrators wanted them to get out of the professional development. What teachers want is actual tools of how to do it. I don't think that's been answered for them." From a community perspective, most pushback pertains to inclusive efforts geared towards the LGBTQ community. For instance, replies about religion and/or Science negate to negate the need for the acknowledgement of Pride Month. "There is a complete lack of understanding. Generations of bigotry and narrow-mindedness that run in their family." She also expressed that when additional voices are encouraged that it comes at the expense of others being minimized and/or less welcome.

Another Caucasian male principal feels that his staff are actively seeking to learn and grow within the CP&E framework. "The sticking point is how it transfers to the everyday." As a principal, there is a need to be empathetic towards educators because certain school years are tough, so some staff end up doing, "The easiest thing to get through – they just don't know if they can plan another lesson right now." He added that politics and the current state of our world possess power; however, his school does not have students, "That are actively negative towards someone because of their ethnic background, their race, their gender, or gender interests." Those challenging CP&E in schools are White people. "They're just fearful of change, that their kid's

education might be different than their own, that the demographics of their community are changing, and that we're growing as a society to become more aware and evolve." This contingent is worried about losing power, involvement in education, and that some are being given more opportunities based on need. "When you're doing equitable things for people – those that have had certain things for forever and now have it getting taken away because they honestly don't need it – parents adversely react." A Caucasian male principal shared the mentality of his staff concern about, "Focusing all of our efforts on cultural proficiency and not enough on the actual art of teaching." He strives to keep families informed of the PD and work. Nonetheless, he feels that families recognize that a concerted effort is being made, but don't understand the depth required. "The community does not understand CP&E. A lot of the noise in the news about Critical Race Theory has played too much of a role in it, and it's blurred what it really is."

Administrators Across the District

District-based administrators outlined that CP&E work represents a polarizing topic and one that seems to be politicized. Many concentrated on individuals who sought to detract from the district's values and goals – both within the community, as well as staff. Most shared a palpable feeling within schools of being exhausted and/or disinterested by CP&E work, while many articulated a desire for there to be more time for other initiatives – when in reality, CP&E should already be embedded into training and conversations.

A Caucasian male director emphasized that our country is very polarized and thus either on one side of the conversation or the opposite end. The community, "Gets talking points from the media that they consume. Most people aren't going back-and-forth on the dial either." He asked to defer about his school community and family perceptions about CP&E, and cited the irony behind our PD not equitably addressing the multifaceted learning needed to improve

schools. Another Caucasian male director of similar race feels that staff, as well as the community, remain split. Some people just do not value the premise of PD, while others,

> Think that because they're not overtly biased towards anyone, then that's enough and that everyone should be treated equally… There is a mentality that there's only so much of anything to go around, and if we're giving more to someone, that means less for them… It's part of the colorblind kind of schema."

He continued to share the outlook of too many citizens having no idea what CP&E work is being done since communication with stakeholders is always challenging. "That group doesn't really know what their kids are learning. And then, others will take every opportunity to talk how what we're doing is a disservice… They throw a bunch of rhetoric out there that is baseless."

A Caucasian female supervisor shared that, "For some, it feels like you're devaluing their culture that used to be more at the center of attention. People who don't have experiences outside of their bubble are resistant. They think people are trying to invade it." She believes that many teachers' perceptions about CP&E have been negative. Given the ramifications of the pandemic, they only want to engage in academics and instructional best practice PD. "Once the CP&E work really took center stage, we lost the ability within the district's yearly Professional Development Calendar to target other things. This skewed some people's perceptions of our goals." She feels that the community is slowly embracing CP&E work. "They want to be engaged and to help do the right thing. So, we have to stay connected by getting out into the community… in order that every student in the community is seen, heard, valued, and appreciated."

One Caucasian male supervisor responded that he was disgusted by what is being implemented by teachers in respect to the time and effort invested in CP&E PD. "When you talk about culture, socioeconomic status, gender identity, it hits teachers at a very personal level.

They get very uncomfortable talking about it because it opens them up to be vulnerable." He expressed that without that truth, people are not invested in the PD being provided. "They would just rather be who they are and not be bothered." The district is trying to be more open, more accepting, and more eager to learn about the diversity within the community. He noted that a large portion of the general population is driven by ignorance and creating direct connections to CRT. We are, "Making people feel uncomfortable, because while teaching them, it's also exposing them." He stated that schools are the perfect institutions to minimize ignorance in order to, "Provide global, unbiased, nonjudgmental instruction about different races, cultures, sexual orientations, and gender identities; just so as a global society, our kids grow to be more accepting, empathetic and tolerant." A Caucasian male supervisor contended that the district has moved from mostly having early adopters to 90% buy-in for CP&E work. In regard to the small contingent unchanged by PD, he expressed that, "They get very defensive and hold an attitude that the phase will pass. There are pockets of teachers who feel that this isn't the work that we should be doing." He believes that there is a, "Larger, social, cultural war going on between a left and a right perspective playing out in the community." With this recognition, he sees value in the district's elected officials embracing CP&E philosophies in order to showcase measurable, culturally-relevant goals and remain committed to the importance of partnership. More than ever before in his career, he sees, "A very vocal minority that uses the pulpit of a public school board meeting to drive their own agenda through an intentional – and almost attacking manner – but, only view it from their perspective. It's often lumped-in with CRT then." This admin believes that in a broad sense, a loss of power and social capital, that has existed for a long time, is being threatened. "Norms that have benefited particular groups of people are being challenged and questioned. The privilege and access taken for granted is being challenged, so people feel that

they're losing control." He extended that this reality taps into individuals' insecurities, thus exuding a mindset of rejecting CP&E. "Hey, school, get back in your lane in a sense and not deal with these issues – let them be dealt with at home. They feel that the school's role is becoming too large in their children's lives."

A Caucasian female director feels that many staff believe that CP&E is not the utmost priority when their instructional focus is driven by Special Education constructs, or content-specific standards aligned with ELA, Math, and Science. She believes that community opinion does not provide an accurate depiction. "It's the same old adage that you only hear from the loud people. The squeaky wheel gets the oil." For example, if approximately 2,200 students have an IEP, less than 30 families typically attend community conversation events – and that majority share a full-inclusion mindset. Additionally, "People don't believe it's the school or the workplace's place to tell you how to or feel about culture proficiency and equity." In an educational organization where you are representing every student, it's your job to ensure representation for different socio-economics, disability/ability, race, gender, ethnicity, and backgrounds. A Caucasian male director agreed that there is a cohort of staff that question, "Why do we need to keep hearing about equity… It's meaningful work, but there might be more relevant things in their mind that we could be doing during that time." CP&E is a, "Highly politicized topic this day and age across the country. Vocal people come out, especially when they strongly believe in a platform." For topics of race, gender, ethnicity, and disability, the data reflects a need, so, "Why leave it up to that group of people to get better – because schools should be supporting them?"

An African American female director shared that when it comes to PD, staff need to believe that the topic is of interest and relevant, or represents an area that is not strong. "So, we

try to have a unifying theme: our 'why.' The idea of getting conversations back to instruction and its impact has been helpful." CP&E represents, "A lot of inside out work." It's vital to connect theories and conceptual frameworks to a teacher's classroom impact." Explaining the importance of CP&E is hard due to the need to less frequently attack it in isolation and weave it into so many components within schools.

> The goal is to make sure that kids see themselves and feel really valued in their experiences. We need to be mindful of families who believe students are missing out on something due to the idea of talking about race, class, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation. If we're now giving attention to this, that means that now my child is being made to feel badly about who they are.

She added that some members of the community simply cannot relate and it is evident by their unwillingness to dialogue. Some people don't want to consider what it feels like to not be part of the majority, because they have not been, "In a situation that's uncomfortable, or they're not really sure how to navigate things." CP&E is about shifting the frame in, "How we interact and talk" with staff, students, and families. There is a need to design opportunities to be reflective. "The notion of belonging and dignity – what that looks like. It doesn't feel as offensive. When staff aren't doing the right thing, now they don't feel like they're being told that they are racist or homophobic."

Per one Caucasian female supervisor, "Many people believe that school is for school – a place to learn how to read, write, and do math." She equated CP&E to social/emotional learning, but the reality of the nation being polarized and on opposite ends of the political spectrum's conflicting ideologies. "They're not letting go, for whatever reason, of Critical Race Theory and transgender themes… And that is part of our community, too, since we're so large and diverse."

She noted CP&E progress being a gradual process and a shared journey of commitment – one that, unfortunately, not every stakeholder is apt to join. “Whatever way that you slice it, we’re diverse language wise, and in terms of socioeconomics, race, and ethnicity. In order to be an effective classroom teachers, staff needs to understand that.” She shared that working with consultants for delivery of PD has yielded an improvement in respect to both engagement and subsequent understanding. To ensure quality, “PD for a thousand people, you need a lot of facilitators. We need to improve the staff’s comfort level in facilitating” our district’s direction and values. “It’s a lens that we look through everything. It’s not another thing. But, the time aspect is something that’s always going to be a challenge.” Her reply noted that the world is not a utopia, so the priority remains gaining favor within the community in relation to who is on board. That results in less focus on fervent distractors and detractors, as well as appreciation for, “Passionate School Board members willing to listen, and push back when people speak out.”

Uniqueness within Diversity and the Conceptual Understanding of Race

Interviewees were asked to professionally define diversity and its impact on their leadership. Additionally, a working definition of race was requested and followed via inquiry if they felt that it was feasible to eliminate racial disparities within a public education setting. Across the district, 85% of participants provided multiple examples of aspects of diversity. In striving to define race, nine participants (69%) did not provide a specific answer and probing was needed. Of those individuals, five pushed the conservation further, while four others either remained uncomfortable or stated they really did not know. In all, 38% believed that racial disparities could not be eradicated, with another 38% remaining unsure or believing such could only be accomplished to a limited extent.

Principals

The initial response from an Asian female principal was that diversity applies to anyone who is not part of a school's majority culture. She emphasized that a child's family dynamic potentially bears similar influence in comparison to race, ethnicity, and gender. For race, it is composed of individual backgrounds such as where you are from and how you self-identify. "For me, both of my parents are Indian. I'm Asian; I'm from India. My husband is Caucasian; he's American – part Italian, part English. And for my kids, however, they want to identify themselves." There remained an attribution to conversation and crafting practices around a building's unique enrollment, especially needing commitment and cohesiveness. While hopeful that racial disparities can be reduced, versus eliminated, she could not confidently agree.

A Caucasian female principal sees connections between diversity and different cultures, religions, and backgrounds. "It's really important that we hire, retain, and celebrate teachers that look like our diverse students." She believes race to be an evolving term due to religious, regional, and dialect variables. As an example, she spent years labeling her friend African American while unknowingly hurting her by not recognizing her Haitian heritage. Instead, she was just seeing her skin color through an, "Overarching umbrella term that didn't consider culture." A desire to eliminate racial disparities in terms of academic performance was exuded, but with caution because, "Culture is inherent, so it shouldn't really even be a disparity." She pointed out seeking to understand where children are coming from and allowing them to see themselves within literature.

One Caucasian male principal strives to not place students into groups. "True respect for diversity is looking at every student as an individual." He expressed that commonalities between upbringing and backgrounds do not yield similar feelings. "It's not just culture or race, but achievement and Special Needs influences that factor into moving them forward." In referencing

race, this admin referenced skin color, origin, culture, and heritage. He was steadfast in that racial disparities can be eliminated. “It is not just a school problem, it’s a society problem. There are a lot of theories on why it’s happening; some of our subgroups are underperforming and overperforming.” He does not believe that systems are in place that are set-up unfairly. “Every system creates exactly what it’s designed to create – some intentional, some unintentional.” Data should tell leaders why it’s happening and that the complexity of our educational system – buildings linked to the community, up towards the state and national levels – reflect significant barriers. “I don’t even know if some things that we’re doing right now are good moves in changing the system. Giving people handouts… Keeping a family together, that family structure is a key to academic success and life success.”

Another Caucasian male principal cited that different backgrounds produce diversity within the confines of culture, intellect, and socioeconomics. To remove barriers to equitable access for all, leaders must, “Push people along on the continuum to be more culturally-proficient and recognize differences.” He outlined that a textbook definition of race involves DNA, but society’s inclination is to place people into classifications such a Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, and Asian Pacific Island.

> It’s taken on more legs than originally defined, but then even from a Science standpoint, it doesn’t even exist. So, I can’t answer that question other than from an organizational standpoint or societal standpoint. We have classifications that dictate what those different racial groups are.”

His stance toward the importance of CP&E efforts is that its priority enables leaders to combat racial disparities. “You can’t totally wipe that out across the board, but that doesn’t mean we can’t get better.”

One Caucasian male principal stated he never considered needing to define race. “I guess it’s super simple, but yet it’s incredibly complex.” He added that race categorizes people. “Hundreds of years ago it started and we unfortunately pushed the ball down the hill and there’s no way of stopping it. It either prohibits you or it includes you, which it shouldn’t.” Regarding diversity, he pinpointed it’s about recognizing differences such as how a child is raised and exposed to things prior to coming to, as well as outside of, school.

> How I see something or what decision I make, someone’s going to come about it from a a little bit of a different way, and that’s okay. I think to ask a lot more of what people’s opinions are then maybe I used to in the past.”

He added that disproportionality is ingrained in ways people do not even realize. “They’re doing the best that they can, and yet there are still things that they’re doing that are implicitly biased.” As such, he thinks it is possible, but not likely, that racial disparities can be eliminated in public education.

Another Caucasian male principal, referenced the current state of our country and people needing to be strong to have courageous conversations about race and trying to improve understanding people’s differences that reflect diversity. “Equity is about giving everybody the chance to succeed, whether it’s Special Education, intervention, or enrichment.” He believes that eliminating racial disparities is possible, but society cannot 100% eliminate anything. “It’s exciting that we are taking a strong lead within the state, or at least this region, in what we’re doing with CP&E. We’re making some great strides.”

Administrators Across the District

An African American female director was ardent in that racial disparities can be eradicated from public education, but questioned the complete commitment from everyone. “We

need to dismantle barriers that create disparity… we must challenge ourselves and that is the hard part." She defined race as a construct that allows us to define each other by skin color and culture. "And so, what is a race here in the United States is not if you're in South Africa and other countries." She referenced historical contexts of race encompassing power and marginalized groups. "Race is an identity that shapes experiences and the ways in which many of us navigate the world." In respect to diversity, it pertains to differences amongst people. It represents an accessibility lens and seeks to understand how children experience school. "We need to come back to our students – who they are, what they need – and the ways in which our choices around materials, instructional practices, classroom environments, and school culture ultimately shape those experiences."

A Caucasian female supervisor broke diversity down into neurodiversity, in addition to racial, ethnic, gender, and socioeconomics. "You can't do anything without thinking about our different communities." In regard to race, the Caucasian reply was that it posed, "A loaded question… We acknowledge that race is a thing and different from other types of diversity because it walks into the room. Race is different from gender or ethnicity; it's its own separate thing." She added that race relations in America add a different layer because of a historical context such as exclusion or segregation. "We don't want to further divide and provide students with less opportunities, particularly those that historically have been marginalized. I think that's the challenge of the work and evaluating data. We want it to trend in the right direction."

One reply from a Caucasian female supervisor highlighted the need to consider multiple perspectives to, "Ensure that each person is valued and appreciated" within decision-making processes. As such, leadership teams should feature diversity in respect to race and gender. She defined race as, "What's in your DNA," and being biologically-defined as humans. "It isn't just

who we are, but it's also what we do and bring to the conversation to provide a greater perspective." She noted the struggle in overseeing 13 grade levels, thus trying to balance feedback from staff. Nonetheless, she articulated that racial disparities cannot be eliminated. As such, leaders can, "Deal with our own assumptions and perceptions," particularly to experiences outside of a school setting. For her, it's about schools impacting the community and then local communities influencing each other – to which, support is essential from local government.

A Caucasian male director described race as the most evident difference that people can see. "At first glance, you can make generalizations on the race of someone based on a visual representation." He stated that diversity is found in countless ways, so leaders have to be mindful to target a wide variety of thoughts and backgrounds to have a sense of what is occurring in the organization. "We have to ensure that everybody feels like they belong." However, racial disparities cannot be eliminated, because "All educators and stakeholders are not always in it for the right reason… The real truth is we're all humans and it's like saying we will one day have a hundred percent of students and practitioners who are advanced." He continued that it does not mean that eradication should not be the goal and students cannot be viewed as a lost cause. "Expanding growth mindsets improves things for kids… making sure we're taking folks from where they are now to someplace closer."

Another Caucasian male supervisor discussed race as being multi-faceted components of what makes you a person. To ensure continued contributions, people need to feel valued. "Kids must understand and feel that they're unique… the diversity that students, the community, bring to a building that value has to be embraced to maintain different perspectives on how they contribute to the larger school community." Race was linked to the color of one's skin and how society defines groups and subsequently generates profiles. He added that while "doable," in

order to eliminate racial disparities, it takes a committed and systematic approach led by courageous individuals. “Disparities are rooted in having to share access and privilege. And the more you do that, the harder it gets.” More so, it requires a multi-year commitment to first acknowledge, then plan, to decrease data-driven disparities.

A Caucasian male supervisor wanted to point out that our country’s laws and beliefs are founded on Eurocentrism. “There are laws and history that have prevented equal access to public education, and it’s going to take a long time for us as a nation to recognize that. It is very political – not only racial, but socioeconomic.” He extended that city schools in this country are impacted by funding and quality of teachers.

> Historically, it’s hard for individuals that live in those pockets to get out. How is that ever going to change unless something globally changes, and I don’t see that happening. There’s a lot of immigration that goes into that, too… Coming to us with lower socioeconomics and poor education.

He added that although being resource-rich in the district, plenty of children are disadvantaged yet unjustly compared. Despite being a self-described lifelong learner with a military background, he desires to grow in his journey to understand the impact of social, emotional, ethnic, religious, and gender backgrounds. “If you don’t have a strong understanding of who you are as a person and identify your personal biases, it’s hard to be an effective, empathetic leader because you don’t know the people that you are supporting or leading.” In terms of race, this admin specified accounting for where a person originated, but not being defined by that. Instead, it’s about one’s culture and background, even if categorized as Caucasian, African American, Brown, or Asian.

Another Caucasian male director broke down diversity into facets of race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, and culture. He referenced desiring to know what is important to a family and what is unique about cultural identity. For race, he highlighted its relevance to who we associate with and how we identify. “I guess to put it bluntly, it’s the color of our skin. Nothing more complicated than that.” The participant stated that all racial disparities, aside from enrollment, can be equitably-altered by removal within our educational system.

The Pervasive Nature of Whiteness

The definition of Whiteness was examined in a qualitative manner, while jointly pursuing its presence and role in their professional work.

Principals

An Asian female principal associated Whiteness with the majority culture. “Whiteness is being born and bred in America.” She sees teachers bring their Whiteness into the classroom, but is more frustrated by a lack of awareness in trying to see others’ perspectives. As a result, judgment stems from their upbringing, how they were raised, what they experienced, and their beliefs. A Caucasian female principal correlated Whiteness with being privileged and a stronger likelihood of having an advantage and/or opportunity. “People don’t want to admit that it’s real, but it’s innate – we were founded on it. There are White males running our country and they always have. We are trying to dissolve that business of Educational America.” For her, the focus is about discovering what other people go through, especially when it represents a new reality.

A Caucasian male principal shared frustration in how the ideal is used and misconceptions. He noted that affluent White people are more apt to benefit from privilege (and asserted that some opportunities may have been earned by family members) in comparison to poor Whites. “When I hear the term Whiteness, I know what people are trying to get to. I don’t

like it; it groups diverse humans into one broad category. Whether a skin color matches yours or doesn't, people are not the same." He believes it is dangerous to make blanket statements about White people, because you cannot do that fairly for African American or Asian populations.

Another Caucasian male principal noted the advantages of being White in our society, but did not see or understand what Whiteness means. He has been inclined to become defensive. "It is part of that construct where I do benefit from being White. I do benefit from being male, especially from a leadership standpoint and doors that have been opened because of those pieces." As a result, he recognized the need to find ways to make opportunities more equitable. "It's hard to look at the data and say, 'we've got a problem." Another Caucasian male principal sees a link between Whiteness and appearance, but without considering language, background, upbringing, or culture, people miss important aspects of an individual. He admitted being benefited by being White and that the societal problem is embedded in our country's history. "It's something we're trying to overcome, but we're obviously not making nearly as much progress because those that are White, that are in power, are the ones that are trying to make sure that it doesn't occur." One Caucasian male participant said that he never thought of Whiteness and it doesn't affect him.

> Whether you're Black, blue, green, purple, red, it doesn't change my perspective on what I'm going to do with that student. So, I acknowledge different colors and cultures, but my objective is making sure that children feel safe and welcome. That is not going to change based on Whiteness… I also don't want to say I don't see color, because you have to see color.

Administrators Across the District

An African American female director defined Whiteness as people who are not of color. "They share a pretty similar broad stroke experience." She added that society normalizes school based on the experiences of middle class White kids and teachers, and that kind of becomes the norm. A Caucasian female supervisor added her belief that White colleagues view her differently in comparison to African American or Asian peers. "I have to be mindful of making sure that my experiences as a White female aren't generalized." A Caucasian interviewee of like gender articulated that White is not always going to be the majority and demographics are changing each year. Awareness is crucial to a collective group. She expressed frustration, but yet an omnipresent reality of White fragility within a book study. "Certain behaviors or tropes would be called out. People have an inclination to become defensive, sensitive, and seek to justify."

Another Caucasian male director stated that Whiteness means considering the role that race plays. "Your race is the first thing people know and see about you… I do know there's a perception of a 40-ish year old White guy, heterosexual, that could lead to perceptions of certain things from certain folks." Another Caucasian male supervisor went deeper in that societal structures reflect a power base and privilege connected to access. The more you appear White, the more likely you are to garner that benefit. He noted that there is a gender component of Whiteness that compels him to be more open-minded and intentional about unconscious bias. "There is an inability for me to understand experiences that others have had because of my Whiteness. I haven't experienced as many violations of dignity." He recalled a disciplinary situation a few years ago where he felt the need to escort the Black student involved to his bus at the end of the day to avoid more potential physical conflict. However, he then sent the White student to his bus independently. This admin questioned why – was there more at bay behind that decision, what message did that send to staff and students, and how the experience of that child

could impact future belonging, trust, and/or stigma. “It’s not guilt or shame, it’s just to be reflective as a leader about how my decisions may be different because of my level of Whiteness.”

A Caucasian male director stated that the majority of the population is White. He believes Whiteness is, “Promoted to ensure they can make the rules and benefit. Whiteness remains evident in rules, regulations, and policies that have been written by the government – by White people – to support White people and prevent others from having access.” Another individual identifies as Caucasian, male, Catholic, and heterosexual. He objects to the categorical term of Whiteness and contends its use is negative. “I willingly say there are aspects of being a White male that absolutely provide me with advantages in society. I also think that as a White male, in certain respects, that it’s a detriment.”

Beliefs about Antiracist Approaches

The premise of leaders in all positions across the district learning, then seeking to support, an anti-racist outlook has been incorporated into CP&E PD. Participants were asked about their understanding of this tool, as well as to explain its significance to the district in respect to being embedded as an analytical tool to facilitate conversation.

Principals

A total of five principals were unable to define antiracism. It was shared by 55% of participants that it demands leaders to step up to address and take action in the moment, or be actively working towards measurable change. One third believed that anti-racism requires self-reflection, followed by courageous conversations, while two people felt that individuals either cannot, or will not, change. Other replies referenced a need to be bold and feel supported to do

so. Only one reply directly referenced teaching, while another individual shared a feeling of being labeled and possibly pitting people against one other.

A Caucasian male principal stated that, “Being anti-racist is to actively point out racist behavior and make an effort to change it.” He shared that anti-racism PD came at a controversial time, so the district has been poignant in not following-up much about it. Another Caucasian male principal replied that, “We’re not changing anybody’s beliefs. If you’re racist, then you’re racist.” He added that our focus needs to be on educating staff in order to alter their instructional practice.

Another Caucasian male principal referenced author Abraham Kendi in his connection to antiracism. “It’s really taken on its own direction from a societal standpoint.” He noted that most people have not been challenged to intentionally look at race and situations from an equity lens.

> People contribute to the problem by omission. But, it pits everybody who hasn’t necessarily been forced to think differently and dialogue against each other. It puts them in a basket of them being racist, which I think is irresponsible of us as a society because it becomes divisive and it further puts a wall up to hear different people’s stories that could be pushed along the continuum to reflect.

He continued that the premise intends to spur action when encountering issues that are overtly racist.

An Asian female principal equated an anti-racist outlook to not being inclusive. “It’s about standing up for those who may not have a voice, or being mistreated, with an active voice to lessen our number of passive learners.” A Caucasian male principal indicated that being anti-racist represents the next step beyond being culturally proficient. “It’s really having the guts to call it like you see it and recognizing when things are not fair. It is saying it and then standing up

for that." He expressed it being easy to address actions that are not kind and fair as a leader. "Being anti-racist is taking a step further and saying, I've got to make sure that doesn't happen in my building or in my world."

A Caucasian female principal shared that there is a negative connotation, but that its genesis pertains to inclusivity and not treating people differently. She believed that the district models the practice of anti-racism well, but was unable to define it. An African American female principal expanded in that the theory places action behind what someone does (or decides to not address through avoidance). "Anti-racism is really saying, I don't like racism. I don't like practices or systems that lead to racism, and I'm going to do what's needed to dismantle it, to call it out, and to make changes to improve." She felt that the school board displayed a habit of working their way around certain words, particularly anti-racism, during public sessions. This notion doesn't make her feel supported as a building leader. "Our superintendent is against racism, but struggled because of not wanting to deal with community backlash. But, many Americans are scared of publicly supporting anti-racism and mobilizing for change." She believes in her fellow principals actively trying to do something because they see issues, but lack the support to fully do so.

One Caucasian male principal cited a need to actively search inwards when encountering racism. "The anti-racist part is what can you do to make sure that it stops occurring. It's not necessarily always actively fighting against things, but awareness about your own views." He added that anti-racism requires mental, emotional, and spiritual factors. Another Caucasian male principal made a correlation of anti-racism encompassing implicit bias.

> We need to elevate others of different backgrounds to establish teachable moments that build community. That requires acknowledging differences. We see a tremendous amount

of people saying, 'Well, I'm not racist… I don't see color.' At one time, I said that, too.

Administrators Across the District

The most prevalent attitude expressed by district-based administrators was that anti-racism requires action. Most people discussed the principle in a generalized fashion, with two individuals citing examples of such. Over half of replies connected anti-racism to the district's equity policy, for four leaders emphatic in that there is a need to collectively push towards calling attention to equity issues aligned with race. Two responses denoted that it represents a controversial topic, including one person who identified the requisite of educating all stakeholders – particularly community members. With that, one individual within the group was not able to define anti-racism, with two peers sharing inaccuracies within its definition and practice.

A Caucasian female supervisor believes that an anti-racist outlook refers to an individual not wanting to engage in any kind of awareness through CP&E work. For example, people unwilling to recognize subgroups within district and school demographics that experience barriers that others do not. "Anti-racist outlooks don't make blanket statements about certain subgroups." Meanwhile, a Caucasian male supervisor proffered that being an anti-racist is, "An intentional choice about policies and procedures that disenfranchise other groups, and then actively working against it." He shared a mindset of not being a bystander and being compliant in allowing for inequities in education to continue. "Because of the semantics and language, I don't think you would ever see the district use the phrase because it's got baggage attached to it."

A Caucasian female supervisor believes that components of the district's equity policy link to anti-racism because it mandates action. "We can have beliefs, but if we don't have actions tied to those beliefs, then we're not doing anything about it." A Caucasian male director

colleague added, “You’re either a racist because you’re ignorant of one’s culture or background, or you’re an anti-racist. You can’t be both.” He shared that sitting back and doing nothing is being racist. When schools know that populations are oppressed, which is frequently exhibited by achievement data, leaders need to decide to, “Either be part of the problem or part of the solution.” Another Caucasian male supervisor stated that antiracism, “Dovetails with color blindness. It’s not just stating that everybody should be the same, but specifically fighting back against racism and calling out policies, procedures, and practices that are racist or biased towards a certain group.” He sees it as a way to battle and facilitate the district’s obligation of addressing unconscious bias.

One Cacucasian male supervisor equated antiracism to how people term things and is inherently fixated in CP&E work.

> You have a contingent of people who don’t believe that it’s the school’s job to necessarily teach anti-racism. But, if you believe that schools need to support lifelong learners and make meaningful members of society, then it falls in line with morals and goals that we should be teaching kids.

He added that it’s ultimately about creatively cultivating meaningful teaching that is age-appropriate for kids. Another Caucasian female supervisor outlined that, “We would never want any student to feel less than those around them – whether it be their color of their skin, the way they learn, the place they live, or how they get to school every day.” She highlighted creating a sense of belonging in an array of school environments. “It’s about the knowledge that’s out there to educate people to make informed decisions,” and stressed the necessity to better understand personal bias. It was noted that in educating individuals, there needs to be a willingness to dialogue and acknowledge race.

An African American female director articulated that anti-racism represents a notion to be more action-oriented. “What are the choices that we’re making, the actions that we’re engaged in, that are showing our courage and our steps towards racism… It’s about having courage to get up and say something is not okay.” In her decision-making position, she needs to be discriminated against and not make the easiest choice. More so, the action, the engagement, is really the crux. For example, she admires how the district doesn’t say that they support the LGBTQ community, but acknowledges its presence in the student body. “Raising the pride flag outside of our district administrative building, encouraging staff to put stickers of the rainbow on their classroom door, to give a safe space for students to meet – that’s the action.” A Caucasian male director shared that, “An anti-racist outlook requires a tacit understanding to be proactive in one’s embrace of equity. It’s okay to say something and take the next step.” He contends that it is teachers’ foremost job to influence all aspects of students’ lives. Furthermore, educators cannot know that they’re not racist within engaging decision-making about programming and procedures that govern schools.

Unconscious Bias in Aspects of the Organization

Of those participating in interviews, the most common theme that emerged was its presence in classrooms, particularly how teachers socially interact and formally plan/instruct to address student needs. Of those possessing a district position, two thirds reference a disparity between the secondary and elementary levels. For example, many upper teachers justify their work as being a teacher of higher level content such as Algebra or Chemistry, versus an educator for all students. Of the full group, 10 participants specifically generalized forging relationships with learners and being reflective about one’s own experiences driving opportunities for ongoing connections. Additionally, over half of principals stressed seeking to consider others’

circumstances, specifically their culture and language needs, when interacting with families. A similar mindset was shared in respect to hiring, but was more frequent for those with district roles.

Principals

In the Summer of 2022, participants were asked if they believed that staff in elementary buildings possessed an awareness of, and a way to minimize, unconscious bias? One principal stated yes – with that Caucasian male principal not providing additional detail. Three responses were a resounding 'no,' while five other replies indicated a partial understanding and/or ability.

Participants shared more confidence stemming from awareness of unconscious bias, versus actively minimizing such. It's notable that one's race influenced replies. For example, the lone African American female principal in the study indicated a need for staff growth upon her arrival, specifically, "Calling it out and naming it when it would come up in a meeting." She felt it incumbent upon her – given both her leadership role and race – to push people to become more comfortable and vulnerable pertinent to thinking about children of marginalized groups and shared perceptions of a family. She did not feel her staff held a shared mindset in working to mitigate bias, because they did not have the tools to do so and referenced administrative training that she viewed as a direct result of Human Resources implementing requisite training for those on interview panels. Her frustration was fueled by students providing her feedback in terms of how they felt teachers treated them. With that, the same adults utilized the Union to defend their practice and claim administrative harassment versus engaging in a growth mindset about a lack of cultural responsiveness fueled by bias.

Another Caucasian male principal articulated that their staff possessed the awareness, but that, "There is not a way to actively undo unconscious bias." He maintained the belief that it

must be an active work in progress and priority. “It’s pretty easy to talk about it in a setting, and then within the next week, you forget about it and you go back to old habits.” Another Caucasian male principal shared the sentiment that is was the significant to have a relatable starting point in order to realize it’s something that everyone has ingrained in them – no matter where their heart is – and, in order to recognize that and be reflective, a leader must strive to, “Keep that in the back of your mind in order to treat people fairly.” Another Caucasian male principal shared an outlook that understanding of bias demands a depth of knowledge, specifically that, “Much it is recognizing White privilege. It was hard for me to first wrap my head around what White privilege is” due to growing up poor and relating to the stigma of needing a free lunch ticket when he attended school.

Four principals felt that as a district there is a need to receive more training. In particular, there remains a need to consistently be reflective about ongoing/future practice as a focal point in order to apply a concept/definition versus knowing it exists. One of the four principals felt that about half of their staff felt targeted by the premise of unconscious bias and that they seemed to exert more energy into defending their practice and/or refuting the existence in contrast to having courageous conversations about such. For example, “It’s not about ‘those kids;’ they’re your kids, too; they’re all our kids in each class. Essentially, too many staff combatted the fact that they did not have, “A handle on their unconscious biases, and telling people that they are aware.”

Overall, two principals expressed an awareness of biases that can be directly attributed to CP&E training and PD. With that, two interviewees specifically referenced core components of the aforementioned bias training via definitions, examples, referencing group exercises, or hypothetical scenarios. No one delved into defining unconscious bias and how such can potentially be applied.

Administrators Across the District

One Caucasian male director stated that staff remain aware about unconscious bias; however, do not possess the skills and/or training to minimize such. He candidly noted, "I can't comment on the latter though; I couldn't tell you that." An African American female director concurred with being aware due to recent PD efforts; yet it remains an area where growth is needed – "A work in progress how we check ourselves." She questioned comfortability to engage in the work and feels that striving for ideals such as belonging and dignity exemplify stronger entry points for conversation and learning. She continued,

> How do we acknowledge it – not beat ourselves up about it – but continue to grow? I think that's the error. I think when we say we did something that's not okay, people are going to think we're a racist. That's just not the case. We're all doing the best we can. We're all trying to do what we can to get better at it. But I think we have to be willing to honestly say, 'this is hard for me,' or 'I don't understand.'

A Caucasian female supervisor believes that they know the definition of unconscious bias, but don't fully recognize their own bias such as microaggressions. She believes the work is important, because, "Each generation is fixing it; you're not seeing it or hearing it." Her response focused on access and opportunities for the LGBTQ community, "Becoming more accepted, which is fabulous."

One Caucasian male director guaranteed that all staff have been trained on the topic, but they, "Do not take to heart and need to really think about more to grasp how it impacts them." He contended that commitment is lacking in certain buildings. Another Caucasian male supervisor agreed that awareness of unconscious bias is present, saying,

> I think we all understand. We've all been trained. We've talked about it… So, we could

> probably do a better job of finding a mechanism or a way to keep that in front of folks in their daily practice. I don't think we've institutionalized a way to check your unconscious bias.

Another Caucasian male supervisor countered that there is some awareness, but minimal in regard to, "Unintentional biases." More so, they lack a skill set to attack the issue.

Within another response, a Caucasian female supervisor believes that, "Teachers are very genuine" and possess an awareness. Conversely, they do not have capacity. She feels that love and high expectations in the classroom serve to minimize barriers as it will yield feelings of respect, admiration, safety, being welcome, etc. The reply associated the power of these classroom environment characteristics leading to great instruction. Meanwhile, a male Caucasian director acknowledged PD on the concept of implicit bias, but the results were not evident on a daily basis. He added that the majority of teachers would say that they are not biased and do not have bias within their practice because they don't really know what it is. "They don't listen to how they talk or they don't understand the kids that they're talking to." A Caucasian female director confirmed the awareness and expressed a desire to have it more recently revisited as a reminder. She referenced staff turnover due to the pandemic, but also believed that newer teachers receive this education and/or training within their undergraduate coursework. There was a recognition of, "A superficial level of implicit bias and how it impacts their interactions with students, their instruction with students, and needing to pause to reflect – rather than reacting, not going off those initial judgments."

Within the district-based group, seven expressed an awareness of biases that can be directly attributed to CP&E training and PD. With that, two interviewees referenced a core

component of bias training via definitions, examples, or referencing group exercises/scenarios. Zero participants defined unconscious bias or exemplified its possible application.

Attitudes Influencing Inclusive Practices

One of the most vocal parent groups in the district revolves around inclusion. In preparation for the 2023-24 school year, CP&E expanded to Cultural Proficiency, Equity, and Inclusion (CPE&I). Leaders were asked their opinion regarding inclusion in public education and its effectiveness. The most common topics were its staffing implications, service delivery models, the force behind the practice, and a negative stigma surrounding inclusion. Most individuals (77%) responded that inclusion represents a needed and powerful construct. However, every individual ended up employing a 'yes, but' statement.

Half of district-based admin believe inclusion is becoming a forced practice, with one third denoting staffing constraints minimizing student outcomes. Principals agreed with 66% believing it's being forced, and half stressing staffing limitations. In all, 83% of individuals holding district posts, versus 33% of principals, spoke to the nuances of service delivery models being oft-overlooked. Some principals felt that they did not have a voice in inclusive practices, as the model is universally thrust upon every elementary building.

Principals

An Asian female principal stated that she doesn't understand the inclusive model expected for the district. "It's on paper, but then we're stuck with a consultative model of one Special Ed teacher supporting three grade levels." She noted that too many students are pushed towards pullout direct instruction, especially by parents – which creates a scheduling and staffing strain. This is compounded by teachers frequently holding a negative outlook about inclusion – one that reaps an unspoken responsibility for student support for IEP children versus General

Education peers determined by one's job title. A Caucasian female principal referenced specific students who are thriving after being included in various aspects of the day. "It's tailored to individual needs, but too many people put an umbrella on inclusionary practices. For some, it's minimal inclusion and then building out."

A Caucasian male principal was deliberate in that, "You have to have a willing, strong-skilled educator in front of that class." He stated that in other instances, pulling a child from the General Education setting slows their pace versus having them persevere in closing gaps. "For some students, being in an inclusive classroom is completely overwhelming." He emphasized adherence to LRE on a case-by-case basis. "Sadly, I don't think we have the time, desire, and knowledge, to take that deep of a look with every student." Another Caucasian male principal referenced inclusion being a moral dilemma for him. "The primary years are so critical. And when that certain student is tearing up the classroom – the parents are not very supportive or on board – other kids are leaving classrooms and missed instructional time mounts due to evacuating rooms." He added that the internal struggle is fueled by a continuum that remains subjective in terms of data, and the frequency/duration for implementing potential interventions. "So, it's critical to have inclusion, but I also think it's really cumbersome for the educational system and oftentimes we pull the plug when the damage has already been done to the many others."

Another Caucasian male principal continued the trend of being reserved with inclusion. He mentioned some students being averse to classroom stimuli or benefitting from individualized instruction. Plus, "The federal and the state budgets won't allow us to fund full inclusion… I think it's a politicized idea because that's what people want to hear. I just don't think that our educational system can actually adequately support it." Another Caucasian male principal feels

there is more support at the secondary level in contrast to options at the elementary level. “We don’t have academic support classrooms, other resources where our children can go when they’re not succeeding. We have co-teachers, but what are they going to do? They have other students on their caseload that they’re responsible for, too.”

Administrators Across the district

A Caucasian female supervisor believes in inclusion because, “It works, and it’s necessary.” She discussed the need for a child’s experience to personify effective inclusion, versus just the physical location. With that, smaller class sizes and more adult support are essential to manage structures and routines. “You can’t force people into inclusion and you can’t force people out of inclusion either.” A lack of staffing represents a common detractor plaguing inclusive practices, as well as shared planning time. An African American female director stressed that inclusion cannot be universally applied because some low incident and behaviorally-challenged students may struggle. “We have to look at kids’ needs with the intent of them being included as much as possible.” She likened remediation to close gaps outside of the General Education classroom via direct reading instructional intervention as a bridge. Cautioning against pull-out practices was noted because the end result is, “Them not having access to the same conversation and interactions. In an attempt to help kids, we inadvertently paralyze them.”

A Caucasian male supervisor stated faith in inclusive practices, but is wary of assuming every child benefits from this option. In addition to the Special Education student, “It can be powerful from the standpoint of the Regular Education student.” He discussed unified sports programs yielding regular interactions and friendship bonds. Another Caucasian male supervisor of the same race and gender pointed to the research behind access to services in a General Ed

setting. He spoke to the notion of belonging and being valued, in addition to the continuum of prospects. “To some degree, parents have a big influence on their desired outcomes for their children. So, it’s important to embrace that partnership.”

A Caucasian female director attributed an inclusive mindset to meeting the needs of children that are part of the community. She likened their support to be part of the district’s emphasis on diversity. A colleague of her race spoke to the value behind co-teaching and there being a need for no delineation of roles in terms of instructional delivery. He stressed the staffing implications behind such scheduling and offerings. Yet, another Caucasian male director disagreed. “I think that the inclusion movement, like many other things, has gone too far in one direction. It’s an overcorrection to a problem.” He blames a lack of thoughtful implementation for such. “I’ve seen situations where it’s harmful to the student – and other students, frankly – and it’s being promoted, pushed, implemented because of an agenda either on the parent’s part or the school district.”

CRT as a Framework for Enhanced Understanding

District administrators have reviewed literature regarding Critical Race Theory. In doing so, tenets for crossover in regard to CP&E initiatives have been discussed, in addition to background on its evolution. Leaders were asked what they thought of when hearing the term CRT, as well as their understanding of its use in schools.

Principals

The majority of principals were unable to define CRT (six in total), while even more shared uncertainty surrounding the tool. Furthermore, 88% of responses outlined that CRT is not applicable and/or being utilized in elementary schools. There was shared sentiment by 66% of participants that CRT is extremely politicized, with 44% feeling that it carries a negative

connection. The same percentage also acknowledged its origin in the legal and justice systems in an effort to better understand systemic inequity associated with race.

A Caucasian male principal said that CRT carries a negative connotation, but noted that he could not define it. “People have blown it up to the point where when parents hear it, it’s a bad word. But really, it is taking a look at race to gain a deeper understanding of what's going on within different races.” His goal remains to not directly use the term and instead concentrating on having stronger conversations about the children in the building. Another Caucasian male principal does not believe that CRT is being taught in schools. “It’s become another example of weaponizing a term… I don’t think that the district acknowledges that it promotes Critical Race Theory from a staff development standpoint; which, I think all of our conversations point back to CRT.” In essence, it is part of the district’s values.

> It gets tiptoed around every school board meeting when it comes up. And, it’s like, we don’t do that, which I don’t think is fully truthful, because we do say that Black and Brown students are marginalized in society and there are systemic and historical roots that continues to add to that problem.

He acknowledged that, “There are inherent racial pieces in our society.. It’s important that we try to solve the problem in schools… I just think it’s a lightning rod term that our district needs to own from a staff development standpoint.”

Another Caucasian male principal shared that does not truly understand CRT, but pointed out its applicability to higher education, the law profession, and criminal justice system. “Some of the drama is led by people who think we’re trying to teach that there’s some type of shame in being a White person. They try to distort things. It’s not a topic of conversation with elementary students.” An Asian female principal referenced CRT’s origin to the legal field. “It’s not being

used in schools in the way that the version intended of how it's being discussed at board meetings… We're using it in terms of strictly cultural proficiency that we're trying to embed in our schools." An African American female principal replied that CRT is best reserved for higher education, although concepts are certainly embedded in the district's PD. "We have certain mindsets behind it that are twisted to say something similar. In reality, trying to train staff and shift mindsets can be viewed as CRT… I don't think schools are actually doing it the way people think." One Caucasian female principal shared that doesn't believe that CRT belongs in public schools. Another male colleague also noted being confused about CRT. "We are not pushing Critical Race Theory in our school anyway, just based on my knowledge and understanding of the theory itself… So, in terms of all the negative publicity, it's coming from one population of people."

One Caucasian male principal expressed that CRT is not being taught in schools, but that's the common misconception. "It's a false narrative that's out there that people have latched onto for the purposes of politicizing schools now. We teach acceptance within a school community." He added that CRT is college level terminology and content. "At our level, we want students to be able to work with students that don't look like them and may experience a different home life." Another Caucasian male principal agreed that CRT is not designed for elementary schools, and pointed to its legal context, specifically, "Looking at how the judicial system was affected by racism… Now, it has been broadened into education where maybe it wasn't originally intended."

Administrators Across the District

All but one interviewee maintained that CRT is not being taught in classrooms, while two thirds underlined strong opposition to the tool. The latter was attributed within five responses to

misinformation, specifically with at least one third of answers stating the media's influence in respect to CRT being politicized, polarizing, and divisive. Four participants pointed out the country's historical inequity in public education, while three people cited CRT's legal origin and systemically-oriented perspective. Meanwhile, two replies underscored that CRT has no place in schools, while that same number openly admitted that the topic of CRT makes them feel uncomfortable.

One Caucasian female supervisor connected to how CRT's origin lies within the legal system and the desire to review trends about outcomes such as conviction rates. In doing so, CRT serves to minimize implicit bias revealed via data. For district purposes, some of the framework, "Ensures we have a lens that allows every person equal access to all of all that we have to offer." A Caucasian male supervisor believed that CRT looks at systemic inequalities and already-established practices and policies of innate bias. He referenced a history of the country upholding the status quo that knowingly restricts access to the resources and social capital.

> In terms of schools, it's morphed into a catchall of anything that would allude to being culturally-relevant. We are pushing to treat all members of the community with equity and dignity. But, anything associated with that work has become dirty – lumped-in, the rooted CRT backlash despite the intent… There is this perception that there should be an apology admission we've been wrong or we have privilege.

He likened opposition to commonly being viewed as an attack on the American Dream where everyone can do anything in life, because it's not conceptually about the privilege resulting from a systemic issue, but rather work ethic.

A Caucasian female supervisor shared that CRT is about systematically looking at how legal policy has been written and its impact on society. She referenced redlining in Philadelphia, and pointed out conservative media news outlets twisting the theory. “We're living in a time of misinformation and tribalism.” She shared that CRT is not within elementary schools.

> There isn’t a unit in American History of American government courses, but our older students do learn that not everyone who was a veteran in World War II received the same benefits of the GI Bill because of their race… Tenets are part of curriculum, but we don’t push it on our students. Our curriculum is written by our teachers and aligned to the standards from the PDE.

Another Caucasian male directory first pointed out that CRT is not explicitly taught; and, relative to a higher level of academia. He expressed concern in it being politicized, and attributed this to, “The polarization of our two political parties, and the one party trying to use it as a platform to create issues against the other.”

One Caucasian male director shared that the, “Rhetoric surrounding CRT has been used to devalue any kind of CP&E work.” Detractors use CRT to be divisive and as a weapon against the intentional work being done. “It’s almost better to not even touch CRT, rather than combat it, because it's a volatile term right now.” A similar peer shared that CRT requires, “A complex, theoretical, high level, thought process that is typically saved for college level conversations.” He denoted that conversations about equity are incorrectly associated with assumptions about CRT being taught and that members of the community who believe this, “Have no idea what Critical Race Theory really is.” Opponents of CRT use the terminology heard elsewhere. In respect to the understanding of CRT, “We’re not touching that piece, nor should we, because it’s not age appropriate” at the elementary level.

One African American female director entailed the definition of CRT being, "Understanding the negotiations of race and theories that we encounter within an educational organization and how you process through those pieces. I don't think it's indoctrinating kids in a certain vision or mission." She expressed that this outlook represents a dichotomy in regard to what is being presented by community members during school board meetings. An African American admin stated that, "Critical Race Theory is a theoretical framework that's been a focus in graduate programs." She stressed that CRT teachings are not included in classrooms across the district.

> There is a need though of seeing injustice, the ways in which race has played itself out negatively, and wanting to do something about it… So, for us to say we don't teach it, that's true. But the idea of recognizing that there is a structure and a system that has really not played out well for lots of families and people of color is also true.

She continued in that this is where people question and challenge district leadership. As such, "We're not as willing to say, this is a theoretical framework, and this is how we're using it. We want to feel good about that and feel comfortable."

A Caucasian male director highlighted that CRT is extremely controversial because it's hard to maintain an objective approach.

> There is a standpoint of it being anti-White portrayed in the media. There are enough soundbites in the literature that can make it sound that way. It's a struggle since it's divisive… There are a number of underpinnings of CRT that are just factually tough to get your head around.

He continued that he is more comfortable with the premise of anti-racism. "They're not mutually exclusive, but CRT makes me very uncomfortable. One basis is that there has to be a dominant

majority… That affects every institution we have, so it just creates a situation where White folks feel attacked." It was expressed that less-educated, White members of society, have difficulty admitting to such.

Summative Reflection & Findings

Via examining the lived experiences of educational leaders and utilizing a MMRS composed of qualitative interviews and quantitative trends within responses at the district/central office-based level, in addition to building principals, some trends emerged. As a result, the design and anticipated outcomes of PD efforts are better understood. Experience/age, race, and gender did not yield consistent trends impacting qualitative or quantitative data. Leaders working in one setting and serving a school-specific community shared different outlooks not just towards CP&E and the various topics outlined above, but also in respect to PD in general.

Each educator and leader holds a different understanding of the application and intent of numerous definitions of CP&E components. Embedded in unique examples, leaders seek to better understand the application of their learning and knowledge and expand opportunities for students. They remain cognizant of the value of CP&E work and are refining the potential for crossover within all PD initiatives. As such, the majority of reflection affirmed a desire to understand and empathize amidst the daily work manifested in disrupting the public education system in which disproportionality, injustice, and racism are still deeply rooted in 2024. Diverse communities hold varied levels of comfort along the continuum that must be combated by growing the skill – and reinforcing the faith – behind CP&E endeavors. Ultimately, comfort strengthens over time.

All of these realities force leaders to embody the values of a district. Change cannot occur without reflecting on our own backgrounds and experiences and their impact on our responses to

challenges and planning to systematically alter children's futures. Policy and politics both influence the extent in which can be successfully accomplished, in addition to measurable outcomes. And, even the most poignant intent can be stunted by resistance – which requires a growth mindset and active participation in a community's continuous learning.

Participants demonstrated that hallmark of leadership – being vulnerable for sharing their thoughts and feelings in a formal setting in order to push for increased understanding and cultivate self-reflection. They strived to illustrate competence in how the district's vision, mission, and values become tangible, particularly within transferrable skills and knowledge acquisition. Leaders also pushed to explain how and when CP&E tenets can be leveraged from the PD context to the classroom via instructional engagement essential to the holistic development of children.

Each day – not just during a predefined PD session – the work is hard. Thus, informed leaders modeling a desire to enhance their own awareness is essential to reap results in our elementary schools. Replies helped to illustrate what the work 'looks like,' how it makes people feel, and proffered ways that we can collectively adapt/persevere through service. Four findings are noted below:

1. A wide spectrum of differing feelings, emotions, attitudes, and beliefs exist across the school district. Certain topics allowed for increased honesty, with other terminology producing feelings of discomfort. Even an informal, anonymous setting cannot offset the magnitude of seriousness surrounding topics pertaining to culture, racism, diversity, bias, equity, and equality.
2. Educators desire actionable expectations and ideas for implementation in instructional settings. In using Brown University's Cultural Proficiency Framework, the most shared

planning and evaluative components reflect purposeful efforts to assess culture and value diversity. However, the requisites of managing the dynamics of difference, adapting to diversity, and institutionalizing cultural knowledge have not been extensively broached. Although differences are not being eliminated or demeaned, some leaders still witness differences being dismissed. As such, the fourth of a six-part continuum is evident with the organization currently inadequately responding to these dynamics.

3. While there were commonalities, there were far more differences within the acquisition of CP&E knowledge and its application between principals servicing a school each day versus district-based administrators supporting multiple buildings (many of the latter serving all 13 elementary schools). Such speaks to the emotional and relational influences unique to each school's climate and community. With that, autonomy to drive conversations about building-specific needs lacks congruence throughout the majority of the district.

4. Awareness represents the foundation of PD that can substantiate future initiatives. There needs to be a shared understanding of the purpose of bias training – particularly unconscious bias. Furthermore, without consistent application of strategies to reduce, versus eliminating bias, meaningful progress towards refining one's cultural proficiency to contribute to an organization's collective mission, and thus closing gaps pertinent to equitable access to experiences and opportunities remains a structure that cannot be attained.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Author's Academic & Professional Lens

CP&E is rooted in nearly every facet of public education. It is not just about what we want to do and aspire to be, but how we get there and persevere through an array of barriers towards truly making growth. Educational administrators serve as leaders for the district and school community that encompasses an array of stakeholders. Decisions made directly impact children on a daily basis and today's political climate often represents a magnified reality of pressure. However, in order to justly holistically educate all children, an understanding of learners' unique needs and variables on academic achievement is essential for school leaders.

While PD represents a powerful tool to drive change in the public education setting, participants' investment of effort, interest and knowledge in the topic, and unconscious biases influence its potential to enact change once leaving the physical confines of a PD session. How content and principles is presented – as well as the terminology and language – remains critical. The ability to engage in challenging conversations that require both listening and sharing personal experiences and feelings aids the process. In doing so, collaborative efforts gain strength within a shared mission guiding administrative policy and subsequent instructional practice. In essence, the process demands 'buy-in' from influential individuals across all facets of a school district and the citizens in which it embraces in a ministerial manner, particularly when a plethora of student achievement data showcases a lack of equitable access to a high-quality instructional for all student subgroups.

Via the aforementioned, shared experiences of school leaders, practitioners can reflect on a collective, ongoing effort. Through reflection, we learn how attitudes and beliefs of individuals

in decision-making positions influence movement along the CP&E continuum. In limiting the redaction of insight, authenticity of commentary is preserved to allow the study to highlight trends, as well as the significance of language chosen by school leaders during an interview setting, in addition to real world examples of shaping the future of schools.

Gaining an understanding of administrators' knowledge, application of ideals, comfort in their stewardship yielding change, and day-to-day impact, helps decision-makers guide future work through reflection of where a district as a comprehensive entity – and specific schools that represent differing, diverse areas of the community. The study embedded an academic, though almost anthropologic, lens into a professional context to support progress and push towards rectifying a history of social injustice within the public education sector. More so, the collective awareness of actionable efforts that are impacted by personal attitudes, beliefs, and experiences – especially feelings/emotions that (un)consciously influence our activism by virtue of interactions, engagement, communication, self-identity, and ability to empathetically understand others – represent vital components revealed via this study.

Without comprehensive understanding and intentional work, leaders cannot engage the community to truly move the proverbial needle towards delivering an equitable education for all students within a district. Progress is clear, but through numerous interviews, more is still desired, especially in regard to meeting a desired standard where there remains an inconsistent understanding of leadership's role in fostering a sense of responsibility toward the work.

Limitations

Normative consensus is manifested by social order (Reckwitz, 2002), and meaningful, shared social interactions and experiences deepen awareness (Wenger, 2006). This mixed method study articulated how participants are pushing to institutionalize cultural knowledge.

Assessing peer contributions, versus questions primarily embedded in self-reflection to determine academic and professional knowledge and enthusiasm, would serve to better demystify levels of urgency and comfort associated with principles that caused discomfort within interview sessions such as antiracism, disproportionality, inclusion, race, and Whiteness.

Solidifying practices would empower NPSD to advance within Brown University's CPF from managing the dynamics of difference (#3) to the fourth facet of adopting new policies that change practice by supporting diversity and inclusion. By virtue of progressing along the CPF continuum, transformational outcomes within its framework are more overtly identifiable via descriptions of standards of individual behavior and organizational practices that are replicated in each school to truly advocate for others.

Lessons Learned & Implications

"School districts play a key role in stopping the cycle of fearful rhetoric, engaging with stakeholders in ways that unite a school community around shared priorities (Hodge, 2023, p. 534). Justice motives within political psychology research, such as people fundamentally believing that everyone receives what they deserve – and deserve what they receive – are countered by CRT (Hafer & Sutton, 2016). The theoretical tool of CRT allows for educators to investigate what many people don't understand, such as child development, versus accepting the traditionally-accepted explanations our nation has always had as an explanation for inequity (Ladson-Billings, 2021).

The framework of CRT allows PD to represent an outlet to minimize practitioners being unable to translate theoretical knowledge into classroom practice, particularly when examining what the data is doing and how it is (and is not) working (Colmenares, 2021). Via unpacking principals' expectations, subjective nuances of leadership roles – across an array of CP&E

endeavors – research can be strengthened. Doing so fully embodies CRT's IV (Interest Convergence). For example, gauging a principal's understanding of their leadership capacity is essential; yet, learning their shared perspectives of departmentalized contributions, such as directors and supervisors of Curriculum or Special Education, is beneficial to strengthening the intersectionality of a District's ongoing PD.

Within the confines of SPT, educational administrators represent leaders of Districts and schools that shape social structures. SPT pushes for deliberate efforts to change people's habits (Shove et al., 2021). And, given the phenomenological, interpretive paradigm in this study we learn how individual experiences comprise New Polar's social structures (Chen, 1996).

The qualitative responses in this study shared the practical significance of lived experiences that are impacted by subjectivity. Meanwhile, the quantitative components proffer a descriptive statistical analysis. Often, an individual's job description correlates with (un)conscious assumptions about the impact of leaders' differentiated responsibilities in equitably altering outcomes for students following participation in PD.

Data presented in this exploratory research reflects margins and contrasts between principals of schools often less than three miles away. For example, one principal had her life threatened after her ardent efforts to address disproportionate achievement outcomes and felt compelled to leave NPSD. However, more than one colleague believed that the intentionality of CP&E PD has, or will soon enough, run its course.

Replies displayed a more macro mindset held by district administrators – and to a degree, were overly idealistic – needing to support numerous schools in contrast to principals being able to forge stronger relationships with educators, students, and families on a daily basis. Despite

statistical analysis, age and gender did not indicate a significantly distinguishable impact of potential world views.

Transformation comes to fruition when individuals seek to learn, then know oneself, in order to reconsider self and others (Mezirow, 1990). “We need to lead with the understanding that those most equipped to identify, investigate the consequences of, and generate the most appropriate resistance strategies to tactics like the CRT bans are our community members” (Boveda, 2023, 126-127).

Recommendations & Questions for Future Investigation

Per Varsik & Gorochovskij (2023), intersectionality is impacted by power and privilege; it demands individuals’ identities not remaining independent. PD pushing to address societal injustice must reap policy change – specifically towards inequitable access to education for children – and encompass participation and learning outcomes that strengthen an understanding of diverse learners’ need. CP&E PD can become more powerful when elected officials, such as School Board members, do not avoid publicly discussing frameworks such as CRT, and instead spur on the community to embrace such a tool to improve every student’s school experience.

There is tremendous potential by clarifying that CRT is not a topic taught to children; however, the ideals benefit the community by allowing educators to develop equity-focused initiatives. There is no shame in acknowledging varied forms of disproportionality and committing to rectify them via strategic instructional change that mandates a different way of doing things. Such an outlook actively serves to best meet the needs of a community, and society, where diversity is increasing. As an elected official, it affirms the significance of their responsibility and empowers practitioners to minimize the political effect of misdirected discourse – which has been not just been supported, but encouraged, by the PSBA.

Requisites of educational equity include systems that are guided by leaders such as principals, directors, and supervisors, entrusted to safeguard students having equitable access, opportunity, and outcomes (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015). Leaders must remain accountable for change and should be encouraged to develop – then publicly present – equity goals to the community to reflect changes in practice via tiered interventions and varied enrollment structures such as smaller class sizes for schools with a higher marginalized student population. For example, elementary school principal presentations were last done in the New Polar School District in 2021. The community needs to be informed of what has changed over the past three years – and why – in retrospect to when educators were coming out of the pandemic.

Data-driven equity goals are essential within this process, as is transparency about funding, staffing, growing Special Education identification, enrollment transience, an uptick of mental health needs, as well as an emphasis on Social-Emotional and Executive Functioning skills. Ultimately, these ideas represent starting points for immediate action in NPSD. Student growth in terms of reducing disproportionate achievement manifested through opportunity gaps should be rewarded for educational leaders who internally struggle with how far to push for change and potentially risk their own family's financial stability in doing so.

Future qualitative study must strive to secure equal representation within participants, particularly for race. Contrasting roles held by leaders must push to demonstrate the daily activities of individuals holding differing roles in an organization. Research must seek to ascertain a stronger understanding of how CP&E PD is evident in the following:

1. Initiatives and goals for a unique elementary school context versus the larger, district-wide community.

2. How values of belonging and equitable opportunities are embedded in regular conversations with various stakeholders and what policy change has resulted from such.

3. The structural decision-making implications/opportunities of short-and-long-term planning that reflect diversity within a school building's local community.

Via additional exploratory research, participant groups should consider teachers and coaches within a qualitative mechanism – in conjunction with administrators – to garner a more in-depth determination about the impact of PD delivered by educational leaders with staff. Some prospects for pursuit include the following questions:

1. Across multiple years of study, is there evidence of a positive correlation between CP&E PD and student academic growth?

2. In contrasting teachers and school leaders' views, what aspects of CP&E are most actionable in classrooms and how can they be measured in an ongoing fashion?

3. Despite the false narratives presented in the media about CRT, how can educators be better empowered to leverage the framework and remove its politicized stigma?

4. In designing interview questions for educators that utilize CRT as a theoretical framework, which of the six tenets most effectively yield crossover into other methodology, and what literature is best suited to guide future PD design?

5. How can a qualitative study also include an analysis of haptics via an interpretative lens to find connections between what nonverbal replies reveal when certain topics are posited?

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APPENDIX A: AUTHOR'S PROFESSIONAL LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY

(June 3, 2020)

Dear (Redacted) Families,

The past week-plus has been a tumultuous time for our country. For African American and Brown families, these feelings and realities have been recurring for hundreds of years. As one of my professors eloquently wrote, "There is a long history of racism in our society and the ways that it worked hand-in-hand with the development of our public school system in the U.S.; on this there is no shortage of evidence. This is a part of our nation's DNA."

As an educational leader, father, and member of the community, these conversations and topics cannot be avoided. We all represent agents of change. I encourage you to speak with your children. I welcome our teachers to hold discussions and share their feelings alongside colleagues, in addition to with our students. I echo the sentiment of those disenfranchised and privileged alike that 'Silence is Compliance.' We must become more accustomed to having uncomfortable conversations. There is no such concept of being color-blind. We can utilize ongoing social injustice to teach and present cultural competency concerns within our nation in age-appropriate ways.

(Redacted) Elementary represents an extremely diverse school. We are proud of our families and we strive to create shared experiences and learn from unique cultures and backgrounds. We are not perfect, but our teachers have immense hearts and prioritize coming from an empathetic perspective. As our principal, I acknowledge that I have not lived racially-driven experiences. My prior teaching and administrative experience was in the most diverse city in the United States – (Redacted), NJ. My ongoing academic study at the doctoral level is in a

program focused on diversity and equity. Yet, my professional resume and scholarly endeavors do not mean that I understand. I need to listen more and learn from the complexities surrounding our past/present in order to better shape the future for our children. And it would be ignorant for me to not acknowledge that my life's path has been advantaged by being White, as well as male.

My K-12 (Redacted) educational experience as a child and teenager shaped my life profoundly, hence my desire to return to an area where I can do the same for others day-by-day. No, I do not have the answers, but I pledge to be part of the solution versus the problem. In setting high expectations for all learners and reducing, then eliminating, disproportionate access to educational opportunities, I am confident our staff will continue to put forth the passion and energy to equitably educate our (Redacted). Our families deserve nothing less!

Earlier this week, (Redacted) Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, and Director of Curriculum and Equity, all shared their thoughts with our district. I implore you to read their words. I ask that you consider volunteering your time by joining the (Redacted) Cultural Proficiency Parent Sub-Committee by completing the form here: Parent Interest Form - Cultural Proficiency and Anti-Racism Group. Undoubtedly, having a presence from (Redacted) can positively impact the conversation across such a large school district!

Lastly, some of our Elementary Guidance Counselors have recommended the hyperlinked resources below for educating and supporting our children during this time. Please spend some time reviewing these materials and determine how best to engage your child(ren),

Race & Racism Toolkit
Video: "Something Happened in our Town"
CNN/Sesame Street partner to talk with kids about ending racism

Educationally,
Wes Heinel, Principal

APPENDIX B: GOODMAN'S CULTURAL COMPETENCE FOR EQUITY

Cultural competence for equity and inclusion is the ability to live and work effectively in culturally diverse environments and enact a commitment to fairness and to the full participation of all members. In environments that are equitable and inclusive, there is a fair distribution of resources and opportunities. People feel valued, feel a sense of belonging, and can fulfill their potential.

Cultural competence for equity and inclusion requires a range of awareness, knowledge, and skills. The five key components of this model are: 1) Self-awareness, 2) Understanding and valuing others, 3) Knowledge of societal inequities, 4) Skills to interact effectively with a diversity of people in different contexts, and 5) Skills to foster transformation towards equity and inclusion. Each of these components, and some of the competencies within them, will be discussed below.

1. Self-awareness: Self-awareness is the consciousness of our social identities, cultures, biases, and perspectives. It entails the ability to understand who we are and what we bring to relationships and situations. There are numerous competencies to this component, including:

    • Awareness of our social identities and their cultural influences and how they intersect.

    • Awareness of our prejudices, stereotypes, and biases.

    • Awareness of our internalized superiority and internalized inferiority--how we have internalized (often unconsciously) notions of the superiority of our dominant/privileged social identity groups (internalized dominance) and the

inferiority of our subordinated/marginalized social identity groups (internalized oppression.)

• Awareness of how we may be perceived by others and the impact of our behavior.

2. Understanding and valuing others: Not only is self-knowledge and awareness needed to enact cultural competence for equity and inclusion, so is knowledge and appreciation of the social identities, cultures, and worldviews of other people. Many of these competencies mirror the ones in self-awareness which include

• Knowledge of the social identities of other people, their cultural influences, and how they intersect.

• Ability to value and appreciate ways of being, doing, and thinking other than our own.

• Ability to recognize how other people express internalized superiority and internalized inferiority.

3. Knowledge of societal inequities: We cannot understand ourselves or other people, or create greater equity without considering the larger socio political and historical context of which we are part. We need to have a grasp of different forms of privilege and oppression and how these affect people's experiences and access to social power. It is also critical to appreciate the interlocking nature of different types of inequality. Some key competencies include:

• Knowledge of the history, ideology, and current manifestations of systemic inequalities and how they reinforce each other.

• Understanding of how different forms of oppression operate on interpersonal, cultural, institutional, and structural levels.

• Understanding of the impact of systemic inequalities on individuals' opportunities and lived realities.

4. Skills to interact effectively with a diversity of people in different contexts: In addition to understanding self, others, and society, we need the ability to adapt to and work collaboratively with diverse people in a range of situations. People's social identities affect their interpersonal, communication and work styles, as well as their views of conflict, notions of leadership and sense of time (among many other things). Some competencies of this component of the model include the ability to:

• Embrace, integrate, and adapt to different cultural styles.

• Deal with conflict due to cultural differences and the dynamics of inequality.

• Engage in dialogue about social identities, diversity, and oppression issues.

5. Skills to foster transformation towards equity and inclusion: Cultural competence for equity and inclusion requires more than just understanding the impact of social inequality. It entails being able to identify and address inequities and choose appropriate interventions to create environments, policies, and practices to ensure diversity and fairness. Competencies for creating change are needed at various levels such as skills for:

• Continual self-development, including for self-education, self-reflection, and personal change.

• Addressing interpersonal and group issues for example, responding to biased comments, addressing inequitable group dynamics, and creating culturally inclusive work and learning groups.

- Transforming institutions such as being able to create, critically analyze, implement or advocate for organizational norms, policies and practices that are equitable and inclusive.
- Creating societal change by being able to work collaboratively with others to foster social justice.

Developing cultural competency is an ongoing process; it is not an endpoint. We will have different degrees of competency in different components with different social identity groups. Depending on one's role and responsibilities, individuals may need particular competencies within each of the main components. The Cultural Competence for Equity and Inclusion model can help us navigate the path towards greater understanding, effectiveness, fairness, and full participation.

APPENDIX C: AN ANTIRACIST EDUCATOR'S HOLISTIC APPROACH

To think about all of the parts of schooling, not just the classroom, anti-racist educators take a holistic approach and consider many dimensions of schooling through an anti-racist, anti-oppressive lens. These dimensions include:

- The demographics of staff, particularly in schools with predominantly BIPOC students
- School leadership and paths to school leadership
- School governance (e.g., network and district leadership)
- School curriculum
- Special education
- Teaching and learning practices
- Definitions and measurements of academic success
- Definitions and measurements of teacher success
- Professional development
- New-teacher training and support
- The wellness of teachers, staff and students
- School mission and vision statements
- School, network and district policies
- School culture and approaches to discipline
- School Infrastructure
- Allocation of resources and budget

APPENDIX D: PENNSYLVANIA COMPETENCIES (CR-SE)

Competency 1 - Reflect on one's cultural lens.

Competency 2 - Identify, Deepen Understanding of, and Take Steps to Address Bias in the System.

Competency 3 - Design and Facilitate Culturally Relevant Learning that Brings Real World Experiences into Educational Spaces.

Competency 4 - Provide All Learners with Equitable and Differentiated Opportunities to Learn and Succeed.

Competency 5 - Promote Asset-based Perspectives about Differences.

Competency 6 - Collaborate with Families and Communities through Authentic Engagement Practices.

Competency 7 - Communicate in Linguistically and Culturally Responsive Ways that Demonstrate Respect for Learners, Educators, Educational Leaders, and Families.

Competency 8 - Establish High Expectations for Each Learner and Treat Them as Capable and Deserving of Achieving Success.

Competency 9 - Educate Oneself About Microaggressions and their Impact on Diverse Learners, Educators, and Families, and Actively Disrupt the Practice by Naming and Challenging its Use.

APPENDIX E: CROSSWALK OF CRT TENETS WITHIN INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

CRT Tenet	Summer 2022	Summer 2023
Tenet I (Permanence of Racism): Racism, both conscious and unconscious, as a permanent component of American life.	#3A/B, #4, #7 #8, #9, #10A/B #12, #13, #14 #15, #16, #17	#1, #3, #4 #5, #6, #7 #8, #9, #11, #12, #13, #15 #16, #17 #18
Tenet II (Whiteness as Property): Because of the history of race and racism in the United States and the role U.S. jurisprejudice has place in reifying conceptions of race, the notion of Whiteness can be considered a property interest.	#8, #10A/B ,#11A/B #13, #14, #15 #16, #17	#3, #4, #5 #6, #11, #12 #13, #15, #16 #17, #18
Tenet III (Counter Storytelling & Majoritarian Narratives): A method of telling a story that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority; majoritarian narratives are also recognized as stories and not assumed to be facts or the truth.	#6, #7, #9 #12, #14, #15 #16, #17	#2, #4, #5 #6, #11, #12 #13, #15, #16 #17, #18
Tenet IV (Interest Convergence): Significant progress for Blacks is achieved only when the goals of Blacks are consistent with the needs of Whites.	#4, #5, #6 #7, #8 #9 #10A/B, #11A/B, #12	#1, #2, #4 #6, #7, #8 #9, #11, #12 #15, #16, #17

	#13, #14, #15 #16, #17	#18
Tenet V (Critique of Liberalism): Critique of basic notions embraced by liberal ideology to include color blindness, meritocracy, and neutrality of the law.	#4, #5, #7 #8, #9, #10A/B #11A/B, #12, #13 #14, #15, #16 #17	#1, #4, #6 #7, #9, #11 #12, #13, #15 #16, #18
Tenet VI (Intersectionality): Considers race across races and the intersection of race with other identities and differences.	#3A/B, #4, #5 #6, #7, #9 #11A/B, #13, #14 #16, #17	#1, #2, #3 #4, #6, #7 #8, #11, #12 #15, #16, #18

APPENDIX F: QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (SUMMER 2022)

1. Please provide your job title, age, gender, race/ethnicity, and years experience in education.

2. What is your educational background? Are there any personal influences that have paved your professional path?

3A. (Principals) Please describe your school community. How is it similar or different from other elementary schools in the district?

3B. (District-Based Admin) Please describe the District's community. What similarities or differences are there between elementary schools?

4. How do you professionally define Cultural Proficiency & Equity?

5. What are the key aspects of the district's vision and commitment to CP&E? How are they evident in your school?

6. How comfortable are you in leading the district's CP&E work? Do you have an influence in the direction of professional development? How so?

7. What has been your biggest challenge in leading the district's CP&E work? What beneficial changes stand out to you?

8. What does the mindset of the phrase, "What is equitable is not always equal," mean to you?

9. Why do you believe there are disproportional results in Math for Black and Brown students across the district? What are the strongest variables associated with disproportional achievement in the district?

10A. (Principals) Have you conducted an equity audit for your school? If so, describe the process.

10B. (District-Based Admin) Have you helped conduct an equity audit for any school in the District ? If so, describe the process.

11A. (Principals) Did you establish an equity goal for the 2021-22 school year? If so, was it attained? Explain.

11B. (District-Based Admin) Do you know of any equity goals established by elementary schools for the 2021-22 school year? If so, were any attained? Explain.

12. What percentage of teachers actively embed CP&E into their weekly work? Please provide an estimate. And how does this estimate make you feel?

13. Do you believe that staff possess an awareness of, and a way to minimize, unconscious bias?

14. What are teachers' perceptions about CP&E PD? What is the community and families' perception of CP&E work?

15. Why do you think that some people react adversely to the topic of CP&E in schools?

16. What is your understanding of an anti-racist outlook? What is its significance to the district? Explain.

17. What do you think of when you hear the term Critical Race Theory (CRT)? What is your understanding of its use in schools?

18. On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the most important), where do you value CP&E work in terms of changing teacher practice? Why?

19. On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the most important), where do you value CP&E work in terms of improving student performance? Why?

20. On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the most important), how pervasive is racism in your school's organizational structure? Why?

APPENDIX G: QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (SUMMER 2023)

1. What is Cultural Proficiency & Equity (CP&E), and what is its foremost function?

2. Following another year of Professional Development (PD) pertaining to CP&E, what outcomes has the district and/or your school achieved?

3. How do you professionally define diversity, and how does it impact your leadership?

4. What does equity in education mean, and what purpose does it serve?

5. Do you believe that CP&E work is associated with a political agenda? Do you believe that it is worth prioritizing? Why or why not?

6. Is it possible to eliminate racial disparities within our public education setting?

7. To what degree do you possess the knowledge, and will, to understand and address issues of race as they relate to existing achievement disparities?

8. When encountering challenging contexts within CP&E PD, what perspective do you most frequently come from (think about the compass) and why? As a reminder, some examples are as follows:

- Emotional: feelings anger, sadness, joy or embarrassment.
- Intellectual: seeking additional information.
- Moral: deep-seated belief; rightness or wrongness.
- Relational: reacts with specific behaviors and actions.

9. Over the past year, has teacher buy-in progressed in relation to CP&E work? If so, how do you know?

10. What is your opinion regarding inclusion in public education and its effectiveness?

11. What do you think of when you hear the term Critical Race Theory (CRT)? What is your understanding of its use in schools?

12. What is your working definition of race?

13. Please provide a definition of Whiteness. What presence and role does it play in your professional work?

14. On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the most important), to what extent do teachers actively embed CP&E work into their weekly instruction. How does that estimate make you feel?

15. The district's commitment to CP&E runs the gamut of emotions and there seems to be an inability – by us and others – to comprehensively capture its essence. If the goal is to move beyond information, what are you thinking and feeling when engaged in the work? To the best of your ability, describe your emotions towards the CP&E process.

16. In your opinion, do our CP&E efforts serve to manage inequality or push to eradicate it? –

17. In your opinion, does equitable access to learning consistently occur in each of our 18 schools?

18. In conclusion, why do people struggle with this work?