HOOD COLLEGE

Leading for Educational Equity and Change: A Case Study of
Assistant Principals' Beliefs and Actions

DISSERTATION

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DOCTORAL COMMITTEE

The members of the committee appointed to examine the dissertation of Ebony-Nicole Kelly find

that this dissertation fulfills the requirements and meets the standards of the Hood College

Doctoral Program in Organizational Leadership and recommend that it be approved.

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Leading for Educational Equity and Change: A Case Study of
Assistant Principals' Beliefs and Actions

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ABSTRACT

This study about Assistant Principals responds to the call for educational leaders to meet the
needs of those student-scholars who are marginalized, disenfranchised and forgotten.
Administrators are increasingly responsible for ensuring an equitable learning environment in
schools. When school leaders commit to educational equity (i.e., fairness, access, and
opportunity), they enhance teacher guidance towards influencing equitable student outcomes.
This qualitative case study examined assistant principals' perspectives around leading for
educational equity and change and sought an understanding of what assistant principals are doing
to make education more just. The research questions were: 1. What are assistant principals'
perspectives of their role in leading for educational equity? 1a. What are assistant principals'
beliefs around leading for educational equity? 1b. What are assistant principals' actions in
leading for educational equity? Seven assistant principals from a large, Mid-Atlantic public-
school district who were engaged in equity initiatives comprised the sample. A survey was sent
to all 59 assistant principals in the district, and 15 were completed for analysis. Additional data
sources from the sample of 7 selected participants included virtual, semi-structured interviews,
equity artifacts, a self-anchoring scale, and open coding identified key words from the
transcripts, scales, and surveys, and focused coding identified trends. Findings of the study
included: building positive and genuine relationships is key; (b) equity in scheduling; (c)
interviewing and hiring for excellence and diversity; (d) professional development around equity,
anti-racism, and culturally responsive teaching; (e) being a lifelong learner; and (f)

parent/community engagement. These findings provide insight on the lived experiences of assistant principals who are leading for educational equity. The findings can support assistant principals to learn from colleagues who are leading for educational equity and use that learning to promote equitable leadership practices on their campuses. The findings also provide heightened awareness and urgency for providing professional development to support future administrators to become educational equity leaders. Equally important, the findings provide insight to guide the development of knowledge and skills for strategic planning and implementation to support culturally relevant instruction and, ultimately, the overall improved performance for student-scholars. Finally, the results can be used to help school districts and institutions of higher education as they prepare future administrators to be strong, resilient leaders for educational equity.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my son, *Hunter Lee Elías Necati Kelly,* whose name loosely translated means one who hunts with God from a clearing providing salvation. His name has Afro-American-Latino-Turkish-Irish roots. He is my global citizen who reminds me of the importance of championing the work of educational equity at every opportunity for all children.

To the assistant principals (of this study and others) who are racial equalizers courageous enough to challenge the status quo, committed to reflecting on their beliefs to help them be relational, innovative, and transformative in their leadership and practice.

And last, but certainly not least, to my ancestors who have come before me, established greatness in great odds so that I may be able to have the privilege and honor of being a protagonist of racial equity. I am my ancestors' wildest dream in which I find humility and hold a healthy sense of obligation in honoring that legacy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Tim, my brother by God's design, who believed in me and spoke words of life into my situation on many occasions. Though our lives are such we are not in constant communication like yesteryears, please know you hold a special place in my heart always.

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To the 2020 Hood Cohort we are forever connected. I can still see our seating arrangements in the Beneficial-Hodson Library and Learning Commons laughing, crying, exchanging ideas and intellectual banter, and contemplating how we were going to eat that proverbial elephant (the dissertation journey) one bite at a time. Special mention and appreciation to Carrie and Gayle, both partners in success at various intervals of this process.

To my Dissertation Committee, Dr. Jennifer Cuddapah, Dr. Joy Lawson-Davis, and Dr. Rulle, for the support and knowledge. The committee provided constructive criticism and suggestions for improvement in our many meetings. The committee's ability to break the dissertation process down to workable steps helped me tremendously. Offering their time, words of wisdom, tough love, and their support and expertise in industry has been greatly appreciated.

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To Dr. Christine Handy, who I affectionately refer to as one of my Big Sisters and mentor. Despite expertly serving and running a professional union of over 800 members in one of the largest districts in the nation as President, you regularly checked on my progress, prayed for and with me, and helped push me to finish the dissertation even in the 11th hour of writing my revisions, because my Doctor friends didn't tell me about the after-defense "revision writing process."

CHAPTER: 1 INTRODUCTION

"These are all our children. We will profit by, or pay for, whatever they become."

-James Baldwin, American activist, novelist, playwright, essayist, poet, and equity warrior.

Personal Significance

The chapter begins with a discussion around my "why" and my "lived experience" which helped ignite the desire in me to pursue this research. So, why study educational equity? Why study how assistant principals are leading for educational equity, their beliefs, and their actions related to the work? Actually, I could share endlessly about why I'm so passionate about educational equity especially given the current national and local state of related to racial equity issues in education, the mass assault on racially and ethnically marginalized groups via gun violence, and inequitable disciplinary actions for our student-scholars of color. Instead, I will share a glimpse into my heart and head around why this ongoing work of civil justice is so personal and important to me. I begin by describing three significant images related to my life and, ultimately, to my "why" of serving as an educational equity-minded school leader.

The first image, a tall apartment building, represents where I grew up in my formative years; it was considered the concrete jungle, a project development for low-to-moderate income families in Jersey City, New Jersey. At the time, it was called Duncan Projects—five towering, 14-story high-rise buildings each with a perimeter 30 ft. I lived on the 12th floor in building 3, and I was a latch-key child. After school, when my parents were working, I could be found at one of two places, the library asking the librarian to order diverse books, maps, and magazines (*Ebony* and *Jet* were my favorites) or the neighborhood diner drinking hot chocolate or eating a bran muffin and people-watching with one of my childhood confidants. After that, I was at home without adult supervision for 2 hours until either my mother or father returned from work. I

attended the neighborhood school where there were limited resources. I was a very curious and studious child, and I excelled in most of my courses. Even as a child, I knew that my school was different, although I was not yet able to articulate it. My school did not have all the books or resources I saw on TV or even things that were at the school my cousin attended elsewhere in New Jersey. Nevertheless, I was happy overall even though I knew student-scholars who received different resources would have different opportunities and access. Today, many student-scholars still do not receive educational equity and excellence in school. Decades of racial inequity, a lack of culturally proficient instructional leaders, and funding gaps have systematically left some student-scholars without the same learning and achievement opportunities as others. Thus, I want my service and contribution to the field of education to be a great disruptor of racial and civil injustices for children who may happen to enter into this world with less resources and access.

The second image, a starfish, represents me and the opportunity given to me in an afterschool club. A quick recap of the starfish story: A person was walking along the beach one day and saw starfish being washed ashore; knowing they would not survive on the sand the person began to place as many as she could back into the ocean with the hopes of maybe one of them surviving even for one day longer. I was that starfish. Metaphorically, I was a little girl growing up in New Jersey, and an after-school club counselor saw me on the shore and placed me back in the water. She gave me hope, made me feel safe, loved, worthy, and HEARD! Essentially, she helped to change the trajectory of my life. Later, as I was leaving middle school and entering high school, my family was in transition, and we were in the process of moving from New Jersey to Maryland. By then I was excelling well enough in my courses, especially English and literature, that I earned the opportunity to take honors high school English. I

remember it so vividly; it was my 8th grade middle school teacher and assistant principal who championed me to take the courses even though only one other person in the class looked like me, and the teacher's actions showed her lack of efficacy in my ability to achieve in the class. My former teacher and assistant principal wrote letters of recommendation, spoke with the teachers and administrations in Maryland, and called the school until I was placed in an appropriately rigorous instructional school setting. I stayed in communication with both of them for quite some time. They showed such commitment to me and my success. I feel it is my privilege and responsibility to do the same for my student-scholars, the staff, and families whom I serve.

The third image is of my son, Hunter Lee. As a mother of a multi-racial, male child, I worry, I wonder, and I am even more vigilant in my efforts to make sure student-scholars of color receive equitable academic, social, and emotional learning experiences and opportunities as do their majority-ethnic peers. It grieves my heart that children of color are underrepresented in so many of the advanced or highly able educational programs, disproportionately sent to the office with behavioral referrals, and have a lower high school graduation success rate. The message this sends is egregious. I want to help mitigate, and ultimately dismantle, that status quo not only for my son but for all children who are victimized. I believe to eliminate racial predictability, we must first remove institutional barriers and demonstrate culturally proficient policies, practices, and behaviors. In my small sphere as principal, I do my best to lead in such a way.

The formative years of my childhood, the significance of the starfish story, and my desire to create more equitable spaces for my son and all children remind me of the power to influence and the importance of being unwavering in my pursuit of educational equity to create

environments with excellent learning experiences for all scholars. It can be a great tipping point for a child; it was for me. When one understands this, I believe, it is only then that we can make a difference every day! I am committed to positively impacting future generations.

<center>Assistant Principals and Educational Equity</center>

Assistant principals who are leading for educational equity to improve student-scholar performance could be at the center of the organizational culture that promotes and ensures equitable learning environments in schools. Lumby and Coleman (2016) asserted, "Equity in education means that personal or social circumstances such as gender, ethnic origin, or family background, are not obstacles to achieving educational potential (fairness) and that all individuals reach at least a basic minimum level of skills (inclusion)" (p. 55). Equity in education denotes fairness, opportunity, and achievement. Equity in education is not about equal treatment of all student-scholars. Rather, it focuses on equal outcomes achieved by individualizing the instruction and support for every child. Equity connects itself to student success, especially when measured according to differences such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, language, family background—the list of diversities found within our student population (Linton, 2013). Race-conscious assistant principals who reflect on their beliefs and practice about educational equity may be able to create experiences where student outcomes meet this criterion of success.

Educational equity is dependent on effective school leadership (Linton, 2011). Some researchers believe the principal is the most influential person in a school. Loeb and Valant (2009) argued that the school principal is the key person at the schoolhouse and is critical to the success of any reform effort or other school improvement initiatives. However, the assistant principal plays a vital role in the day-to-day operations of a school. Armstrong (2009) noted that

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assistant principals "represent the face of school administration" (p. xii). Marshall and Hooley (2006) further espoused, "the assistant principal maintains the norms and rules of the school culture and encounters daily the fundamental dilemmas of the school systems" (pp. 2-3). The assistant principal carries out the actionable tasks identified by the principal.

Though considered the "forgotten leader" in the literature on school administrators (Cohen & Schechter, 2019, p. 100), the research agrees that the assistant principal position is a pathway to both the principalship and other senior-level administrator positions which can greatly influence equitable outcomes and learning experiences for student-scholars. The assistant principal is a critical position for teachers aspiring to become school administrators who can have significant influence on the decisions of the campus (Armstrong, 2009; Herrington & Kearney, 2012; Marshall, 1990; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Yu-kwong & Walker, 2010). Herrington & Kearney (2012) asserted, "the most critical role that makes or breaks an administrator's career in the upward progression from teacher to principal to superintendent is the role of the assistant principal" (p. 80). The role of the assistant principal, concerning their expectations and responsibilities can have a tremendous impact on student success and the operations of the school. assistant principals can support the principal in creating an environment where teachers want to engage in culturally responsive approaches and where student-scholars can learn and thrive.

The position, skill-set requirements, and expectations of the assistant principal in today's context is, to some extent, a new phenomenon as federal, state, and district accountability measures and policies place more demands on school administrators. As the paradigm of the assistant principal's role shifts and innovations in education continue to occur so, too, does the onus on its thought leaders. The narrative and work of assistant principals in meeting the needs

of student-scholars who are marginalized, disenfranchised, and, perhaps, forgotten presents a unique opportunity to affect change. These student-scholars deserve an opportunity to improve performance similar to those of their majority ethnic peers. Having a growth-mindset leadership stance is a significant trait when leading for educational equity (Dweck, 2006 & 2010, Linton, 2011). Growth-mindset leadership is a component needed to build growth-minded stakeholders and ultimately propel organizational cultural change. The job of an assistant principal is dynamic and fast-paced and requires multitasking, and quick and insightful decision-making along with interactions with student-scholars, teachers, and parents. James MacGregor Burns (1978) asserted, "Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth" (p. 2). Assistant principals who consider and reflect on their beliefs and practice in leading for educational equity can help to demystify this phenomenon of marginalization of students.

Authentic Leadership

In creating the conditions for student-scholars' success, the assistant principal can play an invaluable role—especially an assistant principal with an authentic leadership style. Authentic leaders anchor their practice in ideas, values, and commitments; they exhibit distinctive qualities of style and substance and can be trusted to be morally diligent in advancing the enterprises they lead. In other words, authentic leaders, display character, the defining characteristic of authentic leadership (Fullan, 2001). Research has shown great leaders are authentic, have character, possess a moral compass, and consistently follow through. Linton (2011) shared, "an authentic leader is one who clearly knows who they are, where they come from, and why they do this work," (p. 155). Even after decades of dissonance, leadership scholars agreed on one thing, for the 21st century leadership is a process whereby one person influences a group of individuals to

achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2010). Leadership is complex and has multiple dimensions. Authentic leadership is a significant characteristic which ushers organizational change over time.

Assistant Principals' Call to Action

Principals are increasingly responsible for ensuring equitable learning environments in schools (Whitaker, 2002). However, there is a dearth of literature and research pertaining to the explicit role of the assistant principal. There is no formal job description found in the literature for assistant principals (Barnett et al., 2012; Glanz, 1994; Hartzell et al., 1995; Mertz, 2006). However, the assistant principal's performance is measured by the same criteria as a principal's as outlined in the national standards, the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL). This set of broad policy standards is the foundation for administrator preparation, induction, development, professional learning, and evaluation. There is a surge in expectation for the assistant principals' involvement in leading for educational equity. Chapman (2005) states, "There is a need to adopt new approaches to conceptualizing the role of principal and assistant principal and alternative strategies for redesigning and restructuring positions of leadership across the school" (p. 8). As the literature makes clear, there has been a paradigm shift in the role of the assistant principal (Butler, 2019). No longer are assistant principals simply thought of as entry-level personnel in educational administration whose roles and responsibilities are merely tacit and managerial in nature. Their role now includes helping the principal in the overall running of the school, ensuring the safety of the student-scholars and staff members, collecting data, policing school behavior, and making sure the school meets federal and state student/teacher performance guidelines. "Assistant principals are expected to be instructional leaders, personnel directors, fund-raisers, public information officers, social workers, negotiators, legal experts, statisticians, financial analysts, and politician" (Ed Source, 2001, p. 1).

While principals are expected to maintain school safety and student mental health, supervise difficult employees, retain effective staff, manage time and tasks, and have their own work-life balance (Harper 2018), assistant principals have the unique opportunity to elevate and steward the work of their respective principals. Assistant principals who put equity in the forefront improve teacher guidance and student outcomes (Browne, 2012). Leading for educational equity and being culturally proficient allows teachers and administrators to learn together.

Historically, the role of the assistant principal has been difficult to define because of the ambiguity and variations of the duties performed from one school to another. In fact, Marshall & Hooley (2006) characterized the assistant principal's role as often "ill-defined, inconsistent, and at times incoherent" (p. 7). Beginning in the 1900s, the principalship has gone through six evolutionary stages including: one teacher (i.e., one-room schoolhouse), head teacher, teaching principal, school principal, supervising principal, and change agent/instructional leader (Campbell et al., 1990). During that same time, the title of assistant principal emerged. The assistant principal was typically a teacher with experience whom the principal appointed. The assistant principal was seen as an adviser with little formal authority (Glanz, 2004). Mertz and McNeely (1999) noted that the assistant principal position was born out of the need to manage increasingly larger school enrollments. Moore (2009) maintained it was time to end the ambiguous role of the assistant principal by standardizing the job responsibilities to help establish uniformity of the position. Mertz and McNeely (1999) stated it is typically the job of the principal to outline and define the role and responsibilities of the assistant principal.

Background

The Elementary and Secondary Schools Act of 1965 was reauthorized by Congress in 2002, and its successor, the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, specifically called for an

allocation of federal funding for parent and family engagement, emphasizing stronger school partnerships with parents and family members. This law played a vital role for school accountability in boosting achievement for all student-scholars, particularly those from a disadvantaged background.

Leading for educational equity and building school culture is aligned with the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders which guides effective school improvement and student-scholar performance. The professional standards apply to principals, assistant principals, and others in school-level leadership positions. The PSEL takes a firm stance related to administrators leading for equity as shown in Standard Three of its 10th standard, Equity and Cultural Responsiveness, which states,

> Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being. Effective leaders: a) Ensure that each student is treated fairly, respectfully, and with an understanding of each student's culture and context, b) recognize, respect, and employ each student's strengths, diversity, and culture as assets for teaching and learning, c) ensure that each student has equitable access to effective teachers, learning opportunities, academic and social support, and other resources necessary for success, d) develop student policies and address student misconduct in a positive, fair, and unbiased manner, e) confront and alter institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with race, class, culture and language, gender and sexual orientation, and disability or special status, f) promote the preparation of student-scholars to live productively in and contribute to the diverse cultural contexts of a global society, g) act with cultural competence and responsiveness in their interactions,

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decision making, and practice, h) address matters of equity and cultural responsiveness in

all aspects of leadership. (Superville, 2019)

It is only in recent years that educators have fostered the belief that there is a link between equity

and student performance.

Cultural Competency

Cultural competency (Linton & Davis 2013) encompasses understanding the background,

values, norms, and characteristics of one's own culture and the culture of others. During the

1980s, the concept of cultural competence gained prominence in the health care and social work

fields. However, within the last three decades, cultural competence has acquired increased

attention and relevance (Terrell & Lindsey, 2019). Cultural competency is conceptualized as a

set of behavior, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system or agency or among

professionals to allow for effective work in cross-cultural situations (Cross et al., 1989; Issacs &

Benjamin, 1991). Though the notion of cultural competency was birthed from the health care and

social work fields, practitioners, scholars, teacher-leaders, administrators, and school districts are

now understanding the significance of its underpinnings and the leverage it wages in improving

student performance (Terrell & Lindsey, 2019; Salisbury, 2019a).

One of the hallmarks of cultural competence which threads through the healthcare field,

the business world, and education is having the awareness of one's own cultural identity and

views about differences. The ability to learn and build on the varying cultural and community

norms of stakeholders which guide fairness and access of services and practices of the institution

is yet another hallmark. More specifically in the field of education, this understanding informs

and expands teaching practices in the culturally competent educator's classroom. Likewise, with

this knowing comes an urgency in changing the narrative of the role of the assistant principal in affecting change and leading for educational equity in the organization.

Statement of the Problem

The challenges for school leaders are now more urgent than ever (Carbaugh & Marzano, 2018). Inequity in our schools negatively impacts academic performance and creates a negative school learning experience for student-scholars. Schools have yet to achieve educational equity and excellence. This is a profound problem for 21st century school leaders. Over the past few decades, it has become increasingly apparent to school leaders, the business community and, more recently, politicians that issues of diversity play a vital role in the economic and political life of the United States (Lindsey, et al., 2018). Generally speaking, most practitioners and policy makers in education would emphasize a commitment to equity education as a fundamental value. It is critical for school leaders to be comfortable with their personal values and beliefs. Only when the paradigm shifts begin, can leading for equity truly begin to mature. Assistant principals can mitigate inequitable structures and/or increase equitable, positive school learning experiences, and structures for student-scholars while leading the work within the school system.

This study responds to the statement, "educational equity is entirely dependent on effective school leadership" (Linton, 2011, p. 27). In the limited body of research focused on the assistant principalship since the position's inception, there is agreement that all aspects of the position need further and continued research (Cohen & Shcechter, 2019; Glanz, 1994; Marshall & Greenfield, 1985; Morgan, 2018). Causal explanations of the achievement gap must consider a multitude of factors. Darling-Hammond (2010) argued that there is a "legacy of inequality in U.S. education," that explains the diverse levels of outcomes across racial and social class groups (p. 255). Darling-Hammond also maintained "educational outcomes for student-scholars of color

are much more a function of their unequal access to key educational resources, including skilled teachers and quality curriculum, than they are a function of race" (p. 55). Assistant principals have the reach to ensure that the inequality illustrated above is not perpetuated on their campus and, if it is, to change it by leading for educational equity in hiring and in providing professional development to staff.

Although the research is sparse around the role of the assistant principal regarding their perception of leading for equity, this study explicitly examined their perspectives on beliefs and actions around leading for educational equity and change, explored assistant principals' experiences in learning about and leading for educational equity, and identified what assistant principals are doing and believing to move the work forward in the field of educational equity. Student-scholars of color are underperforming at an alarming rate compared to their majority ethnic peers, and the leadership of an assistant principal might be able to mitigate this. This research is an opportunity to broadly examine the traditional roles of the assistant principal (manager/gatekeeper, disciplinarian, high stakes testing coordinator) and elevate current, more innovative involvement of the assistant principal in educational equity, instructional leadership, and professional development. These are all areas of potential inequity in education. As custodians of student-scholar performance and achievement, time needs to be spent researching and challenging the status quo. My hope is that this body of research will assist in that charge.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework provides the lens from which to structure the approach, inquiry, and actions to take place (Dewey, 1938). The conceptual framework that supports my research enhances the construct of the assistant principals' beliefs and actions and their role in leading for educational equity. The conceptual framework used for this study is Curtis Linton's (2011)

growth and equity leadership framework. This conceptual framework provided the basic tenants

for the research design and influenced the decisions I made regarding data collection and

analysis for this study. The interview protocol and survey questions were aligned with this focus.

The study examined the assistant principal's perspective of their beliefs and actions in leading

for educational equity as actualized using the components of Linton's growth and equity

leadership framework. More specifically, Linton's framework indicates that achieving leadership

equity requires three arenas of focus: culture, practice, and leadership. Included in the framework

are three overarching questions which help focus the work on each of the arenas.

- *Culture:* How does the workplace create conditions to ensure that success,
  engagement, and inclusion are not predictable by race, ethnicity, and culture?

- *Practice:* How does the workplace identify specific strategies, actions, or goals that
  are designated to eliminate the racial achievement gap?

- *Leadership:* How does the workplace spend time and resources on developing the
  vision, skills, and accountability of its formal and informal leaders to lead for equity?

For this study, I examined all three arenas which each have three additional lenses of

engagement: personal, institutional, and professional. Figure 1 presents a graphic of the

conceptual model that guided this study. In the graphic, the three arenas (culture, practice, and

leadership) are overlapping reflecting their inter-relatedness. The conceptual framework anchors

the examination and work around assistant principals' beliefs and practices. Leading for

educational equity requires developing assistant principals' knowledge and skills to identify

strategic planning in equitable scheduling and implement processes to support culturally relevant

instruction. It also requires building relationships and investing authentic time and resources in

the communities they serve. Through these practices, educational equity can result in the overall

improved performance for all student-scholars at a school. Participants' equity artifacts, self-anchoring scale and survey responses illustrated the importance of being relational before you can be operational. Responses also demonstrated the value in leadership transparency with instructional and operational decisions and the impact of assistant principals being responsive to people's needs and values. These theoretical underpinnings of authentic leadership, which shaped the study design as well, also significantly elevated the study findings. Chapter 2 will provide additional examination and discussion of these concepts.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework: The Equity Framework
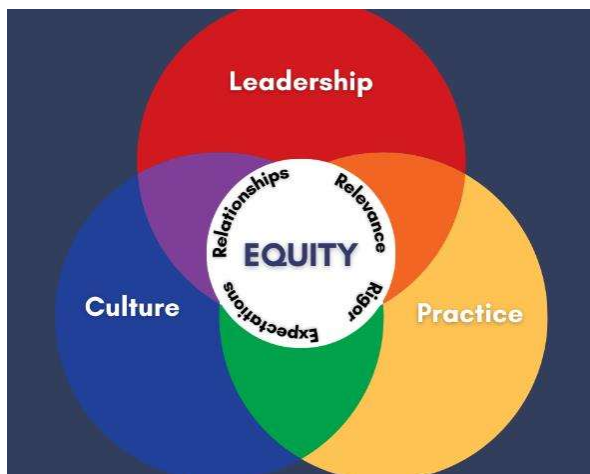
Purpose of Study

There is a gap in the literature focusing on the systemic change in basic assumptions of the role of the assistant principal (Armstrong, 2009; Chapman, 2005; Glanz, 1994; Grodzki, 2011; Grubb & Flessa, 2006). Even more limited is research on the role of the assistant principals' beliefs and actions in leading for educational equity. In fact, I have found no study specifically conducted with this focus. Nevertheless, assistant principals are being called to

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partner with their principals and other school leaders and, in some instances, to take a more definitive role in leading the equity work on the campus (Alvoid & Black, Jr., 2014). Calls for school improvement increasingly speak of the need for systemic reform involving a comprehensive approach to restructuring schools and is often referred to by such loosely defined terms as *school-based management*, *site-based governance, shared decision making*, and *teacher empowerment* (Irvine, 2002).

This qualitative case study examined assistant principals' perspectives on their beliefs and actions around leading for educational equity and change. It also explored assistant principals' experiences in learning about and leading for educational equity. Lastly, it sought an understanding of what assistant principals are doing and believing to move the work forward in the field of educational equity. When school leaders commit to educational equity (i.e., fairness, access, and opportunity), they enhance teacher guidance and student outcomes (Browne, 2012). Assistant principals can become equity-minded leaders of excellence, be contributing members to their campus and school district, and thereby assist in perpetuating the paradigm shift of the role of the assistant principal.

Research Questions

The study was designed to address the following research question and sub questions:

1. What is the assistant principals' perspective of their role in leading for educational equity?

   1a. What are the assistant principals' beliefs around leading for educational equity?

   1b. What are the assistant principals' actions in leading for educational equity?

Context

The setting for this qualitative case study was a large, urban, mid-Atlantic school district where less than 30% of the student-scholar population was White, while nearly 60% of the district's workforce was White. This case study used purposeful sampling to identify middle school assistant principals employed by the mid-Atlantic school district for participation in this study. It is one of the country's largest school districts with 210 schools, of which 42 were middle schools, and it had an enrollment of 160,000 student-scholars. Enrollment included pre-kindergarten and Head Start children and first through twelfth grade students. The district served a county that had suburban, urban, and rural areas and is a portrait of contrasts. In the district's schools, there were 157 countries represented and 39 languages spoken. After English (73%), Spanish was spoken by the highest number of students (15.6 %) followed by Chinese (3.8%), and African languages (3.0%). The county had a population of 1,017,859 and a median household per capita income of $99,435 making it one of the wealthiest counties in the United States. However, there were pockets of low-income and poverty-stricken families. Approximately 48% of student-scholars received free or reduced meals (FARMS) within the county. Measures of performance used by the district resulted in the following: a 90% graduation rate, 65.9% advanced placement participation, 34 national Blue Ribbon schools, and an average combined SAT score of 1653.

Secondary middle school assistant principals from the district were selected for this study due to the push for equity, antiracist approaches, and the social-emotional initiatives in the district's schools. This district has an ongoing commitment to equity and excellence as evidenced by its strong statement on equity:

We BELIEVE that each and every student matters; outcomes should not be predictable by race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status; equity demands the elimination of all gaps; and creating maximizing future opportunities for student-scholars and staff is necessary. Therefore, we will hold high expectations for all student-scholars and staff, distribute resources as necessary to provide extra supports and interventions so all student-scholars can achieve; identity and eliminate any institutional barriers to student-scholars' success; and ensure that equitable practices are used in all classrooms and workplaces.

Furthermore, the study district was in the process of undergoing an antiracist system audit unanimously approved by the district's board of education. The audit provided an opportunity to examine the system-wide practices and policies to ensure race and bias did not impact access, opportunities, or equitable outcomes for student-scholars' academic and social-emotional well-being. The audit analyzed policies and practices that impacted staff as well. My research on the phenomenon of the assistant principal's beliefs and actions in leading for educational equity and change are in alignment with the district's system's thinking.

<div align="center">Researcher Positionality and Subjectivity</div>

When I think about who I am as a researcher, I consider my experiences both personally and professionally. At the core of my thinking is always the weight of being a woman and, more specifically, a woman of color—a woman by all accounts who should be a statistic considering the hardships I have had to endure, the environment in which I grew up, and the odds I faced when trying to change my circumstances. As I move through life, seek opportunities, and encourage others to be their greater self, I know now, in my early forties that I do this as a self-loving proud woman of color which ultimately influences my thinking, approach, and motivation. I purposely engage myself in activities, organizations, travels, clubs, and

conversations with others from different ethnic groups who seemingly do not share my experiences, cultural norms, background, or even language.

I like to believe my overarching way of thinking is not biased and that I am not prejudiced in whom I look to first to see if discrepancies are on the rise; but if I am honest, my first thought is always to make sure the Black and Brown student-scholars are sorted, provided for, and thought of because I suppose my thinking is that the majority ethnic student-scholars will always have an anchor, a life-line, a support. Our current system is designed to meet their needs and to always consider them. While many of my experiences in education might support that claim, I cannot emphatically say it is true across the board. I like to think once I am able to contribute to my son's and my community, I will make a concerted effort to positively influence other communities. At times, I justify my thinking with the understanding that, if the student-scholars of color needs are met, then it benefits the entire campus and community and all student-scholars' needs are met.

I maintain a significant tenant of leading for equity in education by providing the necessary supports to ensure a fair environment that facilitates equal access to educational opportunities and learning experiences and academic success for all student-scholars. Employing equity in education is a leveraging tool that allows culturally and linguistically diverse student-scholars a greater chance at academic success enabling them to move from being dependent learners to becoming independent learners able to complete higher-order thinking tasks and creative problem solving. Equity in education is rooted in profound evidence-based research. Equity in education is a fundamental and civil human right which all student-scholars should be afforded.

As a former assistant principal and now a principal, both leadership roles develop and support educators and staff. As a mother of a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual male child, I understand the urgency in ensuring a learning environment led by an equity-minded educational leader who reflects on their own beliefs and actions. Such a leader can be critical to the success and performance of my child and all children when it comes to having positive learning and school experiences. This opportunity of leading for educational equity is work I find close to my heart and beneficial. Currently, the district where I am employed is pushing for anti-racist approaches and producing more culturally responsive classrooms and equity-minded and culturally responsive intelligent stakeholders. As an administrator, my research directly affects the work I do and provides the opportunity to effect change in the industry. I want to learn to learn, meaning I want to learn about the work schools are doing regarding leadership equity in my field so I may become a better practitioner and change-agent as I continue my journey as an administrator.

Since I am a practitioner/insider in the area which I studied, with a knowledge base of the organization I researched, I acknowledged my biases. As a researcher studying the perceptions of assistant principals employed by the same school district in which I work, I sought throughout the study to refrain from self or organization-promoting and/or denouncing. I did this, to the extent possible, by building in methods that mitigated bias, using industry-standard tools of evaluation, interviews, surveys, and questions. Lastly, I continued to acknowledge my positionality and reflected throughout on its implications. Chapter 3 will provide a more in-depth analysis of my methodology.

Definition of Terms

This section defines a list of commonly used terms referenced throughout my research study for which a uniform understanding is needed.

Assistant principal (traditional): The term assistant principal is commonly used in the United States to confer an entry level campus administrative position (Glanz, 1994). Depending on the country of origin, several other names used for the position include vice principal, administrative assistant, deputy head, deputy principals, associate principal, and assistant to the principal (Cranston et al., 2004; Kwan & Walker, 2008). An assistant principal is an entry-level position in educational administration that assists the principal in the overall running of the school. The job is fast-paced and requires multitasking to hold a leadership position in interactions with student-scholars, teachers, and parents.

Culture: The totality of ideas, beliefs, value, activities, and knowledge of a group or individuals who share historical, geographical, religious, racial, linguistic, ethnic, or social traditions, and who transmit, reinforce, and modify those traditions (Davis, 2006)

Cultural Proficiency: The policies and practices of a school or the values and behavior of an individual that enable the person or school to interact effectively in a culturally diverse environment" (Lindsey et al., 2019). It is an approach not a theory, program, or silver bullet (Davis, 2006).

Culture of Equity: An environment wherein individuals are provided what each personally needs in terms of resources and support, rather than all receiving equal potions regardless of need (Linton & Davis, 2013).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: A framework that recognizes the rich and varied cultural wealth, knowledge, and skills that student-scholars from diverse groups bring to schools.

It seeks to develop dynamic teaching practices, multicultural content, multiple means of assessment, and a philosophical view of teaching that is dedicated to nurturing student academic, social, emotional, cultural, psychological, and physiological well-being (Howard, 2010).

Culturally Responsive teaching (CRT): An educators' ability to recognize student-scholars' cultural displays of learning and meaning-making and responds positively and constructively with teaching practices that use cultural knowledge as a scaffold to connect what the student knows to new concepts and content to promote effective information processing. All the while, the educator understands the importance of being in a relationship and having a social-emotional connection to the student to create a safe space for learning (Hammond, 2015).

Educational Equity: Every student has access to the opportunities, resources, and rigor they need throughout their educational career to maximize academic success and social/emotional well-being, and each student's individual characteristics are viewed as valuable (MSDE, 2019).

Equity: Recognizing that people are not the same but deserve access to the same outcomes (Nuri et al., 2012).

Fixed Mindset: A belief system that suggests a person has a predetermined amount of intelligence, skills, or talents (Dweck, 2006).

Growth Mindset: A belief system that suggests that one's intelligence can be grown or developed with persistence, effort, and a focus on learning (Dweck, 2006).

Instructional Leadership (leader): Instructional leadership involves setting clear goals, managing curriculum, monitoring lesson plans, allocating resources, and evaluating teachers regularly to promote student learning and growth. Quality of instruction is the top priority for the instructional principal.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): A Legislative Act, introduced by Congress in 2001 and signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2002, calling for accountability of schools in boosting student achievement for all student-scholars, particularly those coming from a disadvantaged background. This act was a reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Schools Act.

Positive School Culture: Develops as staff members interact with each other, student-scholars, and the community. It becomes the guide for behavior shared among members of the school at large. School culture is a self-repeating cycle; culture is shaped by the interactions of the personnel, and the actions of the personnel become directed by culture (Hinde, 2004). The culture of a school can be a positive influence on student learning, or it can inhibit the functioning of the school. Stakeholders in any environment prefer to be in a situation that is appealing and welcoming. When student-scholars attend school, the expectation is that it is a place where they like to be, a place that offers support and encouragement, and a place where physical comfort levels are optimal (MacNeil et al., 2009). Research indicates school culture plays a significant role in educational reform efforts (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015).

Principal: Functions of a principal at an elementary, middle, or high school are similar, whether the setting is public or private. The role of a principal is to provide strategic direction within the school system. Principals develop standardized curricula, assess teaching methods, monitor student achievement, encourage parent involvement, revise policies and procedures, administer the budget, hire, evaluate staff, and oversee facilities. Other important duties entail developing safety protocols and emergency response procedures (Dowd, 2015).

Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL), formerly known as the ISLLC Standards-for Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium: The 10 standards describe what

effective school leaders should know and do to lead high-achieving staff, schools, and student-scholars in the 21st century. They address an effective principal's role in hiring, school culture, equity, ethics, operations, and school vision and goals. The professional standards apply to principals, assistant principals, and others in school-level leadership positions. According to the Council of Chief State School Officers, the standards are "forward-looking" and are based in both research and practice (Superville, 2015, par. 2).

Race: The color of one's skin; different from racism, which is prejudice based on skin color, and institutionalized racism, which is prejudice plus power (Linton & Davis, 2013).

Racial Awareness: A consciousness or framework that recognizes the historical, social, political, and economic consequences of being a member of a racially marginalized group in the United States (Bobo et. al, 1997; Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Tatum, 2007; Wilson, 2009).

School Leaders A principal, assistant principal, or other individual who is an employee or officer of an elementary or secondary school, local educational agency, or other entity operating an elementary school or secondary school, and responsible for the daily instructional leadership and managerial operations in the elementary school or secondary school building (National Association of Elementary and Middle School Principals).

Shared Vision: Commonly held goals and missions of stakeholders which result in a commitment toward a specific purpose (Senge, 2006). A shared vision is a picture that stakeholders carry in their heads and hearts. It is generated by the leader of an organization and creates a sense of commonality giving coherence to diverse activities; it allows collaboration and creates a common identity and a sense of purpose. New ways of thinking are welcomed while risk taking and experimentation are encouraged (Senge et al., 2012).

Student Achievement: The discrepancy in educational outcomes between various student groups, namely, African American, Native American, certain Asian American, and Latino student-scholars on the low end of the academic performance scale and primarily White and various Asian American student-scholars at the higher end of the academic performance scale (Howard, 2010).

Systems Thinking: Examining and understanding the interconnectedness and impact of interventions within an organization based on a growing theory about the behavior of feedback and complexity, the innate tendencies of a system that lead to growth or stability over time (Senge, 2006).

Self-Efficacy: The notion of an "I think I can" philosophy affects how we feel, think, and act as learners. Teachers' efficacy beliefs are positively associated with how long they will persevere at a task or change. Confidence refers to having self-efficacy, the belief that one has the ability to successfully accomplish a specific task. Leaders who have confidence are more likely to be motivated to succeed, to be persistent when obstacles arise, and to welcome a challenge (Avolio, 2003; Bandura, 1986,1997).

Significance of the Study

According to Freire (1993),

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (p. 185).

Assistant principals who reflect on their beliefs about and engage in equity leadership learning opportunities have the unique leverage to help stakeholders take an active role in the transformation of their world. The assistant principal is an underrepresented figure in the professional literature; yet it is a critical role that supports the work in leading for educational equity (Cohen & Schechter, 2019; Glanz, 1994). The ability of assistant principals to self-reflect on their beliefs about leading for educational equity can contribute to their ability to work effectively with stakeholders. Staff who perceive their assistant principal engaged in the reflection and action of equity leadership may lead to robust professional conversations about race, cultural competency, and interrupting biases. These conversations may be the tipping point needed to change practices to better meet the needs of every student-scholar and enhance their learning experiences and opportunities.

I believe this qualitative study adds to the body of knowledge regarding leadership and, in particular, the assistant principal's role in leading for educational equity. It also promotes an understanding of the responsibilities of the assistant principal as evolving and requiring greater innovation in practice. Overall, the study is significant in that it a) provides insight on the lived experiences of assistant principals who are leading for educational equity, b) demonstrates that assistant principals can learn from their colleagues who are leading for educational equity and can use that learning to promote and carry out equitable leadership practices on their campuses, c) provides a heightened awareness and urgency about providing professional development to support future administrators to become educational equity leader, and d) demonstrates that leading for educational equity may develop assistant principals' knowledge to identify strategic planning skills to implement processes to support culturally relevant instruction and the overall improved performance for all student-scholars at a campus.

The results of this study can be used to assist educational policy makers and practitioners who wish to gain greater knowledge of assistant principals' beliefs and actions regarding educational equity. Also, the study can provide direction to action-oriented practitioners in the work for educational equity. Finally, the study's in-depth descriptions of equity-oriented strategies used by the participants can be used to reinforce a focus on ensuring fairness, access, and opportunity so that "everybody's capacity for being equity-minded can be enhanced" (Ainscow et al., 2013, p. 11). This includes students as well as every adult (i.e., staff) in the learning organization.

Overview of Methodology

A qualitative case study was used for this investigation. Case study research, as defined by Merriam (1999), "is a type of research which provides an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (p,21). Phenomenological research focuses on descriptions of what and how people interpret their experiences (Patton, 2015). A phenomenological research study is a design of inquiry stemming from a philosophy and psychology in which participants describe their lived experiences of a phenomenon. This description culminates in the essence of the experiences for several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon. The design has strong philosophical underpinnings and typically involves conducting interviews (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). This case study approach and exploration of the lived experiences of participants provided robust data from which my results were derived.

This study is a qualitative case study with purposive sampling. I selected participants for this qualitative study based on their work in educational equity as evidenced by the criteria that they were an assistant principal of a secondary middle school with at least 2 years of experience.

The assistant principals were self-nominated by responding to an email seeking their voluntary participation in the study. The email with a link to a survey was distributed to all secondary middle school assistant principals employed by the Mid-Atlantic school district participating in the study. Assistant principals had the opportunity to volunteer by returning a completed survey and indicating interest in participating in a one-on-one interview conducted using a Zoom platform. A selected a small group of willing participants to participated in the semi-structured interview. All participants were informed of the confidentiality of their participation. Compensation for interviewees' participation included a $15 gift card to either Starbucks or Dunkin Donuts for their time.

Data sources included semi-structured interview transcripts, a survey sent to all middle school assistant principals working in the participating school district, an equity artifact (e.g., staff meeting agendas, emails, newsletters, meeting notes, school improvement plans, student learning objectives, administrative documents, school climate surveys, student performance data) provided by each of the interviewees, and my field notes. These varied sources of data allowed for triangulation to minimize bias resulting in a better understanding of (a) the assistant principals' perspectives on their beliefs and actions around leading for educational equity, (b) their experiences in learning about and leading for educational equity, and (c) what assistant principals are doing and believing to move the work forward in the industry of educational equity.

Summary

When U.S. schools were first established, the position of assistant principal did not exist. Until the 1920s, the assistant principal role was not an official position. Over the course of decades, the job of the assistant principal has evolved from performing clerical duties for the

principal and helping less experienced teachers to the multidimensional and complex roles that assistant principals play today. According to Armstrong (2009), the assistant principal is a critical leader in schools. Historically, however, they have been underutilized and under researched (Glanz, 1994; Kaplan & Owings, 1999; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Ribbins, 1997). Even less information and research exist about leading for educational equity. This is an area of significant concern as school-building leadership has been shown to positively impact school success and student-scholar learning outcomes (Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Robinson, et al. 2008). Not surprisingly, the role of the assistant principal is fast becoming more robust and equity-driven in leadership impact. The paradigm shifts provide the opportunity to affect change in ways they have not been considered earlier.

Leadership is about vision, encouraging others to practice that vision, self-reflection, and problem solving for the good of those in an industry—in education, that would be the student-scholars, their families, and school staff. This research examined assistant principals' leadership beliefs and actions in leading for educational equity. If administrators are to bridge the opportunity gap and promote student-scholars' success and improved performance, then stakeholders must call out to our education leadership practitioners; among this body of instructional leaders are the assistant principals. Their conscientious intention in the conversation is necessary to propel the change process forward (Schein 2004; Senge, 2010).

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 presented my personal significance, an introduction to educational equity, the assistant principal's role, and the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings of the study. The chapter also included the purpose of the study, the research questions, context, and my positionality. Definitions and an overview of the study methods concluded the chapter. Chapter 2

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will present a review of the literature on topics pertaining to the study and will further advance

the research rooted in the beliefs and actions of the assistant principal in leading for educational

equity and seminal works and literature. Chapter 3 will include a description of the study

methods and Chapter 4 will provide the results of the data analysis. Chapter 5 will include

discussion of the findings as well as implications for practice and for further research. The

chapter concludes with an epilogue.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The challenges for school leaders are now more urgent that ever (Carbaugh & Marzano, 2018). The purpose of this qualitative study was to (a) examine assistant principals' perspectives in beliefs and actions around leading for educational equity and change, (b) explore the assistant principals' experiences in learning about and leading for educational equity, and (c) identify what assistant principals are doing and believing to move the work forward in the industry of educational equity. This study drew from a broad literature base to address the complexities of educational equity in leadership. This review focuses on literature in the fields of educational equity, political sociology, healthcare equity, and anthropology. It also includes an overview from historical contexts of education in the United States, the definition of equity, and, finally, the perceptions of assistant principals leading for equity and leadership. Literature in these areas of scholarship was selected to provide a more thorough understanding and intersectionality of educational equity. Equally important was the literature on the origins and historical implications of equity in education, its impact, the role of the assistant principal, and authentic leadership as it relates to Linton's (2011) growth and equity leadership framework. I included literature from 1950 to 2020, except for primary resources related to early educational theorists (i.e., Dewey and Jefferson). Research resources included organizational leadership journal articles, books, websites, presentations, podcasts, video journals, and national reports.

This chapter is divided into several sections. First, I present the numerous definitions of equity and conclude with the definition chosen for this study. Next, I present a historical overview of equity. Following, I present the research around educational equity as well as the equity leadership framework guiding the constructs of the study. Additionally, I discuss the current role of the assistant principal and the theoretical framework which anchors the research.

Finally, I integrate findings from the literature review to situate how this study potentially fills a gap in the current literature.

Defining Educational Equity

Defining educational equity need not be complex and convoluted. True educational equity impacts who we are, what we do, and how we do it in a practical, ground-level way so that real success can happen for all student-scholars, no matter who they are or where they come from. Building equity in education shifts the focus of responsibility for academic achievement from the student-scholars to the professional administrators and teachers who are the educators in the school (Linton, 2011). Student-scholars, of course, must do their part; however, the adults in the building must lead (assistant principals) and instruct (teachers) in a way so that all student-scholars can succeed.

Without a collective definition of educational equity, educational stakeholders might aim toward a worthy goal without ever actualizing it for today's student-scholars (Linton, 2015). Thus, the question arises, what is a formal definition of educational equity? Though there are many definitions of equity in the academic and professional development literature, for this study equity in education denotes fairness, opportunity, and achievement for all student-scholars. Lumby and Coleman (2016) asserts, "Equity in education means that personal or social circumstances such as gender, ethnic origin, or family background, are not obstacles to achieving educational potential (fairness) and that all individuals reach at least a basic minimum level of skills (inclusion). (p. 55) Educators provide all student-scholars with the individual support they need to reach and exceed a common standard. However, it is equally important to explore the myriad definitions found in the literature on equity in education. While some researchers espouse the notion that equity begins with a personal commitment to serving every student, equity is

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implemented within an educational institution. Thus, equity must be operationalized. Davis (2007) noted, "Equity is guaranteeing that all student-scholars not only have the opportunity to access a good education, but that they succeed at it" (p. 55). Student achievement is a cornerstone measurement of educational equity. When operationalized, equity works for each student's race, ethnicity, background, gender, and socioeconomic status.

In equitable schools, policy plus practice dictates that educators meet the needs of each student to ensure that every student reaches an acceptable level of proficiency, regardless of that student's ethnic or racial background. Equity as a foundational principle of schooling guarantees that every student has what is necessary to succeed both while in school and after graduation; equity removes schooling as one of the barriers people face in their lifelong quest for success and happiness and. When a child receives a successful education, the individual gains control of his or her future destiny. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has established educational equity as a critical matter of policy and priority. In 2018, Maryland's education equity regulation [Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) 13A.01.06] proposed, "Each Maryland public school will provide every student equitable access to the educational rigor, resources, and supports that are designed to maximize the student's academic success and social/emotional well-being" [Solomon, 2018). MSDE recognizes that gaps in achievement and opportunity persist for student groups and has implemented accountability measures of equity that provide information on successes and challenges in meeting the needs of all student-scholars. Ladson-Billings (2012) asserted, "when student-scholars of color receive educational opportunities that are either culturally relevant or sustainable because schools question or interrogate the centrality of white middle-class culture in the day-to-day of school then educational equity can be realized" (p. 25).

The definition of equitable leadership aligns with a growing body of literature on transformative, socially just, and culturally responsive leadership. In particular, social justice leaders have been concerned principally with "addressing and eliminating marginalization schools" (Theoharis, 2007, p. 223), embodying an urgent moral call to disrupt the institutional systems and barriers that reinforce historical inequities (Murtadha & Watts, 2004; Rapp, 2002; Shields et al., 2005; Wilson et al., 2013). Others urged leaders to couple their understanding of power, privilege, and the political nature of schooling with advocacy and action to readdress existing inequities (Bryne-Jimenez & Orr, 2013; Dantley, 2005; Shields, 2010; Shields & Warke, 2010; Wilson et al., 2013). A wealth of educational research demonstrates that schools throughout the United State., particularly within urban contexts, are often ill-equipped to support meaningful educational opportunities for youth of color (Carey, 2014; Kumashiro, 2012). However, the research is scarce when it comes to how to change the narrative for these youth.

Culturally intelligent leadership such as assistant principals leading for educational equity may help mitigate the perpetuation of these inequitable practices. There exists a great opportunity for assistant principals in this area. I believe educational equity is the paradigm shift necessary for educators to embrace and fulfill the fundamental promise of education: that *all* students learn what they need, not just to survive, but to thrive within a rapidly changing world. Public schools must provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to all student-scholars. Additionally, every student deserves the right to succeed everyday regardless of who they are or where they come from; their success is a spoke of education equity actualized.

Educational equity is not just about equal treatment of all student-scholars, but equal outcomes achieved by individualizing instruction and support for each child. Equity is about all student-scholars succeeding, especially when measured applied to differences such as race,

ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, language, and family background. It is important to acknowledge the diversities within our student-scholars (Linton, 2015). According to John Singleton (2015), a seminal researcher who taught educators across the county how to have 'courageous conversations about race' in schools said, "educational equity is about raising the achievement for all student-scholars while narrowing the gaps between the highest and lowest performing student-scholars and eliminating the racial predictability and disproportionality of which student groups occupy the highest and lowest achievement categories (Singleton, 2015, p. 75). There continues to be a national discussion around educational equity and academic performance; this research and its findings can add to that discussion.

For the purpose of this research there are two overarching constructs: a) Educational equity is defined as student-scholars succeeding, especially when measured according to differences such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, language, family background, etc. (Linton, 2015). and b) Leading for educational equity denotes "a commitment to providing all student-scholars, regardless of their race or family income, with access to an education that will prepare them for college and beyond" (Childress et al., 2001, p. 3). This discussion around the myriad of definitions on educational equity highlights the importance in breaking the links between race, class, and academic outcomes. It too highlights the importance of accountability on the part of administrators as being executive partners in tackling the achievement and opportunity challenges that confront student-scholars and the nation.

Historical Overview of Educational Equity

This section provides a historical trace of educational equity in the United States and a glimpse abroad for a limited global perspective. The historical context of education within the Unites States has seen its share of shifts over the century, both from legal processes and the

need/desire to promote healthy social interactions. Becoming familiar with historical perspectives and current issues in education equity can be overwhelming and taxing for stakeholders, but they can be crucial in the quest for leading for equity. Assistant principals must remain informed of these issues to promote growth and advancement within their campuses. On the supposition that history is important in understanding present-day challenges, this overview promotes historical reflexivity, a process in which education reformers consider the history around present-day desired goals and related outcomes (Rigby & Tredway, 2018).

In 1779, Thomas Jefferson proposed a two-track system for "the laboring and the learned" (Dewey, 1938). He stated, "scholarships would allow a very few of the laboring class to advance, by racking a few geniuses from the rubbish" (Dewey, 1938, p. 56) Jefferson's actions put into play an expectation of access, education, and for whom education was best suited. In 1872, segregated public schools began. Segregation creates a sense of inferiority among members of a minority culture and a feeling of superiority among members of the dominant culture.

It has been the tradition of the U.S. education system to transmit a hierarchy that prioritizes and enforces majority culture (Bell, 2004). For example, when the United States government conquered tribes of Native Americans and inhabitants of Puerto Rico, it instituted educational policies designed to strip these groups of their native cultures (Spring, 1994). Deculturalization, the process of eliminating cultures, occurred frequently when federal and state governments instituted programs of Americanization designed to replace native cultures with the dominant White culture of the United States. It was not until 1927 that the country began to see its first secondary (i.e., high) schools for African American and other student-scholars of color. Prior to this, Black and Brown student-scholars who wanted to continue their education beyond

Grade 7 had to seek other means or forego post elementary schooling all together. In many districts across the country, it was not until 1937 that the boards of education agreed to abolish the practice of paying African American teachers lower salaries than White teachers. Even with written legislation, implementation was rarely actualized.

"Societal responses to diversity have changed a lot since the end of World War II. Each decade in the latter part of the 20th century has spawned new social policies in response to the issues of concern" (Lindsey et al., 2019, p. 9). Many of these policies were long suppressed before emerging into the national consciousness. To gain a baseline understanding of the multiple factors that have led to policy shifts in U.S. society affecting schools, it is wise to examine social policies related to the issues of diversity and major movements in education. In 1948, segregation was beginning to lose validity, credibility, and popularity especially in the northern states of the county. There seemed to be a beacon of hope for people of color regarding a seemingly fair opportunity for an education. However, examples of resistors still prevailed. For example, grants from the Rockefeller and Carnegie foundations supported the formation of the Educational Testing Services. This testing service continued the work of eugenicists like Carl Brigham (originator of the SAT) who did research "proving that immigrants were 'feeble-minded'" (Spring, 1994). Desegregation in the 1950s set the stage for African American student-scholars in the country to attend school with their Caucasian peers.

The 1960s bought integration for equal access and equal rights. This shift from desegregation to integration was monumental. In schools, the push to desegregate had many consequences, chief among them were voluntary and mandatory school desegregation efforts designed to provide children of color the same opportunities White children were receiving. The unintended consequences of these were that demeaning labels became permanently associated

with certain ethnicities, and student-scholars in desegregated schools continued receiving substandard educations. In 1965, President Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), a cornerstone of the War on Poverty. This law brought education into the forefront of the national assault on poverty and represented a landmark commitment to equal access and quality education. The ESEA is an extensive statue that funds primary and secondary education which emphasizes high quality standards and accountability.

The 1970s bought equal benefits and multiculturalism. Multiculturalism represented a departure from the assimilation or melting pot model which had worked well for Eastern and Southern Europeans but not for people of color. Many educators questioned the appropriateness of assimilation as the goal for every cultural group, "…women's issues entered the multiculturalism discussion in many schools. In the broader society, gay men and lesbians also began to claim their rights to equal opportunities and benefits of society" (Lindsey et al., 2019, p. 12). During this period, people of color in the United States were striving to extend the legal gains won during previous decades to broader societal contexts such as the workplace. Equally important to note was the surge in classroom diversity. Educators continuously engaged with increasing numbers of children from diverse cultures, and they needed to learn new approaches, strategies, and techniques for teaching them.

The 1980s era witnessed an avalanche of diversity trainings. The aspects of diversity during this time included ethnicity, language, gender, and issues of sexual orientation, learning physical differences, and age. In 1980, The Federal Tribal Colleges Act established a community college on every Indian reservation that allowed young people to go to college without leaving their families. In 1989, President George Bush's Educational Excellence Act of 1989 promoted "merit" schools, "magnet" schools, and a federal assessment of education. In 1989, the

assessment began a first-ever Education Summit, a meeting of the president and the nation's governors that produced the first set of national education goals.

The 1990s was the era of cultural competence. The Supreme Court in Oklahoma City vs. Dowell struck down an Oklahoma City busing scheme after all "practical" steps to attain racial balance had occurred. President George W. Bush advocated the pre-1954 idea of "neighborhood schools" to no longer further racial inequality but to fight it by funding specialized "magnet" schools in impoverished communities. The 1990s saw a bourgeoning of seminal researchers of cultural competence. The work of Cross and his colleagues (1989) provided a set of tools that, when organized within a framework, provided a template for personal, professional, organizational, and institutional change. Originally developed for use in the mental health profession, researchers found the transfer to education seamless (Lindsey et al., 2019). The work of researchers, Comer (1988), Fullan (2004), Levin (1988), Sizer (1985), and Slavin (1996) supported the basic tenets of cultural competence with the belief that all children regardless of cultural neighborhood can learn well if they are taught well. Although the national debate over school desegregation has not ended, the spotlight is now on the equitable distribution of human and capital resources. Discrepancies exist on school campuses nationwide. School leaders can mitigate these injustices by finding ways to appreciate the rich differences among student-scholars. Figure 1 displays an overview of the significant changes in educational equity up to 2020.

Figure 2

Historical Overview of Educational Equity

Present day 21st century rings in an awakening of the importance and emphasis in cultural competence while reintroducing the magnitude of cultural proficiency; the two are congruent constructs in equity education. Cross et al. (1993) introduced cultural proficiency as points along the cultural competence continuum. For the educator and the organization, cultural proficiency envisions an actionable future in which advocacy and lifelong learning function as processes in serving the academic and social needs of all student-scholars (Lindsey et al., 2019). Cross et al. (1989) defined cultural competence as "a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency or among professionals; enabling effective cross-culture situation" (p. 54). Culturally proficient leaders address issues that emerge when one culture marginalizes the cultural differences of another. They foster policies and practices that provide opportunities for effective interactions among student-scholars, educators, and community members (Lindsey et al., 2019). Likewise, leaders in cultural proficiency demonstrate an

understanding of the cacophony of diverse cultures each person may experience in the school setting.

History professor and the founding director of the Anti-Racist Research and Policy Center at American University, Ibram X. Kendi (2016) posits that racial discrimination leads to prejudiced ideas filtering in ignorance and hate, and it is this that is the causal relationship driving America's history in race relations. One cannot refute, with a clear conscience, that these racial inequalities have led to inequities in education. In 2016, the federal government instructed school districts to allow transgender student-scholars to use the bathroom that matches their gender identity. Though the directive is not a law, districts that do not comply could face lawsuits or lose federal aid. Later that same year, a federal judge in Texas signed a temporary injunction allowing schools to opt out of the transgender bathroom directive. School leaders play a key role in enhancing the relationship between the school and the community, both as individuals and as participants in school and district decisions (Lindsey et al., 2019). These policies, practices, and legislation provide an overview of the historical context of education and, subsequently, an understanding of the urgency to elevate educational equity in leadership.

Court Cases and Legislation Around Equity

As discussed, over the past couple of generations it has become increasingly apparent that issues of diversity play a vital role in the economic and political life of the United States. The momentous Supreme Court decision of Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka (1954) outlawed the "separate but equal" doctrine of segregation. This was a radical departure from the policies and procedures of the Jim Crow era as it set the stage for desegregation of public schools making schoolhouses more diverse in the country. It is important to note, however, the ruling did not provide deliberate or speedy desegregation (NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund

1952), nor did it specify guidance on how to support schools in teaching a diverse population (Phillips, 2019). Schools were forced to reevaluate how they had been educating Black and Brown student-scholars and perpetuating the marginalization of children of color. The struggle to desegregate American educational institutions has shaped numerous legal decisions, reforms, enactments, and policies which subsequently gave voice and a spotlight to the ills of educational inequities which demanded education equity.

The great Civil Rights Movement opened the door to demand that public schools reflect dominated cultures: African Americans, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and Puerto Ricans who demanded that their unique culture also receive recognition and also have a place in the school curriculum (Spring, 1994). The result of civil unrest and inhumane injustices was the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which extended the power of federal regulations to areas of voting rights, public accommodations, education, and employment. Titles IV and VI of the legislation were intended to end school segregation and provide authority for implementing the Brown decision (Spring, 1994). Title VI, arguably the most important section, established the precedent for using disbursal of government money as a means of controlling educational policies. Originally, President Kennedy merely proposed a requirement that institutions receiving federal funds must abort discriminatory practices. However, much to the delight of the educational equity movement, Title VI in its final form required mandatory withholding of federal funds to institutions that did not comply with its mandates. It stated that no person could be excluded based on race, color, or national origin from or denied benefits of any program receiving federal financial assistance; this required all federal agencies to establish guidelines to implement the policy. Refusal to adhere to this mandate would guarantee immediate "termination of or refusal to grant or to continue assistance under such program activity" (Spring, 1994, p. 55). The power

of Title VI rests in its ability to withhold federal money from financially pressed school systems. This became a more crucial issue in 1965 after the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

The Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) of 1964 inspired instituting Head Start programs in our country. The Head Start program was initiated to prepare children living in poverty for school. Though this program had its share of opponents in the political realm and the need for such early jumpstart literacy programs continued to be questioned, the Head Start program remains today. In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was birthed. This legislation passed by Congress revolutionized American education (McGuinn, 2015; Urban & Wagoner, 2009). It should be noted that on December 10, 2015, President Obama signed this bipartisan measure reauthorizing the 50-year-old ESEA, the nation's national education law and longstanding commitment to equal opportunity for all student-scholars. In 1968, Congress passed a Bilingual Education Act in response to a recognition that low academic achievement of Spanish-speaking student-scholars was related to a lack of proficiency in English language. Considered a flagship of bilingual and immersion education programs in schools, this act resulted in having some content taught in English and Spanish. The following years saw a rise of additional federal actions that helped improve bilingual, immersion, and dual education for student-scholars.

Rights for inclusion of student-scholars with disabilities was "one of the most significant acts of educational legislation during the 1970s" (Urban & Wagoner, 2009, p. 365). On November 29, 1975, President Gerald Ford signed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, currently known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2006). The significance of this legislation was and remains tantamount to the education of

student-scholars with differing learning abilities. No longer was the education of student-scholars with differing abilities considered to be a privilege; it was now recognized as a right. School leaders could not refuse to address or handle the needs of student-scholars with differing abilities, no matter the severity of the disability. A free and appropriate education (FAPE) was to be available to all student-scholars in the least restrictive environment (Bartlett et al., 2007). The Section 504 regulation requires a school district to provide FAPE to each qualified person with a disability who is in the school district's jurisdiction regardless of the nature or severity of the disability. Student-scholars with differing abilities have a legal right to FAPE guaranteed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Current standards-based education reforms and the No Child Left Behind Act (2020) (NCLB) require all children to attain minimal standards of proficiency. In schools, it is the responsibility of the administrators to select qualified teachers and staff and build their capacity to deliver high quality instruction to all student-scholars. Under NCLB compliance rules, student growth must be documented and evaluated. This measure of accountability for school districts brings with it a tremendous need for equity-centered instructional leader administrators.

In 2015, Congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which authorized the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act and included several provisions intended to combat inequity in schools. In October 2015, The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) unanimously approved new, refreshed standards for educational leaders and released the final standards a month later. The 2015 Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, formerly known as ISLLC standards, aim to ensure district and school leaders are able to improve student achievement and meet new, higher expectations. The district in which this study took place adheres to its state governing board which provides oversight and adherence to the nationally

adopted Professional Standards for Education Leaders (PSEL). PSEL Standard 3 calls for equitable and culturally responsive leadership in all school leadership through guiding expectations. This is the standard by which effective educational leaders strive to achieve and are measured. Elements of the standard include:

- Ensure that each student is treated fairly, respectfully, and with an understanding of each student's culture and context.

- Recognize, respect, and employ each student's strengths, diversity, and culture as assets for teaching and learning.

- Ensure that each student has equitable access to effective teachers, learning opportunities, academic and social support, and other resources necessary for success.

- Develop student policies and address student misconduct in a positive, fair, and unbiased manner.

- Confront and alter institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with race, class, culture and language, gender and sexual orientation, and disability or special status.

- Promote the preparation of student-scholars to live productively in and contribute to the diverse cultural contexts of a global society.

- Act with cultural competence and responsiveness in their interactions, decision making, and practice.

- Address matters of equity and cultural responsiveness in all aspects of leadership (Superville, 2015).

With changes in policy and philosophy came an increase in state's accountability to its student-scholars and those who educate them. The additional responsibility of the states was

transferred to the schools, specifically to administrators (principals and assistant principals) and teachers. The intent of these policies and legislation was to increase the need of accountability and provide direction for school leadership. This overview is not exhaustive and does not encompass all federal legislation related to educational equity or equitable access to academic opportunities to all children within the United States' public schools or abroad. Likewise, it is not representative of all student groups. The goal was to offer an overview of federal legislation and judicial actions without negating the relevance of legislation not mentioned.

<div align="center">Equality Verses Equity</div>

Educational scholarship around equity and cultural competency suggests that all children can learn. Even more importantly, the research elevates the notion that children and youth from any cultural neighborhood can learn well if they are taught well. Theorist Terrell Raymond (2019) postulated the importance of school leaders and school educators being culturally proficient. In Raymond's (2019) work, he posited,

> Culturally proficient educators demonstrate an understanding of the cacophony of diverse cultures each person may experience in the school setting. Although they accept they may not have intimate knowledge about each of the cultures represented in a classroom, school, or district, they recognize their need to continuously learn more. They develop a conscious awareness of the cultures of their districts or schools, and they understand that each has a powerful influence on the educators, student-scholars, parents, and communities associated with that district or school. (p. 78)

When discussing culturally proficient school leaders, the key is to incrementally increase awareness and understanding of diverse cultures and settings. Then, the assistant principal can begin finding the harmony within the diversity and begin leading for equity.

To conduct equitable leadership practices, leadership and organizations must shift from efforts that manifest a deficit articulation of problems and solutions that change individual deficits or poor socialization to practices that reflect an equity lens and address structural and systemic conditions, processes, and barriers that exacerbate societal inequities (Bensimon, 2005). The cornerstone to providing a quality equitable education is to meet the individual needs of learners. But before creating a cradle-to-college path, the baby must first be nurtured. Narrowing the opportunity gap begins with strong educational-equity-minded school leaders including assistant principals. Equitable strategies help boost graduation rates and end the tendency for urban schools to fail the kids they teach (Butler, 2019).

Despite widespread recognition of how the mainstream policies, practices, culture, curriculum, and instruction of schools reproduce or exacerbate existing inequities, student-scholars and families from nondominant groups (i.e., groups historically limited to access to power in the system) continue to experience persistent gaps in resources, opportunities, and outcomes (Delpit, 2006; Jordan, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Nieto, 2005). Educational leadership plays a fundamental role in either sustaining or redressing these disparities (Riehl, 2000; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Theorharis, 2007). When institutions of learning make a commitment to eradicate and challenge the status quo, success can become tangible to every student. Schools may be able to succeed at equity if all parts, from top administrators to classroom teachers and building staff, have a shared vision of equity (Hammond, 2015).

The very essence of public education has remained the same: an equal education for large, aggregated groups of student-scholars. According to Linton, "Public education has a strong racist legacy and persistent inequities that must be addressed" (2011, p. 97). The history of institutionalized education in the United States has been the impetus for inequity and its

residual continues to perpetuate lack of access, fairness, and opportunity for non-dominant groups. Few educators understand the historical origins of education as an institution. Those both in and out of the field of education collectively hold on to the mythologies of the public school system built as the perpetuator of democracy and the pathway to social mobility. Research demonstrates this is not the case. Rather, public education's origin was to create a minimally educated, reliable workforce to serve the needs of the country's economic engine. In Littky's 2004 book, *The Big Picture*, he describes the history of institutionalized education in the United States:

> In 1892, the National Education Association's (NEA) Council formed the Committee of 10. The president of Harvard University was the chair, and the other nine members were equally intellectual types from the elite institutions of the time. This small group set out to standardize high school programs on a national scale. They proclaimed exactly what subjects student-scholars should be taught and in what order. They even originated the concept of tracking including stating that secondary education was only appropriate for a tiny portion of youth (Linton, 2011).

It is important to note that this group of elite White men set in stone the idea that education is a one-size-fits-all institution. As the Historical Dictionary of American Education says, "The Committee asserted that every subject should be taught the same way to all pupils" (p. 29). This is the archaic piece of paper that most schools still use, without even knowing it, as the basis for their rigid curricula and graduation requirements.

In summary, several themes emerged from the literature review that pertained to educational equity including the concepts of equality verses equity and leading for equity. Much has been made of the difference between equality and equity. Equality is the term that is perhaps

most widely used and recognized in education. Essentially, "equality is connected with sameness. For example, boys and girls are equal so they should be treated the same. The same tax should be levied on those with the same income" (Lumby & Coleman, 2016). This kind of thinking finds its home in a frequently quoted formula that is relevant to education:

"Assuming that there is a distribution of natural assets, those who are at the same level of talent and ability and have the same willingness to use them should have the same prospects of success, regardless of their initial place in the social system" (Rawls, 1968, p. 73).

According to Lumby and Coleman (2016), equity is a term used to indicate a different kind of intended outcome. While equality means treating every student the same, equity means making sure every student has the support they need to be successful. Where equality relates to sameness, equity majors on differences and indicates valuing different abilities and choices. The research suggests equity in education refers to personal or social circumstances, gender, ethnic origin, or family background which are not obstacles to achieving one's educational potential. Equity in education requires putting systems and change efforts in place to ensure that every child has a fair chance for success. Equity is not a guarantee that all student-scholars will succeed; rather, it assures that all student-scholars will have the opportunity and support necessary to succeed (Singleton, 2015). When suggesting the assistant principal is leading for educational equity, school leaders and all stakeholders should recognize that the assistant principal is leading in fairness, not doling out sameness.

The Growth and Equity Leadership Framework

As assistant principals and educators work to directly address the nation's racial and civil unrest and other inequities, they aim to accomplish educational equity which has a profound

impact on eliminating disparities in student-scholar achievement disparities and lifting all student-scholars to prominent levels of success (Muhammad & Hollie, 2012). My study uses the growth and equity leadership framework. To achieve leadership equity, Linton (2011) suggested three important arenas of focus: culture, practice, and leadership. Within those arenas are three additional levels on which to focus: personal, institutional, and professional. After visiting schools that had been successful with closing achievement gaps, Linton (2011) developed the equity framework. There are four common characteristics of equitable schools that Linton observed: a) expectations that set the bar for high achievement; b) rigor that provides the skills and learning student-scholars needs to succeed; c) relationships that help the student believe in the teacher's high expectations and engage with the rigorous curriculum; and d) that respond to the relevancy of the learning. It is important to create assistant principals and educators who want to develop schools that are both equitable and excellent, where all student-scholars achieve high levels of academic success, regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, neighborhood, parental income, or home language. In his book, *Equity 101*, Linton (2011) states, "Equity is about the 'tomorrows' for our student-scholars and children" (p. 149). Linton's statement substantiates the importance and urgency of having culturally intelligent assistant principals helping to lead the work of educational equity.

Linton (2011) provides a guide for understanding what it means to lead for equity. He espoused,

> It is important to define equity, illustrate it clearly, and illuminate its impact on student learning through the stories of highly successful schools and school systems that are eliminating their achievement gaps and lifting all student-scholars to high levels of success. (p. 78)

The success of equity depends on the school and/or system's ability to create an effective framework that guides all decisions, practices, and policies. Linton recognizes many educational institutions engage in a variety of strategies; however, an equitable framework links the strategies together to provide guiding and driving purpose to the school's improvement efforts.

The equity lens provided under Linton's framework suggests examining one's leadership, culture, and practice. In doing this, the leader describes themselves in terms of equity (personal), measures the equity within the system (institutional), and analyzes the equitable nature of the programs and practices (professional). Applying an equity lens to leaders, followers, and the institution clears an educational pathway to determine what the leader, followers, and institution need to do to achieve equity. To effect academic success for all student-scholars, equitable culture sets the stage for engagement and learning while working in trifecta with focused instructional leadership and effective teaching practice.

> No school can guarantee that all student will succeed in life, but all schools can guarantee that every student is prepared at high school graduation with the necessary skills and knowledge to enter college or advanced career training, ready to succeed. (Linton, 2013, p. 19)

It is the responsibility and privilege of the assistant principal to ensure instructional practices and positive school experiences are in place to help student-scholars either become college ready or enlist in an advanced apprenticeship if that is the path they desire.

In schools that function under Linton's equity framework, the focus is on the possibilities of the student rather than their limitations. Davis (2006) wrote, "To assign an assumption to any child at any level can be dangerous" (p. 25). In applying the equitable principles under Linton's framework, assistant principals can help student-scholars navigate and redefine their own

capabilities for success. Linton's (2011) framework allows student-scholars to move upward and forward to much greater heights of academic success than they might have thought possible absent the framework. Linton feels strongly that the success of equity depends on the school and/or system's ability to create an effective framework that guides all decisions, practices, and policies.

The equitable culture of a school matters to its educators, parents, the community, and especially its student-scholars. When the culture of a school focusses on developing high expectations, rigorous instruction, and engagement for every student, cultural relevance (in terms of what student-scholars learn) and strong connected relationships between teacher and student, there is no limit to how far a school can progress. The best schools are not those with perfect practice, but rather those that have created an environment where every student and educator feel supported, understood, and accepted. This is the power of equitable school culture: the power of excellence in education (Linton & Davis, 2013). It has been my experience of over 18 years in education that most educational institutions engage numerous strategies but miss the target when attempting to connect strategies to sustained and observable success. An equitable framework links these strategies together to provide guiding and driving purpose to the school's improvement efforts.

The Role of the Assistant Principal in Leading for Educational Equity

Historically, leadership theories and frameworks are based on Western ideologies and perspectives (Moua, 2010). The assistant principal is a critical leader in schools (Armstrong, 2009). Assistant principals have been underutilized and under researched (Glanz, 1994; Kaplan & Owings, 1999; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Ribbins, 1997). No longer are assistant principals solely responsible for management activities such as disciplining student-scholars, adjusting

schedules, fielding challenging phone calls, and managing building issues. The call to action for assistant principals has been elevated to joining the charge of leading for equity. "School principals and vice-principals make a significant contribution to the culture of their schools by effectively leading and managing" (B.C. School Superintendents Association, 2002, p. 5). Over the years, leadership scholars have documented that, when talking about the leadership process, culture matters. In general, the literature regarding leadership points to the critical need for cross-cultural and global leadership especially given the importance of building networks and relationships to create an appreciation for both similarities and differences. Moua (2010) suggested that for diversity and culture to flourish in organizations, everyone in the workplace must hold each other accountable towards differences. Culturally and linguistically diverse learners are student-scholars growing up in households that differ in some way from the system-normed, White, middle-to-upper class North American households (Ritchotte et al., 2019). Assistant principals have the unique opportunity to make and evoke "good trouble" by moving from the historical role of exclusively manager and disciplinary to culturally intelligent, equity-centered instructional leaders.

Current day leadership calls for what education research scholar, Ronald Heifetz (2019), defines as courageous leadership—the courage to see reality and help others see their realties of who they are, how they behave, what talents and skill sets they have or are missing in this global world, and what opportunities should be capitalized on and seized. Leaders must be able to see and anticipate what skill sets are needed in the future not just develop their employees' skills for the moment. For race-conscious leaders, their work takes on the challenge to interrupt the marginalization of student-scholars of color regardless whether they represent 2% or 90% of their school's student demographic (Flores & Gunzenhauser, 2019). Doing what is best for

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children means trusting and relying on professionals in the related fields of education, psychology, neuroscience, and medicine. It means doing what is best, not what is cheapest. It also means what is greatly needed is doing what works to level many educational inequities that exist rather than continuing the same old approaches that have intensified educational decline. A qualitative research study conducted for 1 year beginning in 2014 focused on how school leaders perceived educational inequalities and student diversity and how these views influenced their leadership practices. The results reflected the changing role of assistant principals. Carter and Welner (2013) and Milner (2010) maintained that a chief role of an assistant principal is determining whether school leaders interpret educational inequities as an achievement gap, an opportunity gap, or some combination thereof.

Leadership in the 21st century not only requires the capacity to think critically and speak and write effectively, it also demands the ability to interact effectively with others from different backgrounds (Tatum, 2007). It stands to reason the development of these abilities require opportunities to practice. In the work of leading for educational equity, it may be important to take the time to understand the role that race has and continues to play in determining who has access to what kind of education. Everyone can benefit from this practice.

Many researchers, principals, assistant principals, teachers, and staff agree that the status quo is not enough when leading for educational equity (Kwan, 2009). Change is necessary to ensure student-scholars' chances at success (DuFour, 2011). It is DuFour's belief that student-scholars can only achieve success and teachers can only grow professionally and personally if given opportunities to collaborate. Assistant principals leading for equity recognize this importance and help facilitate spaces in the organization for such growth to occur. Assistant principals must be simultaneously the agents of change, the support system to the organization

and principal, the champion, and the advocates. As Avery (2003) writes, "...principals and assistant principals must hold a belief system that emphasizes the importance of all students regardless of disability. Inclusive principals and assistant principals believe all student-scholars can learn in community schools that address individual needs" (p. 47). Creating collaborative spaces for educational stakeholders can be beneficial for the learning institution.

Leadership decisions are dependent on the situation which arises. An effective leader can examine a given scenario and act accordingly. An effective assistant principal learns to consider all elements of a situation before deciding how to move forward. With the chaos of a school leader's typical workday, the ability to adapt to any situation at any time is necessary. Efficient and equity minded leaders can change focus on demand and request. Since the assistant principal can be one who influences others through leadership and direction, the style of leadership displayed has a daily impact and effect on the people they staff (Kwan, 1993). The principal and assistant principal's influence and support cannot be disputed. For assistant principals, overcoming the pressures of the job and becoming an effective leader for education equity does not happen without intense reflection and action (Avery, 2003). Continuous reflection on one's beliefs and actions while leading the work can be the bridge that supports sustainability for the assistant principal.

Assistant principals leading for educational equity, too, must either know how or learn to "manage up." Managing up simply refers to doing whatever it takes to make the principal's job easier by essentially managing the manager. Gabarro and Kotter (1980) advised readers to devote time and energy to managing their relationships with their bosses. The authors were not talking about showering supervisors with flattery; rather, they asked readers to understand that the manager–boss relationship is one of mutual dependence. Bosses need cooperation, reliability,

and honesty from their direct reporters. Managers, for their part, rely on bosses for making connections with the rest of the company, for setting priorities, and for obtaining critical resources. It only makes sense to work at making the relationship between the assistant principal and the principal operate as smoothly as possible.

Successfully managing relationships with the principal requires that the assistant principal have a comprehensive understanding of their supervisor and of themselves, particularly their strengths, weaknesses, work styles, and needs. Ultimately, the final decision of what happens in a school and how equity manifests itself rests on the principal, the CEO of the campus. However, assistant principals have the uniquely profound opportunity to put into place practices and approaches that elevate fairness, opportunity, and achievement for all student-scholars in a way that influences the principal to make decisions demonstrating a commitment to providing for all student-scholars with access to an education that prepares them for college and beyond regardless of their race or family income. From personal experience as an assistant principal, I must "manage up" with my principal, prioritize events as they happen, resolve them quickly, and rely on experience to facilitate the most equitable decisions possible.

Theoretical Framework

For a race conscious, strong school leader, meaningful education can and does occur for all stakeholders. According to Hoerr (2005),

> Strong leaders are artists. They inspire, applaud, chastise, steer, and stand on the side. They create, monitor, reinforce, encourage, and stand in the back. Yes, sometimes they stand in the front, too. They recognize it is their responsibility to help create a setting which each individual can flourish and everyone can grow. Strong leaders understand that leadership is about relationships. (p. 87)

Culturally intelligent and equity minded leaders aim to create conditions that create success for all stakeholders. Such leaders not only recognize the importance of creating such conditions, but they keep equity at the forefront of every leadership move they employ. Leadership is moral only if an individual's internalized values are moral (George, 2007) or if they are perceived as such by others (Sparrows, 2005).

Though the body of research reviewed does not elevate one specific leadership style for the phenomenon of leading for educational equity, it is important to note that, within Linton's (2011) equity framework, authentic leadership is a foundational component. To that end, I explored a broad overview of leadership style from the research on authentic leadership style as it may surface in participants' responses. In adding this breadth of research, I hoped to parcel out bias related to not specifically outlining a leadership style. Scholars focused on leadership have no single accepted definition of authentic leadership. Instead, there are multiple definitions, each written from a different viewpoint and with a different emphasis (Chan, 2005). My research study will employ the following three viewpoints of authentic leadership: relational transparency, moral grounding, and responsiveness to people's needs and values (Northouse, 2010). These areas align with what Moua (2010) maintained are important components of a culturally intelligent leader possesses.

Authenticity in leadership is a construct that gained attention in recent academic research (George, 2007; Northouse, 2010; Walumbwa et al., 2008). It describes leaders with great capacity to effectively process information about themselves (their values, beliefs, goals, and feelings), an ability to adjust their leadership behavior in accordance with their own self, a clear personal identity, and an ability to harmonize their preferences with demands of society (Chan et al., 2012). Authentic leadership is conceptualized as the root concept and a theoretical foundation

for any positive forms of leadership (Illies et al., 2005; May et al., 2003). Authentic leadership is transparent, morally grounded, and responsive to people's needs and values. The authentic leadership style is timely and worthwhile as one considers leading for equity and building teacher efficacy and cultural competency to improve student performance (Northouse, 2010). Assistant principals are often required to make decisions in full transparency while responding to the needs of their stakeholders.

I offer a fourth and final scholarly perspective on authentic leadership that involves leaders' choice or motivation to exhibit all behavioral aspects of this construct (Caza & Jackson, 2011). Authentic leadership recognizes how others view their leadership as demonstrated, for example via leaders' behavior or facial expressions. Both internal and external referents are observable when discussing authentic leadership. For the purpose of this study, I employed the construct of authenticity rooted in Linton's (2011) equity framework, "Authenticity is realness in purpose, honesty in beliefs and understandings, and integrity in our relations with others" (p. 95). Authenticity helps us value a situation for both its potential and its limitations. Linton's research illuminates this as a common identifier for educational stakeholders, and, in particular, assistant principals who lead for educational equity.

What assistant principals believe, understand, provide, and demonstrate has tremendous significance on the organization. Assistant principals can make a difference in the success of a school and its programs as well as in its social-emotional and professional climate. The beliefs and understanding of an assistant principal, along with what is provided by way of resources and demonstrated leadership, have influence and credibility with teachers. This influence impacts the way schools are run. Kearney and Smith (2008) noted, "generally teachers who perceive their principals as effective are more open to institutional change" (p. 3). The authors went on to

share, "In school settings, positive faculty orientations to change and principal influence complement each other and nurture environments that forward teacher beliefs in administrators to accomplish changes" (p. 4). In a study on teacher expectations of principals´ leadership, the results indicated expectations of principals´ leadership connected deeply to relationships. This study conducted by Kearney and Smith (2008) confirms the importance of trusting relationships between teachers and the principal and the effects of relations on thoughts, feelings, and ambitions.

In 2013 and 2015, the Finnish National Board of Education (NBE) highlighted its visions for the future leadership of schools (NBE, 2013; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2015). Several educational management topics gained attention including organizing school administration, taking responsibility for finances, and establishing cooperation among schools in networks. The authorities stated that, as the national educational policy in Finland is built on trust and confidence, authorities, school providers, and principals should allocate time for developing initiatives. There was significant emphasis on principals´ educational leadership, and educational authorities were responsible for managing strategies and educational development (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

With the nation's call to action on establishing more equitable schools, educational leaders such as assistant principals must be agents of change and advocates for all, and their staff must see them as such not only by their words but by action, too. School leaders who remain cognizant of the complexity of education and responds to its constant change are more likely to be perceived as successful by their colleagues (Avery, 2003). The change in priorities for assistant principals impact their duties and obligations to their stakeholders each day.

Historically, the primary focus of schools was to establish social order and mainstream vast numbers of immigrant children into a common school setting to produce economically competent, democratic, and moral citizens (Dewey, 1916). These ideas perpetuated an archaic role of education as a study in control and power constructed on relationships that emphasize weeding out undesirables (Dewey, 1916; Johnson, 1972; Spring, 1989). Today, however, it is important to consider shifts in how schools look as compared to the 1900s, 1950s, or even the last two decades. The political, societal, and economic values that account for increased cultural diversity and pronounced changes in educational legislation have required an intense level of accountability on state and local levels to close the achievement gaps, regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. For this study, I analyzed the perceptions of assistant principals regarding their work of leading for educational equity.

A Critique of Authentic Leadership

There is a large body of research that refutes the validity and positive impact of authentic leadership. Since the concept of authentic leadership is still in the formative stages of development, many questions remain regarding it. First, the concepts and ideas presented in the authentic leadership theory practical approach are not fully substantiated. Essentially, the theory, thought interesting and insightful by some, is not built on empirical evidence nor has it ever been tested for validity. Second, the moral component of authentic leadership is questionable and not fully clarified. Third, researchers have questioned whether positive psychological capacities should be included as components of authentic leadership. Lastly, it is not clear how authentic leadership results in positive organizational outcomes. There is an interest in the social sciences to study positive human potential and the best of the human condition (Cameron et al., 2003). Although authentic leadership is intuitively appealing at first glance, questions remain about

whether this leadership results in productive outcomes. The research is not definitive about whether authentic leadership is sufficient to achieve organizational goals (Northouse, 2017). What is clear is that further research may provide greater insight on authentic leadership as well as identify the impact and relevance of it.

Gaps in the Literature

There is an underwhelming body of research in the scholarship of assistant principals leading the work in educational equity and change. To address this gap, research is needed to examine the perceived role of the assistant principal's beliefs and actions regarding leading for educational equity and student-scholar achievement. I proposed that there is an underlying relationship between beliefs and action. In *Culturally Proficient Leadership*, Terrell and Lindsey (2009) share, "Change is an inside-out process in which we are student-scholars of our assumptions about self, others, and the context in which we work with others" (p. 20). They go on to describe an equity lens as follows, "We view our work...as bringing us all together in the understanding that educational gaps are *our* issue" (p. 20).

Assistant principals, who are in the pursuit of leading for equity, are at an advantage in sharpening their abilities in these areas. Assistant principals have the reach to ensure that inequality does not perpetuate on their campuses and, if it does, they can change it by leading for equity. This research is an opportunity to cement the significance of the more innovative and complex responsibilities and role of the assistant principal. It can also give credence to the conversation and add to the literature on the role of the assistant principal as an impactful thought partner, change agent, and equity leader who ultimately helps improve student-scholar performance.

Assistant principals can learn from their colleagues who are leading for educational equity and can use that learning to promote and conduct equitable leadership practices. The hope is that my body of research serves as a toolkit in a call to action to consider the role of the assistant principal in leading for educational equity and helping develop assistant principals' knowledge and skills to identify strategic planning and implementation processes that support culturally relevant instruction and the overall improved performance for all student-scholars served. It is also hoped that it will heighten the awareness and urgency of providing professional development to support future administrators to become educational equity leaders. Lastly, it is my desire that the study will be used as a tool in providing efficacy and value to the assistant principal' leadership role in supporting fairness, opportunity, and achievement for all student-scholars.

Conclusion

A common theme is evident throughout the literature reviewed for this qualitative study; namely that the assistant principal has a significant and critical role of instructional leader in the area of educational equity. Leaders must be able to create cultures where differences thrive. Building equity in education shifts the focus of responsibility for academic achievement from the student-scholar to the professional administrators and teachers (Linton, 2015). School administrators and, in particular assistant principals, have opportunities to leverage their efforts in the area of leading for equity and excellence at the building level. Regardless of the intended mission or task of the assistant principal, very few long-term goals are met without some attention to educational equity (Darling-Hammond, 2010). To balance the challenging crisis of meeting high academic accountability standards for all student-scholars, assistant principals must be able to lead for equity and excellence. We must remember, not all children are equally

supported to equip themselves to live a life they value (Hutton, 2005). It is the duty of school leaders to ensure that each individual student-scholar is supported so that they feel they belong to school, enjoy it and are positively embedded in society. Schools must aid in creating global citizens.

Summary

This chapter opened with a discussion of the scholarship on definitions of educational equity and a historical overview of educational equity. I then discussed the research around educational equity and identified the equity framework guiding the constructs of the research. I shared the complexities and paradigm shift of a race-conscious assistant principal. Moving forward, I discussed a note about the authentic leadership style, a pillar of Linton' (2011) growth and equity leadership framework, which I used as a construct for this study's conceptual framework. Lastly, I integrated the literature to situate how this study potentially fills a gap in the current literature.

The literature suggests assistant principals who lead for educational equity have an opportunity to effect positive change at the building level. Assistant principals have the unique opportunity to evoke positive change. Each day, assistant principals engage in decisions regarding curriculum, policies, and practices to support student success and adult engagement in the culture of the school. The goal of leading for equity is "a commitment to providing all student-scholars, regardless of their race or family income, with access to an education that will prepare them for college and beyond" (Childress et al., 2001, p. 3). Essentially, it is creating global citizens who are able to contribute to and thrive in a world where the landscape is changing and redefining itself almost daily.

The major research question that guided this study is What is the assistant principals' perspective of their role in leading for educational equity? The two sub questions are "What are the assistant principals' beliefs around leading for educational equity? And What are the assistant principals' actions in leading for educational equity?" The study focused on middle school assistant principals. The field of educational leadership has called for developing leaders who can eliminate disparities between dominant and nondominant groups. It is my hope that high-leveraging practices, as elevated in Linton's (2011) equity framework, can facilitate leadership that transform a campus to be more equitable. Chapter 3 will provide a comprehensive view of the research design used in this study as well as the methods of data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine assistant principals' perspectives, beliefs, and actions around leading for educational equity and change, explore their experiences in learning about and leading for educational equity, and understand what they are doing and believing in to move the work forward in the industry of educational equity. In this chapter, I will discuss the epistemological framework guiding the study, the study's design, and the strategies of inquiry used to guide the study. Next, I will describe the purposive sampling process, gaining access to the reach participants, and selection of participants. Prior to embarking on the study, I conducted a pilot test; the results informed the study. I will then describe the data collection processes, including the instruments used, and the procedures for analysis. I will discuss my positionality along with the study's boundaries/limitations. Finally, I will describe the strategies I used to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the study.

Research Questions

As noted in Chapter 1, The following research question and sub questions guided my study:

1. What is the assistant principals' perspective of their role in leading for educational equity?

    1a. What are the assistant principals' beliefs around leading for educational equity?

    1b. What are the assistant principals' actions in leading for educational equity?

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is richly descriptive and effective in educational research (Saldaña, 2013). Merriam stated, "having an interest in knowing more about one's practice, and indeed improving one's practice, leads to asking researchable questions, some of which are best

approached through a research design" (2009, p. 1). I elected to use a qualitative research method

for this study for a number of reasons. First, a qualitative approach was used because it is better

designed to capture emergent thoughts and themes than other methodologies. Second, I chose

qualitative methodology because I wanted to fully capture the "lived experiences" of the

participants that would afford a robust descriptive analysis and strong validity. This qualitative

case study aimed to elevate a phenomenological perspective. Phenomenology was first

conceptualized in the 1900s by Husserl (1931) as a way to understand the context of the lived

experiences of people (i.e., research participants) and the meaning of their respective

experiences. Since Husserl's seminal work, there have been a myriad of theorists who have

continued the research and expanded the theory by aligning it with current qualitative research

methodology (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). Many leaders and theorists have expanded

the application and validity of phenomenology resulting in suitability and usefulness to

educational researchers. Polkinghorne (1989), a phenomenologist, recommended that

phenomenological researchers interview five to 10 participants who have experienced a similar

phenomenon; this results in a substantial capturing and interpreting of the commonality of the

participants' lived experiences. According to Patton (2002), "qualitative methods can be used to

both discover and verify a phenomenon" (p. 47). "With the emphasis of qualitative approaches to

people's experiences, they [qualitative methods] are well suited for discovering and examining

perceptions" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). Third, I chose the qualitative approach for this

study as it allowed me to collect rich and detailed information using multiple methods and data

sources. It also enabled me to capture in-depth descriptions of assistant principals' beliefs and

actions as they lead for educational equity. This qualitative design included semi-structured

interview techniques, a survey, equity artifacts, and field notes along with content analysis

methodology that cements Maxwell's notion that "qualitative inquiry allows one to understand the particular context within which the participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions" (2013, p. 22).

Linton's (2011) equity framework also informs this study examining educational equity through culture, practice, and leadership. Linton touts to achieve equity, one must include all three simultaneously. Within each of these key areas (culture, practice, and leadership), there are three lenses of engagement: personal, institutional, and professional. Linton also elevated the construct of leaders who lead for equity and demonstrate elements of an authentic leadership style.

<div align="center">Case Study Design</div>

According to Merriam (1988) and Wolcott (1992), a case study is defined in terms of its end product. Wolcott asserts that rather than being a method or strategy, a case study is the "end-product of field-oriented research" (p. 36). In addition, Merriam (2009) defined a qualitative case study as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (p. 21). I conducted this case study because I wanted to understand the beliefs and actions of assistant principals around educational equity especially from a group of race-conscious leaders. My goal was to better understand human behavior and experience. I sought to grasp the processes by which people attach meaning to education equity and to describe what those meanings are for assistant principals' leadership for equity. The case study design afforded me that opportunity.

My rationale for selecting a case study for this research on assistant principals' perceptions regarding their beliefs and actions on educational equity leading was based on what Creswell and Poth (2018) stated, "… the participants may be located at a single site,

although they need not be. Most importantly, they must be individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon being explored and can articulate their lived experience" (p. 153). All participants recruited for the study were middle school assistant principals for at least 2 years. Because of the unique operations of middle school campuses, assistant principals who led for educational equity during the COVID-19 pandemic were unique and using them could likely yield robust results. For these reasons, I chose to use a case study research approach to examine the phenomenon of assistant principals' leading for educational equity.

Research Setting

Shaw Arthur School District, referred to by a pseudonym (SAS District), is a large urban Mid-Atlantic school system. According to the district website, more than 70% of the school enrollment are student-scholars of color who represent 150 countries and speak over 39 languages; the most widely spoken foreign languages were Spanish, French, and Chinese. The SAS District's hiring profile for school leaders and teachers revealed that 60% were White female school leaders and 80% were White female teachers. The following statement encapsulates the SAS District's organizational mission.

> SAS District is committed to educating our student-scholars so that academic success is not predictable by race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, language proficiency or disability; we will continue to strive until all gaps have been eliminated for all groups."

The specific target for this study was assistant principals who worked at middle schools which enrolled students in sixth through eighth grades. The school system was comprised of 210 schools serving approximately 160,000 student-scholars. Forty-two of the schools were middle schools. This study included participants from 42 middle schools for the survey, and seven

participants from seven different schools for the semi-structured interviews. Due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic, I conducted interviews virtually using the Zoom platform.

Selection of Participants

Participants for this study were selected for feasibility of access and by purposive sampling. Criteria included current employment as middle school assistant principals working in the SAS District, a large urban Mid-Atlantic district chosen for this study. In the district, less than 30% of the student population was White while nearly 60% of the organization's workforce was White. "Selection decisions consider the feasibility of access and data collection, relationships with study participants, validity concerns and ethics" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 99). My purpose in selecting these participants was deliberate and critical for testing the constructs I investigated. The flagship of a qualitative study is the in-depth inquiry of a relatively small sample that are strategically selected. Criterion purposeful sampling is an approach that enabled me to conduct the study in a particular setting with specific persons and activities that allowed me to gather relevant information to address my research questions and which could not be garnered from other sampling methods. Another criterion for participants was based on their work in educational equity during at least 2 years of experience as assistant principal of a secondary middle school in a district with policies that charge all assistant principals with working in educational equity.

Participants were invited via an email I sent to all assistant principals employed by the SAS District (See Appendix A for the Invitation Email). The email described the study and included links to a consent form and a survey (See Appendix B for the Consent Form). The recipients were invited to participate by completing the consent form and survey. The last question of the survey asked for their voluntary participation in a one-on-one interview. I also

sent two reminder emails two weeks apart (See Appendix C for the Email Request for Follow-Up Information). Since the link to the survey was sent to all secondary middle school assistant principals, they all had the opportunity to self-identify participation via the survey. I chose seven assistant principals from among those who responded to the invitation email to participate in the interviews.

The sample size was large enough to permit sufficient variation of emerging themes and categories, but small enough to manage the study's qualitative data collection and analysis. I informed all participants of the confidentiality of their participation and steps I planned to take to ensure their privacy. I also iterated the importance of the participants' candid sharing of details to support the richness of the data collection for the study. I furnish a written consent form highlighting this confidentiality to the volunteers.

An important underscore of the study related to the participant sample was that six out of the seven assistant principals who elected to participate in the 60-minute interviews were women. This equity-minded group of leader-learner-practitioners presented an opportunity to both learn from and add to the scholarship of assistant principals leading for educational equity. The participant sample also illuminates a research limitation to consider as many national school districts do not have this cadre of race-conscious assistant principals. Another research consideration birthed from having a dominate female participant sample might be the type of artifacts presented and importance put on building relationships, equity in scheduling, and creating spaces of nurture/care first. The "female-ness" presented by these participants is noteworthy. Hearing participants' voices and seeing the data add up to the importance of situating the role of the assistant principal for other states, cities, and districts that may have a more narrowly defined set of roles and expectations for the assistant principal. The study design

has helped yield findings to cement the idea that it is a very important moment in the work of administration.

<center>Pilot Study</center>

Prior to conducting interviews with participants, I pilot tested the procedures. According to Creswell (2018),

> Testing is important to establish the content validity of scores on an instrument; to provide an initial evaluation of the internal consistency of the items; and to improve questions, format, and instructions. Pilot testing all study materials also provides an opportunity to assess how long the study will take (and to identify potential concerns with participation fatigue)," (p. 154).

I conducted the informal pilot study of the interview protocol to improve the design of the formal study and possibly eradicate both external and internal barriers. Maxwell (2013) shared, "If at all possible, you should pilot-test your interview guide with people as much like your planned interviews as possible, to determine if the questions work as intended and what revisions you may need to make," (p. 101). For the pilot, I chose a co-moderator, a middle school assistant principal employed outside the SAS District in which the full study was conducted. During the pilot, I practiced the questions on the protocol, facilitated the conversation within the allotted time, and refined the protocol to achieve a rich narrative discourse surrounding the research topic. The pilot study enabled me to refine my protocol, get practice taking notes capturing nuances, gestures, and other unspoken responses. I used the information from during the pilot test to refine the questions and procedures of interviews. I eliminated two questions and added the question, *How long have you been in your current position?* I also, expanded on the

<center>70</center>

question, *What does educational equity mean to you?* and added, *What does it look like? And What does it sound like?*

<div align="center">Data Collection</div>

I submitted and secured approval from the SAS District's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Hood College IRB to conduct the study (See Appendix D for the Hood College approval letter). After receiving the approvals, I began using primary and secondary sources that allowed me to create a rich and detailed account of each participant's experiences related to leading for education equity. Primary data were collected through the surveys, one-on-one interviews, and researcher's field notes. Secondary data included the documentation and artifacts participants used during the interview to demonstrate their innovation and work in creating racially equitable campuses. For this qualitative study, the collection of multiple sources of evidence allowed for development of "converging lines of inquiry, a process of triangulation and corroboration" (Yin, 2014, p. 116). These varied data sources facilitated triangulation of the data to minimize bias and allow for a better understanding of assistant principals' beliefs and actions around educational equity. The study instruments and collection methods are described in the next sections.

Leading for Educational Equity Survey

I invited SAS District's assistant principals to participate through the anonymous, online *Leading for Educational Equity Survey*. The 10-question survey contained two closed and six open-ended questions. Question 9 was an invitation to participate in the semi-structured interview. There were four Likert scale questions. I used these questions, with responses of *most of the time, sometimes*, and *rarely*, to gather a frequency rate as a way to assess leadership actions. I strategically situated the three open-ended questions at the end of the survey to

maintain participants' momentum. I used this survey to increase the robustness of the data. It is

essential that school leaders use their personal, professional, and institutional lens to reflect on

the individual and the collective needs of the school (Mann, 2020). The *Leading for Educational*

Equity Survey provided increased insight on the role the assistant principal plays in leading for

educational equity (See Appendix E for the *Leading for Educational Equity Survey*).

Semi-Structured Interviews

I used my conceptual framework to frame my interview questions. The semi-structured

interviews consisted of questions designed to understand the assistant principals' perception,

beliefs, and actions of how they lead for equity in culture, practice, and leadership. The questions

also addressed the personal, professional, and institutional strategies they used. The semi-

structured interview protocol included 15-questions which allowed focused, conversational, two-

way communication as recommended by Merriam (2009). This method permitted the flexibility

needed for participants to share what they considered to be their significant beliefs and actions

around their leadership equity. The interview technique, as espoused by Patton (2013) also

allowed participants to go in whatever direction they chose to answer questions, choose their

own words to express whatever they wanted to say, and to freely share their experiences,

knowledge, and feelings (See Appendix F for the Interview Protocol).

In addition to the interview questions, I included the *Self-Anchoring Scale Question*

adapted from Kilpatrick and Cantrip (1960). In this activity, participants were first asked to think

of words/phrases that immediately come to mind that describe the beliefs and actions of an ideal

assistant principal who is leading for educational equity. Subsequently, they are asked the some

to describe the converse, i.e., someone who is not leading for educational equity. Next,

participants were asked to consider a ladder, with rungs from 0 to 10, with 0 being the least ideal

assistant principal leading for equity and 10 being the highest assistant principal leading for equity. They were asked to rate where they see themselves at three time periods: at the present, 3 years ago, and 3 years in the future. They were then asked to share why they felt the numbers either changed or stayed the same for the three time periods (See Appendix G for the Self-Anchoring Scale Question).

Field Notes

I took field notes on each participants' interview capture sheets during and after the interviews. The field notes were aimed to capture nuances, gestures, and unspoken communication during the interviews. I focused my notes primarily on the participants' attitudes that may not have been revealed through the audio recordings. According to Emerson et al. (1995), "Writing field notes as soon and as fully as possible after events of interest have also encouraged detailed descriptions of the process of interaction through which members of social settings create and sustain specific, local and social realities."

Document and Artifacts

I asked participants to share relevant documents and artifacts related to their work in educational equity. "Artifacts are tangible manifestations that describe people's experiences, knowledge, actions, and values" (McMillian & Schumacher, 2012, p. 361). The documents could include equity artifact, mission, vision, or core value statement, the equity framework, staff meeting agendas, emails, newsletters, meeting notes, school improvement plans, student learning objectives, administrative documents, school climate surveys, or student performance data. These documents were made available during the interviews or, alternately, on the participant's respective school website. Similar to my plan of capturing valuable information from the interviews, I took notes on the documents and artifacts and allocated time for the participant to

note key findings and summarize the purpose and relevance of each artifact. After each interview I reviewed and analyzed my notes. Immediately following each interview, I downloaded the interview transcriptions. I read my notes before beginning the initial coding process.

Data Collection Procedures

I arranged an initial schedule for the assistant principal interviews with each participant by phone or email. The interviews were scheduled at a mutually agreeable time. The interviews were conducted using a Zoom platform given that the COVID-19 pandemic precluded face-to-face interviews among school personnel. I created virtual meeting access information (ID/password) and sent it to the participants prior to the interview. Compensation for participation in an interview was a $15 gift card to their choice of either Starbucks or Dunkin Donuts.

I began each interview with a prepared statement during which I introduced myself and the purpose of the interview followed by addressing any issue of confidentiality. With permission from the assistant principal, I recorded the interview. Interviews were recorded using Zoom's audio recording and transcription feature. To be fully engaged, I used field notes and reflective journaling to help capture my impressions and observations during and immediately after the interviews.

I was flexible with the order of presenting the questions to ensure that I engaged in a more relaxed and open conversation which was congruent with the semi-structure interview construct. I had informed the participants I would attempt to conduct the interviews within a one-hour block of time to honor their time constraints with the understanding that the time could extend to 90 minutes if needed and time permitted. Of the seven in-depth interviews I conducted,

all but one lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. Seidman (1998) suggested that 90 minutes is the optimal time for a qualitative research interview.

Management of Data Analysis

Preparation of the Data for Analysis

I followed recommendations of Creswell (2013) in organizing and preparing the data for analysis as well as in in the process I chose for coding, interpretation, and maintaining validity. After each data collection opportunity, I organized the field notes in my electronic journal saved in electronic files organized by individual participant and date of collection. The data files included the interview electronic transcripts, my notes/responses, field notes, a copy of all documents and artifacts, case summaries, and memos. Saldaña (2013) stated that participant activities, perceptions, and tangible documents, along with comments in field notes and reflective, analytic memos/journals are substantive material for coding. The data I collected through the various means (interviews, artifacts, and surveys) were used to help identify patterns and themes to better understand the assistant principals' beliefs and actions in leading for equity.

After, I collected the data, participants' names and leadership locations were changed to pseudonyms to protect their identities to help ensure individual identities of participants were known only to me. Any and all identifying capture sheets were stored separately from data on my USB drive which held all other data. My field notes, the USB drive, transcriptions, and backup were stored in a locked safe in my basement. I alone had access to these data. All electronic data were stored on a password-protected device until the study is published when I will destroy them using appropriate means.

Content Analysis

I followed the study protocols for data analysis approved by the Institutional Review Boards of Hood College and the SAS District. I coded the interview transcripts and the artifact data to identify themes related to education equity and then triangulated the results with the other data collection methods I described earlier. I collected and analyzed study data over a period of seven months.

Trustworthiness

To ensure validity, trustworthiness, and credibility of this research process, I employed various strategies suggested by Maxwell (2013) who argued, "The main emphasis of a qualitative proposal ought to be on how you will rule out specific plausible alternatives and threats to your interpretations and explanations." In this section, I will outline steps I took to address validity, trustworthiness, and credibility of the study.

Robust Nature of the Data

During the course of this study, I collected an array of data from multiple sources. I crafted semi-structured interviews and survey questions that addressed the research questions. I coded the findings in a rich, descriptive form to authentically capture the voices of the participants. The detailed and varied data I collected help provide "…a full and revealing picture of what is going on" (Maxell, 2015, p. 110). The nature of the data and the data collection process enabled me to generate robust descriptions of the participants regarding their leading for education equity.

Member Checking/Respondent Validation

Member checks is primarily used in qualitative research methodology and is described as a quality control process by which a researcher seeks to improve accuracy, credibility, and

validity of what has been recorded during a research interview. During the interviews, I restated and summarized themes shared by participants during the interview to allow the individual to confirm my understanding. For example, some of the phrases I used included: *What I heard you say… Do you mind if I repeat that last sentence?* and *Would it be ok if I share what restate what I have written to ensure I am capturing the sentiment(s) you are attempting to convey?* Furthermore, once the transcripts were available, I engaged in responder validation by providing each interviewee with an opportunity to review and correct, as needed, their interview transcript to ensure its accuracy and clarity. In this way, the participants were able to affirm that the summaries reflected their views, experiences, feelings, and comments accurately. By doing this, I hoped to lessen bias on my part and rule out any potential misunderstandings or misinterpretations of participants' accounts.

Triangulation

I collect qualitative data from participants through the individual interviews, surveys, and artifacts analysis. The data sources were cross-checked against one another for commonalities and differences. Triangulation has been viewed as a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources. It refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Patton, 1999). I was able to use triangulation because of the varied data sources I collected.

Reflexivity

I practiced reflexivity throughout the study by maintaining a research journal which included my fieldnotes. This form of reflective journal writing provides another layer of data collection. I kept a record of and reflected on my biases, presuppositions, choices, experiences,

and actions during the research process. As Ortlipp (2008) suggested, I attempted to control my assumptions around assistant principals who led for equity by bracketing them. Thus, I consciously acknowledged them so I could reflect on how they may influence the research choices I decided to make throughout the study.

Role of the Researcher

As stated earlier, educational equity work is personal. My beliefs, experiences, and values shape who I am, my leadership decisions, and how I connect to and "move in" this work. My relevant demographic profile is summarized as: African American, female, mother of a multi-racial male, anti-racist advocate, perpetual learner, and activist. I have a positive obsession about serving and leading race conscious communities and cultures. I ache to break the cycle of injustice of Black and Brown student-scholars. These factors were taken into consideration while I was conducting my research. To minimalize the influence of my own biases in this study, it was important for me to reflect on these beliefs, feelings, and prejudices (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I am both a former assistant principal and a parent of a racially different son; equity and anti-racist work is very near and dear to my heart. With this knowing comes the understanding that my experiences in both professional and personal arenas impact my thinking and the entire research process including my selection of participants, my dynamic during the interviews, and my interpretation of the data.

I have strong views about the roles administrators should play in being an equity-minded leader in their buildings. I know I can be unwavering as to their behaviors at the cultural, practice, and leadership levels. Likewise, I recognized that my heightened level of moral urgency in leading for educational equity is not shared by all assistant principals. These beliefs, along with my status as an insider of the participating school district presented both assets and

boundaries as I proceeded in this study. Bogdan & Biklen (2007) indicated that strong beliefs are an asset when carefully sorted out, selectively presented, and appropriately expressed as well as when used as an avenue for building rapport and formulating questions that get at participants' experiences. Throughout this study, I remained transparent about my positionality and recognized its benefits and barriers.

<center>Boundaries/Delimitations</center>

All studies have boundaries governing what gets included or excluded from the research. "Limitations are particular features of your study that you know may negatively affect the results or your ability to generalize" (Roberts, 2010, p. 162). This study was delimited by several factors, one of which is its small sample size. The study was a small-scale study of a single, urban Mid-Atlantic district. Maxwell (2015) defined the concept of external generalizability as being represented of a larger population. The use of only seven interview participants limited the generalizability of potential findings to a larger population. Due to the purposive sample for this study, the ability to generalize the findings to other districts and populations of middle school assistant principals is limited. The decision to solicit the SAS District's assistant principals to participate in this study was a matter of time constraints and accessibility. By selecting only middle school assistant principals, the study excluded principals or other school leaders who were leading for educational equity. I acknowledge that using a convenience sampling method reduces generalizability. However, in qualitative research the intent of this study was not to generalize but to learn from a particular sample; it is dependent on the reader to decide which conclusions are applicable and/or resonate. My hope is that what resulted is a greater awareness and an elevated recognition of the need for the work of assistant principals leading for educational equity.

The information gained from the study consist of narrative, self-reported data from a limited number of individual experiences. The study included only secondary middle school assistant principals several of whom were persons of color. The subject of educational equity includes a vast array of topics (i.e., anti-racism, White privilege, White supremacy culture, cultural competence, cultural proficiency, implicit bias, microaggressions, macroaggressions, biases: gender, sexual orientation, religion, linguistic) and one study cannot cover it all. Despite these limitations, my intent in conducting the study was to provide a richer perspective and understanding of the assistant principals' perceptions of beliefs and actions leading for educational equity and change; hopefully this subject has bridged some of the void in the literature.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

To reflect on the ways my beliefs and experiences may influence the research process, I used reflexivity throughout the study by maintaining a research journal. I acknowledged and considered my own biases in hopes to minimize them and increase my objectivity. As I noted, I used triangulation and several other relevant strategies to cultivate internal validity, trustworthiness, and credibility.

Summary

This chapter described research designs and methodologies and proved a rationale for my methodological choices. It also provided insight into my ethics as well as how I collected, analyzed, and stored study data. In addition, I described how my positionality shaped the research and how I ensured confidence in the study's trustworthiness. In this study, I gathered assistant principals' perceptions of beliefs and actions in leading for educational equity to contribute to the dearth of literature that exists about educational equity and assistant principals'

perceptions of it. Ultimately, I hope this results in a call to action. Chapter 4 will present the results of the data analysis while Chapter 5 will present a discussion of the findings, and implications for practice and future study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to ascertain assistant principals' perspectives in beliefs and actions around leading for educational equity and change. In this study, I explored the assistant principals' experiences in learning about and leading for educational equity. The following research question and sub questions guided my study:

1. What is the assistant principals' perspective of their role in leading for educational equity?

    1a. What are the assistant principals' beliefs around leading for educational equity?

    1b. What are the assistant principals' actions in leading for educational equity?

This chapter includes an explanation of decisions I made about coding. It also includes the themes, discussions about how the data were analyzed, and descriptions of the findings and their alignment with the research questions. Chapter 4 also describes the results of the analysis of the transcribed notes from the semi-structured interviews. Data from the interviews consisted of 15 questions aligned to the research questions and Linton's, *Leading for Educational Equity Survey*, a 10-question survey. The 10th question was an invitation to participate in the 60-minute semi-structured interview, and participants' artifacts reflective of their equity leadership. The interviews were conducted and recorded using the Zoom platform, and the video, audio, and written transcription files were saved to an encrypted folder on my personal laptop. Data from the demographic survey was captured using Google. Open and focused coding was used to analyze the transcripts from the semi-focused interviews, online constructed survey, and artifacts. In addition, several other coding methods, (i.e., process and theoretical coding) were used to triangulate the data. The key terms identified in Chapter 1 and themes identified in the literature review were also considered during the analysis. Conceptual and theoretical coding

were used to identify elements from the study's conceptual and theoretical frameworks which included Linton's growth and equity framework and the Northouse authentic leadership theory. Data from the self-anchoring scale, artifacts, and survey were used to look for patterns in how assistant principals approached and perceived themselves in leading for educational equity.

Data Analysis During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic was at its height in the United States when this study was conducted. As much as I wanted to have the semi-structured interviews in person, I was not able to as in-person interactions were restricted in all secondary schools in the mid-Atlantic school district to mitigate the spread of the virus among employees and student-scholars. This system-wide guideline greatly influenced the data collection and analysis procedures which were executed virtually and documented electronically. Emails, Google documents, artifacts, self-anchoring scale activity, and semi-structured video interviews via Zoom allowed me to collect robust data with a high level of safety and confidentiality.

I collected survey data using a Google Form that generated a Google spreadsheet. This provided pie charts that allowed me to quickly compile demographic information and allowed me to identify key terms and, ultimately, themes of individual participant's data from the open-ended questions. Using the recording of the semi-structured interviews from the Zoom platform's transcription feature, I analyzed and organized the data in three passes.

Coding Process

During the coding process, I analyzed the data from the semi-structured interviews through three phases. First, I read through my data to re-familiarize myself with what participants shared. Initially while reading, I jotted down words and phrases that stood out in my researcher's journal. That first pass yielded 157 words and phrases combined. (See Appendix H

for Results of the First Coding Pass.) Second, I read the keys words from the first pass to find commonalities and outliers. The second pass yielded 60 words and phrases. Third, I analyzed the second pass of key words and phrases to elevate trends and synonyms. I then color-coded those key words and phrases to create my code book. This yielded 35 codes. These three passes of coding helped me identify emerging themes from the semi-structured interview data.

I used a similar process to analyze the survey questions. However, because I used a Google Form, I was able to convert the respondents' answers into a spreadsheet organized by each demographic question and open-ended question and by pie graphs for the Likert scale questions. The spreadsheet allowed me to view all participants' data together and more easily identify key words, phrases, concepts, trends, and common themes that emerged from the data. Once I had the spread sheet, I was able to color-code key words and phrases. I was able to use the same process when analyzing the data from the pie graphs to identify emerging themes. This combined data dive yielded 40 codes.

Through the coding process the following six themes emerged from the triangulated data sources (i.e., interviews, equity artifacts, self-anchoring scales, and surveys):

- Theme #1: Building Positive and Genuine Relationships is Key.

- Theme #2: Equity in Scheduling.

- Theme #3: Interviewing and Hiring for Excellence and Diversity.

- Theme #4: Professional Development Around Equity, Anti-racism, and Culturally Responsive Teaching.

- Theme #5: Being a Lifelong Learner.

- Theme #6: Parent/Community Engagement

The themes will be presented in numerical order. Data to support the themes were taken from participants' interviews, equity artifacts, self-anchoring scales, and surveys.

Study Context

This study took place in a large school district in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The district touts over 210 schools, 25,000 staff members, and over 160, 000 student-scholars. At the time of the study, schools in the district were in the wake of returning to full day instruction post the COVID-19 pandemic.

The next section will describe each of the assistant principals who participated in the semi-structured interview portion of the study by sharing their perception of what leading for educational equity meant to them, i.e., what it looks like and what it sounds like. I will also share what they believe are top three priorities as assistant principals leading racial equity work in the middle school sectors. The introductions will provide demographic information on each assistant principal along with student-scholar and staff demographics of their respective campus. The brief description of these assistant principals and their school settings will be followed by excerpts from their semi-structured interviews and self-anchoring scale. A description of the themes will follow. These themes provide insight on middle school assistant principals who are striving to create campuses where racial biases that negatively impact learning are dismantled, interrupted, and mitigated through their perceived beliefs and actions in leading for educational equity. Each participant is described using pseudonyms for their name and school.

Demographics of Interview Participants

Ms. Miller

Ms. Miller identifies as an African American female. She is the assistant principal of Niger Middle School. Ms. Miller has 23 years of experience in education and has been an

assistant principal at this campus for 4 years. She has taken 12 of the 25 educational equity professional development courses offered at the district level. She holds a 12-credit educational equity in excellence certification issued in partnership with the district and a local community college. She shared that the course taken had greatly impacted her work in stewarding the vision of leading for educational equity.

The school is in a small city setting with both single and multi-family homes. The school's minority student enrollment was 63%. Niger Middle School had a student population of 972 student-scholars. The student body was made up of .5% Alaskan Natives, 41.2% Asians, 11.7% Blacks, 8.5% Hispanics, .5% Pacific Islanders, 6.6% two or more races, and 31.7% White student-scholars. The school enrolled 9.5% economically disadvantaged student-scholars. Table 1 provides a summary of demographics of the student-scholar enrollment at Niger Middle School.

Table 1

Niger Middle School 2021-2022 Student Racial/Ethnic Demographics (n=972)

	Total Enrollment	Alaskan Native	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Pacific Islander	2+	White
All Students	972	<5%	41.2%	11.7%	8.5%	<5%	6.6%	31.7%
Emergent Multilingual Learner (EML)	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%
FARMS	9.5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%
Special Education	7.1%	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%

The school employed a total of 99 staff members, with 73 classified as professional staff and 26 serving as support professionals. The demographics of the teaching staff. including teachers and administrators, were 0.5% Alaskan Native, 14.9% Asian, 12.2% Black, 6.8%

Hispanic, 0.5% Pacific Islander, 0.5% two or more races, and 64.9% White. In addition, 70.3%

of the staff identified as female, 87.1% identified as male, and 0.5%. identified as

unspecified/non-binary. Table 2 provides the demographics of the staff at the school.

Table 2

Niger Middle School 2021-2022 School Staff Ethnic/Racial Demographics (n=99)

	Gender			Ethnic/Racial Composition						
	Female	Male	X	Alaskan Native	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Pacific Islander	2+	White
Professional	70.3%	29.7%	<5%	<5%	14.9%	12.2%	6.8%	<5%	<5%	64.9%
Supporting Services	87.1%	12.9%	<5%	<5%	29.0%	25.8%	16.1%	<5%	<5%	29.0%

Note. 2+ denotes responses of more than one racial/ethnic lineage.

When asked the questions, what does leading for educational equity mean to you? What
does it look like? What does it sound like? Ms. Miller shared,

…making sure that all students are successful, meeting all students, where they are in

their unique educational journey. It also means that I provide teachers with those equity

tools to help students in the classroom because in the classroom is where, in my opinion

it all happens. It is my responsibility as an AP to make sure that teachers have those

equity tools to use to be able to meet students where they are. I also believe my equity

responsibility is helping parents understand the educational process.

During the interview, Ms. Miller reflected her top three priorities as an assistant principal

leading for educational equity are: building relationships with teachers and kids, ensuring

students receive education that meets their needs, and connecting parents with supports so they

understand their child's education progression.

Mx. Baxter

Mx. Baxter identifies as an African American non-binary. He is the assistant principal of Bayard Rustin Middle School. He has been in education for 17 years. He has been an assistant principal for 8 years. Mx. Baxter has taken none of the 25 educational equity professional development courses offered at the district level. He shared the following,

> No equity district courses for me. However, I have always participated in school study circles, where we were talking about the idea of race in the very beginning and the value of race culture. In these circles we discussed topics such as, anti-bias, antiracism, white privilege, and white supremacy. I feel my university also prepared me as I attended a historically black university. Currently, I mostly stay informed by participating in individual research and reading the literature around anti-racism, and believe it or not, social media demonstrates folks doing some very innovative things which I sometimes mimic in my practice. Essentially, I use all platforms to strengthen my equity journey and remain a life-long learner.

Bayard Rustin Middle School is in a large suburban setting with apartment buildings, single-family homes, and multi-dwelling homes. The school's minority student enrollment was 80%. Bayard Rustin Middle School had a student population of 901 student-scholars. The student body was made up of 0.5% Alaskan Native, 7.9% Asian, 18.4% Black, 52.3% Hispanic, 0.5% Pacific Islander, 0.5% two or more races, and 18.6%White student-scholars. The school enrolled 58% economically disadvantaged student-scholars. Table 3 provides a summary of the demographics of the student-scholar enrollment at Bayard Rustin Middle School.

Table 3

Bayard Rustin Middle School 2021 Student Racial/Ethnic Demographics (n=901)

	Total Enrollment	Alaskan Native	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Pacific Islander	2+	White
All Students	901	<5%	7.9%	18.4%	52.3%	<5%	<5%	18.6%
Emergent Multilingual Learner (EML)	23.5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	21.1%	<5%	<5%	<5%
FARMS	57.8%	<5%	<5%	12.1%	43.1%	<5%	<5%	<5%
Special Education	11.2%	<5%	<5%	<5%	7.8%	<5%	<5%	<5%

Note. 2+ denotes responses of more than one racial/ethnic lineage.

The school employed a total of 121 staff members; 88 were classified as professional staff and 33 serve as support professionals. The demographics of the staff, which includes teachers and administrators, were 0.5% Alaskan Native, 0.5% Asian, 20.7% Black, 12.6% Hispanic, 0.5% Pacific Islander, 0.5% two or more races, and 63.2% White. In addition, 69.0% of the staff identified as female, 87.3% identified as male, and 0.5%. identified as unspecified/non-binary. Table 4 provides demographics of the staff at the school.

Table 4

Bayard Rustin Middle School 2021-2022 Staff Ethnic/Racial Demographics (n=121)

	Gender			Ethnic/Racial Composition						
	Female	Male	X	Alaskan Native	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Pacific Islander	2+	White
Professional	69.0%	31.0	<5%	<5%	<5%	20.7%	12.6%	<5%	<5%	63.2%
Supporting Services	70.3%	29.7	<5%	<5%	5.4%	43.2%	32.4%	<5%	<5%	18.9%

Note. 2+ denotes responses of more than one racial/ethnic lineage.

When asked the questions, What does leading for educational equity mean to you? What does it look like? What does it sound like? Mx. Baxter shared,

…it is having a moral commitment to make people, students, and families, feel safe by facilitating a space(s) where people, regardless of how they self-identify, truly feel seen, heard, valued and safe. It means, asking myself, how is what I'm doing impacting everybody and all their identities in the best way possible. It *looks* like what policies and procedures I create that will continue to disrupt, dismantle, and not create systems that inherently make access to education and access to knowledge impossible for marginalized groups. It *sounds* like people being comfortable and being able to have a safe space to voice areas of concern without fear of retribution. The concerns might be around curriculum or how the community feels represented in the school; parents being able to see and express themselves without being disrespected or belittled. Lastly, regarding sexual orientation, it *sounds* like a place where people can have those dialogues and it would be a safe space to do so, it may sound like you know not always agreeing on something, but people still understand that we are a place where we're valued, we can be heard. A place we can feel like if there's a problem we are at the table; there's a place for us to be you know be heard when our voices are lifted, so you know that's what it looks like to me and that's what it sounds so like to me, leading for equity.

During the interview, Mx. Baxter reflected the top three priorities as an assistant principal leading for educational equity are: quality instruction, putting structures in place where teachers are teaching well; essentially providing meaningful staff development, and making families feel connected and welcomed campus-building strong relationships.

Ms. Web

Ms. Web identifies as a White female. She is the assistant principal of Billie Holliday Middle School. She has been in education for 10 years. She has been an assistant principal for 2 years. Ms. Web has not taken any of the educational equity professional development courses offered at the district level. However, she shared, she is one of 20 WIDA fellows across the country, and they have a monthly professional learning community (PLC) where they engage in various projects with the University of Wisconsin. She reported she is heavily involved in Unbound ED, an organization rooted in educational equity. Lastly, Ms. Web shared that in order to work with these organizations, there is a lot of professional development that organically takes place.

Billie Holliday Middle School sits in a large suburban setting with townhomes, single-family homes, and multi-dwelling homes. The school's minority student enrollment was 92%. Billie Holliday Middle School had a student population of 968 student-scholars. The student body was made up of 0.5% Alaskan Native, 8.1% Asian, 25.7% Black 54.3% Hispanic, 0.5% Pacific Islander, 0.5% two or more races, and 7.0% White student-scholars. The school enrolled 67% economically disadvantaged student-scholars. Table 5 provides a summary of the demographics of the student-scholar enrollment at Billie Holliday Middle School.

Table 5

Billie Holliday Middle School 2021-2022 Student Racial/Ethnic Demographics (n=968)

	Total Enrollment	Alaskan Native	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Pacific Islander	2+	White
All Students	968	<5%	8.1%	25.7%	54.3%	<5%	<5%	7%
Emergent Multilingual Learner(EML)	21.7%	<5%	<5%	<5%	18.1%	<5%	<5%	<5%
FARMS	66.6%	<5%	<5%	15.6%	44.4%	<5%	<5%	<5%
Special Education	6.9%	<5%	<5%	<5%	5.5%	<5%	<5%	<5%

Note. 2+ denotes responses of more than one racial/ethnic lineage.

The school employs a total of 105 staff members, with 82 classified as professional staff and 25 serving as support professionals. The demographics of the teaching staff, which includes teachers and administrators, were 0.5% Alaskan Native, 0.5% Asian, 28.0% Black, 8.5% Hispanic, 0.5%Pacific Islander, 0.5% two or more races, and 57.3% White. In addition, 69.5% of the staff identified as female, 30.5% identified as male, and .5%. identified as unspecified/non-binary. Table 6 provides demographics of the staff at the school.

Table 6

Billie Holliday Middle School 2021-2022 Staff Ethnic/Racial Demographics (n=105)

	Gender			Ethnic/Racial Composition						
	Female	Male	X	Alaskan Native	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Pacific Islander	2+	White
Professional	69.5%	30.5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	28%	8.5%	<5%	<5%	57.3%
Supporting Services	76.7%	23.3%	<5%	<5%	6.7%	30%	46.7%	<5%	<5%	13.3%

Note. 2+ denotes responses of more than one racial/ethnic lineage.

When asked the question, What does leading for educational equity mean to you? What does it look like? What does it sound like? Ms. Web shared,

> …ensuring that all students at all times have what they need, have access to a quality education and when I think about what a quality education is I'm thinking about an acronym that I recently learned: GLEAM; which is grade level engaged affirming and meaningful. It *sounds* like a happy place. I think staff should enjoy working there, children should love going there and I think you should be able to hear that joy in the space.

During the interview, she reflected her top three priorities as an assistant principal leading for educational equity are conducting classroom observations, providing meaningful and timely feedback to teachers, making home and family connections.

Ms. Rodriguez

Ms. Rodriguez identifies as a Latina female. She is the assistant principal of JuanCarlos Santiago Middle School. She has been in education for 18 years. She has been an assistant principal for 6 years. Mrs. Escobar has taken approximately three or four of the educational equity professional development courses offered at the district level. She shared,

> Two that stand out for me the most, and I would say has been most impactful in my work as an equity warrior are: operationalizing equity and facilitating study circles for educators. I have also participated in and used the skills learned in deescalating strategies trainings.

The school sits in a large suburban setting with nearby farms and multi-dwelling homes. JuanCarlos Santiago Middle School had a student population of 524 student-scholars. The school's minority student enrollment was 80%. The student body was made up of 0.5% Alaskan

Native, 11.6% Asian, 21.4% Black, 41.2% Hispanic, 0.5% Pacific Islander, 0.5% two or more races, and 20.0%White student-scholars. The school enrolled 51% economically disadvantaged student-scholars. Table 7 provides a summary of demographics of the student-scholar enrollment at JuanCarlos Santiago Middle School.

Table 7

JuanCarlos Santiago Middle School Student-Scholar Racial/Ethnic Demographics (n=524)

	Total Enrollment	Alaskan Native	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Pacific Islander	2+	White
All Students	524	<5	11.6	21.4	41.2	<5	<5	20.6
Emergent Multilingual Learner (EML)	15.8	<5	<5	<5	12.6	<5	<5	<5
FARMS	52.5	<5	5.2	14.5	28.2	<5	<5	<5
Special Education	13.9	<5	<5	5.2	5.5	<5	<5	<5

Note. 2+ denotes responses of more than one racial/ethnic lineage.

The school employs a total of 81 staff members with 55 classified as professional staff and 26 serving as support professionals. The demographics of the teaching staff, which includes teachers and administrators, were 0.5% Alaskan Native, 7.0% Asian, 8.8% Black, 15.8% Hispanic, 0.5% Pacific Islander, 0.5% two or more races, and 63.2% White. In addition, 78.9% of the staff identified as female, 21.1% identified as male, and 0.5%. identified as unspecified/non-binary. Table 8 provides the demographics of the staff at the school.

Table 8

JuanCarlos Santiago Middle School Staff Racial/Ethnic Demographics (n=81)

	Gender			Racial/Ethnic Composition						
	Female	Male	X	Alaskan Native	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Pacific Islander	2+	White
Professional	78.9%	21.2%	<5%	<5%	7%	8.8%	15.8%	<5%	<5%	63.2%
Supporting Services	66.7%	33.3%	<5%	<5%	11.1%	40.7%	22.2%	<5%	<5%	22.2%

Note. 2+ denotes responses of more than one racial/ethnic lineage.

When asked the questions, What does leading for educational equity mean to you? What does it look like? What does it sound like? Mrs. Escobar shared,

taking into consideration every student that comes in through our door, and what their experience as a child of color, a child of a diverse background is bringing in with them so obviously increasing that access. Then, I think about one of the biggest components is eliminating obstacles. Our students have diverse backgrounds and as students of color they tend to encounter obstacles that some of their white peers just don't have to encounter. The obstacles are not always huge in nature, sometimes they are small, sometimes they're individualized, but they can be very limiting so when we are you know, thinking about well how do I lead for equity, how do I support an instructional program that is equitable it's thinking about it from a larger vantage point but also considering the individual experience of our students and how we can provide that opportunity and accessibility for them. Equity comes in through our diverse backgrounds- that needs to be celebrated. Increasing access, and eliminating obstacles needs to be on the minds of assistant principals leading for educational equity at all times.

During the interview, she reflected her top three priorities as an assistant principal leading for educational equity are making sure students have stellar instruction (hiring and professional development) and creating process that align with priorities and innovation.

Ms. Floyd

Ms. Floyd identifies as an African American female. She is the assistant principal of Frederick Douglass Middle School. She has been in education for 24 years. She has been an assistant principal for 10 years. Ms. Floyd has taken 20+ educational equity professional development courses offered at the district level. She shared,

> I have taken almost every single class that the equity initiatives unit offers. I did not do it because it was required of me but, I found the content engaging. I thought it was important for the work we do. I always seek professional development. I'm a lifelong learner in that way. I've taken almost everything. I have taken 'how to support Latino students'. I have taken the class they have on African American males. They have Critical Race Theory and the brain. I think the only one I haven't taken was about supporting brown girls, or something like that, but I've taken a number of classes. Outside of the district my PhD is in urban education and so through my dissertation process of course you're exposed to literature. It really is at the center for me. The AP must know and serve in the work and way of equity. Lately, the people I have worked with have kind of mentored me, helped me to reflect more on equity.

Frederick Douglass Middle School sits in a large suburban setting with apartment buildings and multi-dwelling homes. The school's minority student enrollment was 64%. Frederick Douglass Middle School had a student population of 614 student-scholars. The student body was made up of 0.5% Alaskan Native, 10.1% Asian, 20.7% Black, 42.3%Hispanic, 0.5%

Pacific Islander, 5.7% two or more races, and 20.8% White student-scholars. The school enrolled 35% economically disadvantaged student-scholars. Table 9 provides a summary of demographics of the student-scholar enrollment at Frederick Douglass Middle School.

Table 9

Frederick Douglass Middle School 2021-2022 Student Racial/Ethnic Demographics (n=614)

	Total Enrollment	Alaskan Native	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Pacific Islander	2+	White
All Students		<5%	10.1%	20.7%	42.3%	<5%	5.7%	20.8%
Emergent Multilingual Learner (EML)	16.9%	<5%	<5%	<5%	14.5%	<5%	<5%	<5%
FARMS	50.8%	<5%	<5%	12.7%	31.4%	<5%	<5%	<5%
Special Education	11.9%	<5%	<5%	<5%	5.5%	<5%	<5%	<5%

Note. 2+ denotes responses of more than one racial/ethnic lineage.

The school employs a total of 76 staff members, with 55 classified as professional staff and 21 serving as support professionals. The demographics of the teaching staff, which includes teachers and administrators, were 0.5% Alaskan Native, 5.3% Asian, 5.3% Black. 8.8% Hispanic, 0.5% Pacific Islander, 0.5% two or more races, and 78.9% White. In addition, 73.7% of the staff identified as female, 26.3% identified as male and 0.5% identified as unspecified/non-binary. Table 10 provides demographics of the staff at the school.

Table 10

Frederick Douglass Middle School 2021-2022 Staff Racial/Ethnic Demographics (n=76)

	Gender			Racial/Ethnic Composition						
	Female	Male	X	Alaskan Native	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Pacific Islander	2+	White
Professional	73.7%	26.3%	<5%	<5%	5.3%	5.3%	8.8%	<5%	<5%	78.9%
Supporting Services	72%	28%	<5%	<5%	28%	12%	32%	<5%	<5%	28%

Note. 2+ denotes responses of more than one racial/ethnic lineage.

When asked the questions, What does leading for educational equity mean to you? What does it look like? What does it sound like? Mrs. Lowe shared,

not just like looking at data, but just making sure equity lives in the practices of the building and that, for me, it *looks* like making sure all the kids get what they need when the kids need enrichment they get it, if we have a group that's struggling, we give them what they need as well. It means thinking about how are we leveraging resources to make sure they get the support they need, so making sure that construct lives in our practices. It means looking at how we are grading. How we are disciplining, and it means everybody gets what they need, when they need it. But, how am I, supporting the groups that need it, giving enrichment to those that need it and just having an atmosphere where everyone is getting the support they need in order to be the best student, they can be. I think, also for me, a big thing is making sure I keep those conversations on the table when I work with leaders in the building. Every conversation, I try to work equity in, and it just kind of comes natural to me. It is kind of the lens through which I look as I work.

During the interview, she reflected her top three priorities as an assistant principal for educational equity are using data to unmask issues in the school, helping to create an equity mindset to people you work within the department, and supporting staff in reimagining discipline for Black and Brown kids.

Ms. Smith

Ms. Smith identifies as an African American female. She is the assistant principal of Zora Neale Hurston Middle School. She has been in education for 25 years. She has been an assistant principal for 15 years. She is a career assistant principal and enjoys the supporting administrator role and has no desire to become a principal, she shared. Ms. Smith has engaged in less than five of the 25 educational equity professional development courses offered at the district level. However, she shares,

Because I went to an Historically Black College/ University that to me, was one of the greatest opportunities that I had. There were so many conversations about race, about equity, about inclusion, about opportunity or lack thereof, compared to the very short time that I was at Johns Hopkins University and not in their doctoral program I felt that it was very much so. It was at university that I found that there was a constant conversation about not only equitable practices for those of us, but the whole generational debt that we owe to those coming up. That we don't let this just be about who we are and also to then spread out to other cultures, religions, races and make sure they're brought in, and engage and so there were an almost every last one of my courses, there was something brought in about equity even in statistics. Zora Neale Hurston Middle School is in a small-city setting with both single and multi-family homes. The school's minority student enrollment was 65%. Zora Neale Hurston Middle School had a student population of 1,074 student-scholars. The student body was made up of 0.5% Alaskan Native,

19.4% Asian, 13.8% Black, 25.7% Hispanic, 0.5% Pacific Islander, 6.1% two or more races, and

34.9%White student-scholars. The school enrolled 29% economically disadvantaged student-

scholars. Table 11 provides a summary of demographics of the student-scholar enrollment at

Zora Neale Hurston Middle School.

Table 11

Zora Neale Hurston Middle School 2021-2022 Student Racial/Ethnic Demographics (n=1,074)

	Total Enrollment	Alaskan Native	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Pacific Islander	2+	White
All Students		<5%	19.4%	13.8%	25.7%	<5%	6.1%	34.9%
Emergent Multilingual Learner (EML)	9.4%	<5%	<5%	<5%	6.9%	<5%	<5%	<5%
FARMS	28.9%	<5%	<5%	7.7%	16.9%	<5%	<5%	<5%
Special Education	14.3%	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%

Note. 2+ denotes responses of more than one racial/ethnic lineage.

The school employs a total of 129 staff members, with 92 classified as professional staff

and 37 serving as support professionals. The demographics of the teaching staff, which includes

teachers and administrators, were 0.5% Alaskan Native, 7.3% Asian, 12.5% Black, 9.4%

Hispanic, 0.5% Pacific Islander, 0.5% two or more races, and 68.8% White. In addition, 74.0%

of the staff identified as female, 26.0% identified as male, and 0.5% identified as

unspecified/non-binary. Table 12 provides the demographics of the staff at the school.

Table 12

Zora Neale Hurston Middle School 2021-2022 Staff Racial/Ethnic Demographics (n=129)

	Gender			Racial/Ethnic Composition						
	Female	Male	X	Alaskan Native	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Pacific Islander	2+	White
Professional	74%	26%	<5%	<5%	7.3%	12.5%	9.4%	<5%	<5%	68.8%
Supporting Services	66%	34%	<5%	<5%	18%	24%	28%	<5%	<5%	28%

Note. 2+ denotes responses of more than one racial/ethnic lineage.

When asked the question, What does leading for educational equity mean to you? What does it look like? What does it sound like? Ms. Smith shared,

> I'm glad you asked that as it is an important question, and it does mean different things to different folks. When I think about educational equity I think about having an environment where people are welcomed, where ideas are welcomed, where race, culture, ethnicity is celebrated. Also, where everybody can bring who and what they are into a very safe environment. It *looks* like a variety of colors in skin tones, it *looks* like a variety of dress, it looks like a variety of hair color. It *sounds* like having courageous conversations about race, and culture. It is about asking, who is being included who's being left out of situations? It's about asking the questions as to why are we doing this? Is this something that we do just because we've done it all the time or is it truly student-centered?

During the interview, she reflected her top three priorities as an assistant principal leading for educational equity are mining student achievement, modeling a warm welcoming environment, and building relationships with all stakeholders (students, staff. and community).

Ms. Wang

Ms. Wang identifies as a Korean American female. She is the assistant principal of Alice Walker Middle School. She has been in education for 12 years. She has been an assistant principal for 2 years. Ms. Wang has not engaged in any of the 25 educational equity professional development courses offered at the district level. She shared,

I didn't do any district level training or modules, because within our own building we received so much equity leader learning. One of the trainers from the equity initiative unit worked in my building as a staff development teacher, and so I/my staff was always on the forefront of the reviewing end of district level professional development. So, most of my training was all done in-house."

Alice Walker Middle School is in a large suburban setting with both single and multi-family homes. Alice Walker Middle School had a student population of 999 student-scholars. The school's minority student enrollment was 64%. The student body was made up of 0.5% Alaskan Native, 20.8% Asian, 27.5%vBlack, 33.0% Hispanic, 0.5%Pacific Islander, 5.5% two or more races, and 12.5% White student-scholars. The school enrolled 45% economically disadvantaged student-scholars. Table 13 provides a summary of demographics of the student-scholar enrollment at Alice Walker Middle School.

Table 13

Alice Walker Middle School 2021-2022 Student Racial/Ethnic Demographics (n=999)

	Total Enrollment	Alaskan Native	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Pacific Islander	2+	White
All Students		<5%	20.8%	27.5%	33%	<5%	5.5%	12.5%
Emergent Multilingual Learner |(EML)	11.9%	<5%	<5%	<5%	10%	<5%	<5%	<5%
FARMS	45.2%	<5%	<5%	16.2%	23.5%	<5%	<5%	<5%
Special Education	12.1%	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%

Note. 2+ denotes responses of more than one racial/ethnic lineage.

The school employs a total of 107 staff members, with 80 classified as professional staff, and 27 serving as support professionals. The demographics of the teaching staff, which includes teachers and administrators, were 0.5% Alaskan Native, 0.5% Asian, 10.0% Black, 0.5% Hispanic, 0.5% Pacific Islander, 0.5% two or more races, and 78.8% White. In addition, 73.8% of the staff identified as female, 26.3% identified as male, and .5%. identified as unspecified/non-binary. Table 14 provides the demographics of the staff at the school.

Table 14

Alice Walker Middle School 2021-2022 Staff Racial/Ethnic Demographics (n=107)

	Gender			Racial/Ethnic Composition						
	Female	Male	X	Alaskan Native	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Pacific Islander	2+	White
Professional	73.8%	26.3%	<5%	<5%	<5%	10%	<5%	<5%	<5%	78.8%
Supporting Services	71%	29%	<5%	<5%	16.1%	22.6%	35.5%	<5%	<5%	25.8%

Note. 2+ denotes responses of more than one racial/ethnic lineage.

When asked the question, What does leading for educational equity mean to you? What does it look like? What does it sound like? Ms. Wang shared,

…leading education for me is really making sure that the instruction that is happening in the building is sound; students are learning, and teachers are providing the space for the students to be able to learn. Student engagement is happening, and teachers are facilitators; students are happy to be there in the classroom to learn about whatever content that may be learning.

During the interview, Ms. Wang reflected that her top three priorities as an assistant principal leading for educational equity are educational equity, building strong relationships with students, staff, and community, and ensuring solid instruction is taking place.

Summary of Demographics

During the 60-minute semi-structure interviews, participants were asked their preferred identified gender, race, years of education experience, years of experience as an assistant principal, and the number of district-level equity courses taken. Table 15 presents the demographic information for interview participants.

Table 15

Summary of Participants' Racial/Ethnic and Educational Demographics

Participant Pseudonym	Preferred Identified Gender	Race	Education Experience (in years)	Assistant Principal Experience (in years)	Number of District- Level Equity Courses (out of 25)
Miller	Female	African American	23	4	12
Baxter	Nonbinary	African American	17	8	0
Web	Female	White	10	2	0
Rodriguez	Female	Hispanic	18	6	3+
Floyd	Female	African American	24	10	20+
Smith	Female	African American	25	15	<5
Wang	Female	Asian	12	2	0

Interview participants were asked to participate in a 60-minute interview conducted by me and to bring to the interview an artifact which they felt represents how they lead for educational equity. For example, an artifact might include: an agenda, flyer, email, photographs, journal musings, quotes, conference literature, book study from PLC, video montage, a program they either initiated or elevated promoting racial equity, or staff/community feedback/survey. Table 16 identifies the artifacts presented and the themes that emerged from participants during the interviews. As participants shared about their artifacts, I scribed key phrases. I coded the artifacts and identified the following themes listed in the chart.

Table 16

Participants' Equity Artifacts Aligned to Themes

Participant Pseudonym	Equity Artifact	Theme
Miller	Equity and Mindset Interview Questions	Hiring Relationships
Baxter	Mindfulness Room	Relationships
Web	Multilingual Cohort Schedule	Hiring Scheduling Relationships
Rodriguez	Master Schedule	Scheduling; Relationships
Floyd	Positive Office Referrals	Relationships
Smith	Black and Brown Males Monthly Father Chats	Relationships Community Engagement
Wang	Socialization and Equity Staff Protocol	Professional Development Relationships

Online Survey

Study participants, assistant principals of Shaw Arthur School (SAS) District anonymously completed an online-constructed survey, the *Leading for Educational Equity Survey*. The 10-question survey contained two closed and three open-ended questions (see

Appendix E). There were four Likert scale questions. A response to each question was required to move through to the end of the survey. I strategically situated the three open-ended questions at the end of the survey to maintain participants' momentum. I attached a Likert scale frequency rate as a way to assess leadership actions (*most of the time, sometimes, rarely*). I used the survey to strengthen the data pool. It was essential that school leaders used their personal, professional, and institutional lens to reflect on their school's individual and the collective needs (Mann, 2020). This additional layer of data strengthened and provided greater insight on the role the assistant principal plays in leading for educational equity.

<div align="center">Self-Anchoring Scale</div>

During the semi-constructed interviews, I included a self-anchoring scale activity for the seven participants. As I scribed their responses while they were being recorded, respondents were asked to verbalize phrases or words that came to mind that described their beliefs and actions of an ideal and least ideal (worst) assistant principal leading for educational equity. The responses of the participants regarding the beliefs and actions of an ideal assistant principal leading for equity are included in the first column of Table 18. The second column includes their responses regarding their beliefs and actions of the least ideal assistant principal leading for equity.

Another component of the self-anchoring scale was to ask participants to rate their own beliefs and actions in the work of leading for educational equity for three timeframes: during the present 2022 school year, 3 years ago (2019), and to forecast what their beliefs and actions in the work of leading for educational equity would be in 3 years (2025). The self-anchoring rating scale ranged from 0 to 10, with 0 representing the least ideal beliefs and actions of an assistant principal leading for educational equity to 10 representing the highest ideal beliefs and actions of

leading for educational equity. As illustrated in Table 5, the assistant principals collectively believe 3 years from now their beliefs and actions around educational equity would have increased. The data show an overwhelming increase of the beliefs and actions of the assistant principals in leading for educational equity on their campus Three of the seven participants believed they were at five or below in 2019 while four participants rated themselves ranging from five to eight. In 2022, the data shows all participants had increased in their belief and actions around equity. Six of the seven participants shared data that strongly supports an increase over the full span of time. One participant, CB, appears to have the most significant increase with a rating of 2 in 2019, 3 in 2022, and 8 for 2025. Participants all espoused a desire to strengthen their learning, actions, and beliefs around operationalizing equity by 2025. One of the participants touted their beliefs, actions, and learning in racial equity would be at a 10 by 2025. The other six participants rated themselves high by remaining between the 8 to 9 in 2025. The range in responses may be attributed to several factors including the professional development taken by the participant, the university education program taken, another school leader mentor, or an innate desire to continue learning. The last column in Table 18 displays their responses about what factors contributed to the changed scores.

The middle school assistant principals' perceptional data shows their beliefs and actions of an ideal and least ideal (worst) assistant principal leading for educational equity, reflection of their own beliefs and practice, factors that impacted their evolution or stagnation over a period of time, and their level of investment of continued learning (professional) and growing in the industry of educational equity.

I organized the self-anchoring scale artifacts in Table 17 to show the responses of each participant. Participants' responses had both commonalties and differences regarding their

perception of the ideal and least-ideal beliefs and actions of an assistant principal leading and advancing the work of educational equity. Common phrases and words that emerged from participants' collective self-anchoring scale responses suggested these assistant principals:

- Believe in the importance of building relationships,

- Practice developing themselves and learning about antiracism continuing professional development,

- Believe in stating and delivering consistent messaging around educational equity,

- Practice creating schedules that are fair and accessible to all including student-scholars and teaching staff,

- Practice being a life-long learner and exercising humility, and

- Believe in learning about and (authentically) engaging in the communities they serve,

Table 17

Participants Responses on the Self-Anchoring Scale Question

Participant Pseudonym	Ideal Phrases/Words	Least Ideal Phrases/Words	2022 (current year)	2019 (3 yrs. ago)	2025 (3 yrs. from now)	What Changed/ Shifted
Miller	Scheduling Approachable Humility Diversity in hiring Continuous professional learning Relationships	Confrontational Adverse to feedback Deficit thinking	8	4	9	Equity certification (PD) District equity offerings
Baxter	Consistent Diversity in hiring Meaningful feedback People person	No desire to get to know staff, students, community	3	2	8	Individual research Social media National civil and social unrest
Web	Relational Data-driven Access to grade level curricula Meaningful feedback Timely observations	Condescending Elusive Manager vs. Instructional Leader	8	5.5	10	WIDA Unbound (PD) Mentor-an equity-minded principal (PD)
Rodriguez	Scheduling Creating safe spaces Relationships Lives in Core values Ethic of care	Opportunistic in beliefs and actions	8	5	9	District Equity offerings Title 1 school leader exp.
Floyd	Intentionality in getting to know staff and students Keeps equity on the table Considers positionality	Self-Serving Does not seek out others for support Traditional disciplinarian	7	7	9	District Equity offerings
Smith	Relationships Intentional discussion about race Vulnerability Transparency Visibility	Not visible Undermining the principal Fixed mindset (not believing in kids' potential)	8	6	8	University Education Program

Participant Pseudonym	Ideal Phrases/Words	Least Ideal Phrases/Words	2022 (current year)	2019 (3 yrs. ago)	2025 (3 yrs. from now)	What Changed/ Shifted
	MBA Reflective Scheduling Hiring					
Wang	Relationships Data driven All can learn Interrupting Courageous conversations Intentionally looking at race Hiring	Not doing the personal work Manager vs. Instructional leader Not showing vulnerability	8	7	9	(PD)

Themes

Through the coding process, the following six themes emerged from the triangulated data sources (interviews, equity artifacts, self-anchoring scales, and online constructed surveys).

- Theme #1: Building Positive and Genuine Relationships is Key.

- Theme #2: Equity in Scheduling.

- Theme #3: Interviewing and Hiring for Excellence and Diversity.

- Theme #4: Professional Development around Equity, Anti-racism, and Culturally Responsive Teaching.

- Theme #5: Being a Lifelong Learner.

- Theme #6: Parent/Community Engagement

Each theme is discussed in the following sections.

Building Positive and Genuine Relationships is Key

All of the middle school administrations interviewed espoused a high importance of *building positive and genuine relationships* when considering best practices for leading with equity. Comments elevated from the interviews, self-anchoring scales, and online constructed surveys illustrate these assistant principals felt they cannot be operational unless they are relational. For example, during her interview Ms. Smith, stated.

> as an administrator I would be in some schools and people would have a problem because somebody came in with purple hair and maybe it was a staff member and I'm like so what difference does that make. It may look like a male coming in with a dress on, so what, that's who that person is, that's how they're expressing who they are. The signage and bulletin boards will be reflective of the multicultural environment. Sometimes there's in conclusion. Where you, you cannot come to an agreement, and you agree to disagree.

Where we can laugh with each other, we can laugh at each other, we can laugh at ourselves, we can laugh at mistakes we can laugh when there's joy. And sometimes it is sorrow when there's a loss in the Community or something is going on in the world that's impacting we can come together and we can actually grieve together, we feel that comfortable with each other, and we can share our grief. If there was one word that I would say that can embody all of that it's *relationships*. Equity comes down to building strong, solid relationships with people and especially with people who you aren't as comfortable with initially. So, I think when people see that we truly are about relationships everything else clicks; that equity is a part of the true relationship. We have to do this fully and make sure that we have staff who are checking in with every single last one of the kids. Part of my philosophy is an acronym I use MBA a management by walking around. You got to walk around the building, you have to be visible greeting people in the morning. Another important way for an assistant principal to build relationship is to ask questions of the principal. APs should be asking, who does this serves and who's being left out.? Have we considered? let's look into how we can make this happen for our students.

In her interview. Ms. Miller shared,

I'm constantly thinking about how can we create a safe space where students can feel valued, loved, and nurtured so they can learn. The first few weeks of school I emphasize to my departments to build those strong relationships with students. Get to know their likes/dislikes, learn about their cultures, how they feel they do their best learning. I spend time doing the same with my staff and students. I think it is important to model what building relationships looks like, before I can ask my staff to do it.

Similarly, during her interview, Ms. Rodriguez presented an equity artifact and shared the rationale for it birthed from a need she saw in staff intentionally building relationships with the emergent multilingual learners (EMLs), the community, and each other. (See Appendix I for Ms. Rodriguez's equity artifact.) The "connections" component of her artifact amplified the importance of building and cultivating positive and affirming relationships. She shared,

Understanding and executing this importance is not unique but it must be intentional. We had to come to a place where it was known that our equity work was not in isolation. There is a clear pathway, and there were many stakeholders involved in implementing that at various levels, and at the macro and micro levels. It was an aspect of all things, so it is an element of our instruction it's an element of our restorative practices, it's an element of our operational practices and just logistics in general. With team leaders, staff development teachers, content specialists and administrators. Whether it was culturally responsive teaching, looking at our learning progression on anti-racism, going through the beginnings of the equity journey and exploring identities- looking at everything through the lens of the only way we can successfully reach our goal is through knowing ourselves, our kids, their community in order for that to be done, engaging them must be relational not transactional.

Ms. Floyd reflected on her current and future beliefs and how her equity leadership practice is impacted as a result on the self-anchoring scale. She said,

Building relationships with middle school students looks like giving them a chance to make a mistake without treating them like a criminal. That child looks like and can be my son or my brother. I think about that a lot. I also take the time to help them into becoming the best version of themselves. I give this to them in my setting; the office, the hallway,

cafeteria, outside, whenever I encounter them because I know they may not be getting

that in the classroom.

Ms. Floyd further added,

As it relates to how I now monitor and consider discipline, I think deeply about the

punishment in proportion to the mistake, and I do call it a mistake. I do not believe it is

reflective of who they are. I let them know that I never treat them like they are the worst

thing they have ever done, you know. So for me that relationship piece is important.

There was alignment among the online constructed survey (completed by 59 middle

school assistant principals), the semi-structured interviews, and the self-anchoring scale. Of the

15 middle school assistant principals who completed the online survey, 21% gave building

relationships as one of their top three priorities as an assistant principal who leads for educational

equity. Additionally, 49% of the survey respondents mentioned relationships one or more times

as a key word or in a phrase. One respondent gave the following testimony,

A priority of the job is the ability to build strong relationships with all people. Being

intentional about engaging all stakeholders, student and their families, especially!

Another participant shared, "managing students, handling concerns fairly and giving

students the support they need; that can only be done when you have a relationship with

the student and their families." Collectively survey participants stated, "creating access

and opportunity for students, supporting staff in the mission to eradicate racialized

outcomes, and building relationships with all educational stakeholders is paramount."

While participants overwhelmingly espoused the importance of building relationships,

some participants shared that they have experienced or are experiencing barriers which could be

from their current principal, their department colleagues, and/or the district organization. Ms. Floyd shared,

> Our shared vision is heavily vested in relationships; however, it is not explicitly or consistently communicated. Depending on the leader [principal] you have. I would say, it is leader-dependent, and it depends on where you go. I have had a couple of district leaders who were very clear about where we stand for, this is what I do, but I don't think the explicit importance of it exists at my school. This has been brought up, but it is implicit, and we don't follow it. There is no real consistency across the departments. I just don't think we are holding people accountable to do the work of equity, either. The expectation is different for different staff members. I'm an assistant principal of color and my colleague is not a person of color, neither is my principal. The department my assistant principal colleague supervises has a range of staff of color. It seems whenever there is a seemingly sensitive issue around race either with a student or staff member, they ask me to intervene. It is couched with; they can relate to you better. I find myself asking what happened to building strong relationships with our kids and staff?

> Ms. Floyd articulated,

> I have great relationships with my staff, however, I also recognize I have to be very strategic when delivering information at times. For example, my principal wanted to begin the work around implicit bias with our staff, and she wanted me to lead the work. Well, I knew initially it might be difficult for some colleagues to receive the information coming from me, a Black woman so I leveraged my White male assistant principal colleague. I don't know if I want to say it's my belief, but it's been my experience

sometimes that other people who are Caucasian take that kind of thing better from a Caucasian male such as himself.

Ms. Web posited,

When I came to my school, I exclusively monitored multilingual learners and quickly ascertained that I was able to see a school experience through a lens that most teachers and my other two assistant principal colleagues did not have access to. At that time, it was common for newcomer EMLs to have a triple period of ELD (between the double period ELD course and the academic language course), so I got to know a cohort of students really well. Because of this, I also heavily monitored their performance in other classes and essentially completed a virtual student shadow experience during those years -- I was not with students in their other classes, but I had more opportunity than others to examine student work in other classes, the resulting grades, and check-in with students about their experiences in other classes. This was highly impactful in a positive way on my own administrative practice. However, I noticed when I shared my success and suggest for my two AP colleagues to mimic this experience with the cohort of students they monitor it was met with resistance. So, I left it alone and continued to operate and exact change in the sphere I was able to.

As reflected by these assistant principals there is a limitation in what they believe and can actualize on their campus in leading the work of ensuring scholars receive fairness, access, and opportunity during their middle school matriculation.

Equity in Scheduling

Overwhelmingly, respondents shared that a way to ensure access, fairness, and opportunity is through the master schedule. Six of the seven middle school assistant principals

talked during their interview about the importance of and challenges with scheduling staff and course offerings equitably. The feedback shared during the interviews and on the online survey shows the emphasis *scheduling equity* has on their leadership beliefs and practices. For example, Ms. Wang stated in her interview,

> Every decision we make beginning with scheduling staff courses must be done through the lens of equity. It is important to consider how we are servicing and optimizing student access to rigor and productive struggle through coursework. Thinking about how are we making an impact on the students we need to be making an impact for.

Ms. Miller shared that, as master scheduler, she creates conditions for equitable workspaces by looking at teachers' schedules, how many classes they're teaching, how many preps they have, and what resources they have. She shared, "we try to make sure that is equitable." For example,

> If you know their teaching locations and whether they're floating and take all that into account. Is it equitable for all teachers? It is important to ensure we just don't have a particular group of teachers floating all the time. We think about room usage, we want to make sure that the rooms are close to each other, so we don't have teachers, going from upstairs and downstairs unnecessarily, so we look at the distance between classes. At the end of the day, it's about the students, so we want the resources and the tools that they need to help students be successful, so we want to make sure that they also have those resources, tools and fair teaching stations whenever possible.

Ms. Smith shared that being courageous with scheduling is a hallmark of hers. She reclaimed,

I redid the master schedule midyear one year. Zora Neale Hurston Middle School had 1200 something kids. It impacted 700 kids. Even seeing when you've made a scheduling mistake, I can remember walking in some classrooms and saying to myself, this will not work, or what happened! This class is all White! This must be a scheduling error. You mean to tell me there's nobody of color who can go in algebra this period. This is not best for student achievement, and we have to get all the way down to the WHO. Yes, let's talk about the race and, in particular, when I first came to the school no one wanted to talk about the African American males, Latino males, only the Asian and White males. But I had to bring up that data, and when I looked at data on the White males. White students and our Asian students were doing better than African American, and Hispanic students. The data also will look and say truth, even if we say we're equitable if these kids are not making progress, then we have to look at us can't go don't look at the parent and who where they live, or what we have to look at. I knew I had to make changes.

I sent out a ConnectEd message to the community. Parents talked about it for a long time, and I said to them, "I made a mistake doing the schedule. I thought it was what's best for kids, and I now realize we did not set them up for success. I'm giving you a month beforehand. For some reason you feel that your child must be in a certain situation, please contact me immediately. You can contact me by phone or in person, because I need to ask you some questions, and share details with you around what I'm thinking.

Ms. Smith recalls only two or three people contacting her. She shared, "everybody else was like, thank you and, wow that is so nice of you to let us know, and we're okay with your change." She further went on to say, "parents stated they had never had somebody say they made

a mistake and apologized like that. The staff in the math department called me in three days into the change and thanked me."

Of participants completing the online constructed survey, 29% espoused the importance of and challenges around equitable staff scheduling. One respondent shared, "leading for educational equity means every student has access to grade-level, engaging, affirming, meaningful instruction, every day." Another participant shared,

> to me it means intentionality in creating conditions at all levels of education that result in access to high quality learning for all students and improves outcomes, so children are able to grow up and thrive in their lives; I firmly believe this begins with scheduling for the middle school student. They must have a variety of course offerings.

Yet another participant shared, "The schedule should reflect the strongest teachers with the neediest kids. It should not reflect the strongest teacher teaching all advanced or accelerated courses." A fourth survey participant shared,

> Leading for educational equity means examining practices and policy through the lens of anti-racism, adjusting where needed, and providing instructional feedback based on disaggregated outcomes. It looks like honest coaching conversations with staff based in data and sounds like constant questioning of the status quo. This begins with equity in scheduling. There must be opportunities for teacher leaders, administration, and cohorts to decompose these ideas and it must be intentionally embedded in the schedule.

One other respondent reflected,

> …being brave enough to address the day-to-day decisions such as scheduling beginning English language learners with mostly remedial coursework because they do not yet

speak the target language, that are made that unfairly work against marginalized groups and working to ensure structures and supports are in place to help all students.

This survey participant shared beliefs around the challenges of equitable scheduling, stating, though important,

> if we are truly committed to educational equity, then we intentionally pursue it at every level, in every space and for every student, and that means we have to have tough conversations about which teachers teach which kids, and which courses, and the equity in course offerings to all kids.

Notably, three out of the seven study participants presented artifacts which highlighted their work around scheduling.

Ms. Rodriguez provided another perspective which elevates scheduling challenges at the district level. She shares,

> I noticed the data for our ESOL students and their classroom data wasn't great. A further look at the data showed many of the students were not meeting benchmark in either literacy or math. An even closer look showed a core group of these students were dual coded which English being identified as their dominate language, but not having access to language proficiency courses. I know these skills sets are there, they can do general problem solving, and they have critical thinking skills around how to tackle contextual problems when read aloud to, so it begs the question what is really holding them back from their full potential. I looked at the schedule for the entire grade seven class and noticed as a member of the scheduling team I missed opportunities to place students in classes that would benefit them most. So, I began to think of ways to provide more equitable scheduling and before and after school tutoring for the students most impacted.

I was met with so much pushback from the district ESOL department. I was questioned at

every turn, there was so much red tape to have the tutorial offerings available. I was

persistent, then I received a scathing email instructing me to stop my advocacy for this

population could not believe it. It was very disheartening; however, I persisted, and the

scholars did well. After the district saw the growth, I was contacted and asked to share

my model and implementation. The barriers I faced at the district level still haunts me

today.

Interviewing and Hiring for Excellence and Diversity

During the semi-structured interviews, six of the seven participants expressed the

sentiment that is paramount to have the right people on the bus. These respondents were

emphatic in their beliefs of *interviewing and hiring for excellence and diversity* as this greatly

impacts their ability as equity-minded leaders to create, to facilitate, and to serve in spaces where

people, regardless of how they self-identify, can feel safe. One participant shared, "intentionality

in the alignment of resources and staffing is key." The staffing implications discussed by another

participant emphasized, "Decisions regarding students must be equity focused, and hiring staff

with an equity lens is a must!" When asked about hiring, during the semi-structured interview,

Ms. Floyd stressed the importance of hiring for diversity as a way of humanizing and bridging

the disciplinary divide saying, "when I'm hiring I look for staff who will see Black and Brown

kids as humans. Equally shared by Ms. Floyd was the desire to see more diverse recruitment in

hiring practices at her campus." She explained,

> Something else that's also been big, if I haven't said it before, is hiring practices. Our
>
> school has Black and Brown students, but it is majority White female staff, and when I
>
> say majority, I mean like the whole staff; I mean like there was no Black professional

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male in the building at all until I got there and pushed for hiring. There was one Black female teacher. The only Brown people in the building were working in the cafeteria area, no disrespect to them, but one thing I did when we were hiring is push to get people to even come and interview with us.

Mrs. Miller's beliefs and actions around equity in hiring is so pronounced that she elevated it as her equity artifact. (See Appendix J for Mrs. Miller's equity artifact.) She uses an equity and mindset questionnaire to screen and interview teacher candidates. The questions are open-ended and scenario-based. The interview tool asks questions of the candidates which allows the interviewer to consider the following: *capacity and/or approach to relationship building, belief in all students' potential, "all means all," commitment to meeting the needs of all children, behavior management/classroom management practices, responsiveness to feedback.* Of the online constructed survey respondents, 46% emphasized an importance in hiring and staffing. One surveyor wrote,

> Hiring staff who reflect the student population is key; scholars and community need mirrors; they need to see themselves positively portrayed in our profession more. Another survey participant shared, "leading for educational equity means providing opportunities for success for all children through instruction.

The artifacts of five out of the seven study participant associated an importance to hiring and staffing implications. One artifact to elevate is Ms. Web's cohort scheduling artifact. (See Appendix K for Ms. Web's equity artifact.) She shared her rationale for ensuring equity in scheduling,

> I had an opportunity to use our summer school staffing in a creative way that would provide the student shadow experience as an embedded structure and that therefore would

not require the use of substitutes for staff coverage. I hired summer school staff in two categories: classroom teacher and cohort teacher. Classroom teachers are doing what teachers traditionally do: they plan and deliver content during class time. In a more traditional hiring setting, cohort teachers would actually be co-teachers: these teachers would partner up with the classroom teachers to co-plan and co-deliver content for one content area. Instead, I hired them as cohort teachers: these teachers are assigned one cohort of students and travel with that cohort to all three classes on the student's schedule. The students stay together all day, similar to what you might see in an elementary school. The cohort teacher does not plan or deliver instruction; rather, they engage with the instruction in the same way that the students do and from the lens of the student. They also observe how students react to instruction. After their daily shadowing, they then meet with me and the summer school lead teacher to debrief what they saw and to construct feedback for us as a school community, providing opportunities as a school for us to pivot our planning or delivery of instruction in order to better meet the needs of students (especially those who are multilingual learners or who have IEPs). Besides my daily meetings with the cohort teachers, I also have weekly meetings with the classroom teachers to provide feedback for the good of the group. This week, we are also starting a once-a-week debrief meeting for cohort teachers to touch base with the classroom teachers they see during the day (For example, every teacher in the sixth-grade block below will meet briefly on Tuesday to touch base; every seventh-grade teacher will meet on Wednesday, etc.). Organically, classroom teachers have also started to collaborate with their cohort teachers and ask for individual feedback after a lesson. Cohort teachers

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have excitedly shared that they have provided feedback one day to a classroom teacher and seen it implemented the very next.

Professional Learning and Development around Equity

The data during the study revealed that *professional learning and development around educational equity, anti-racism, and culturally responsive teaching* were hallmarks of the middle school assistant principal participants' perceptions of beliefs and actions around leading for educational equity and change. However, professional development can be received from the district, can be received externally or can be self-initiated. Mx Baxter shared,

> I have not taken any district equity training. I have received my training from the schools I have worked in. I remember school study circles, where we were talking about the idea of race in the very beginning and the value of race and culture. We had the dialogue around whether what is equitable instruction before it was actually named or termed. I think that is truly where my equity journey began. Also, I read current literature pertaining to anti-racist teaching. Essentially, I force myself to do individual research. Externally, I would say my university training supported my equity learning as well. We would talk about diversity, ideas around race and culture.

Of survey participants, 40% shared that professional development is important. A respondent from the online constructed survey stated,

> Educational equity is ensuring all children receive what they need to reach their academic and social potential. It would require that staff members are versed on how to build relational capacity without targeting or someone not having a sense of belonging. It sounds as if there are positive messages exchanged as a regular basis.

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Another participant, stated, "adequate professional development with the staff development teacher and staff; having relentless courageous conversations around race, culture and socio-economics." One surveyor shared,

Leading for equity means looking at systems and structures that perpetuate learning gaps in students of marginalized groups. It means giving time for staff to self-reflect on their beliefs on how children different from them learn and what structures in their classrooms, in their instructional delivery don't allow for kids to show up as their whole selves.

This respondent also shared, "An assistant principal must be brave enough to address the day-to-day decisions that are made that unfairly work against marginalized groups and working to ensure structures and supports are in place to help students."

Ms. Wang's equity artifact was the cycle of socialization. She used this as an opportunity to open the school year's first collective professional development experience. Staff were asked to review the cycle and discuss its components. She and her principal selected specific questions around data pulled from student voices. Ms. Wang shared,

It was a way to level-set It was a way to level-set and establish an intentional culture around equity and our own biases. It was an important tool to help staff see who they are and why they might make the decisions they make about instruction and students. The process of going through the different levels of questions has been instrumental in our equity growth. We discuss an aspect at every staff and cohort meeting. It has allowed and, in some cases, forced the staff to be vulnerable.

On the self-anchoring scale, all seven interview respondents exhibited a posture of growth in their equity continuum. All but one participant ranked themselves as 9 or below on the

self-anchoring ladder when asked where they see themselves currently and in the future. The other six respondents shared comments as follows:

I feel I am an 8 with strong potential for growth. I do not think I will ever be a 10. I believe there is always room to learn, move and to be and do better. I am considering taking more of the district equity courses offered, too. I really want to take the 'Understanding White Privilege" module. I believe as a White woman I would greatly benefit.

I'd say that I'm at a seven. I'm definitely not where I started-thank goodness. Now, I'm known to have courageous conversations, and I know I will get to an 8 or 9 in the future. I do not think I will ever get to a 10; the learning and work is ever changing. The learning around equity I gleamed during my graduate coursework has helped me tremendously.

I would say I currently see myself on like step eight. I would say there is always room for growth, so I would never put myself at a 10. Being equity-minded and seeking out equity trainings is a conscious decision; I have to constantly remind myself of this work. I have to constantly seek learning opportunities. The courses I took for my equity certification really helped me to understand equity and those equitable teaching practices. I use them with the departments I lead. Three years from now, I would like to see myself as a nine. I feel like 10 is wrong, if I say 10, then there is no room to grow, and I know I can always grow. I want to improve. So, I do not think I will ever be a 10; it's an aspiration, though"

Being a Lifelong Learner

Middle school assistant principals in this study reflected on the importance of *being a lifelong learner* having a posture of a growth mindset, having an ethic of care, and communicating unconditional positive regard. During the interview, Ms. Smith, stated, "I'm

sorry to say, my 20 plus years in education in this district equity wasn't always talked about." On an anchoring scale question, Ms. Smith shared,

an assistant principal who has an equity mind would ask the principal, how can I help you, what do you need to do to make sure all students or parents or staff are welcome in there and we're being successful.

Ms. Rodriguez discussed her investment in continuous learning by sharing she has enrolled in a doctoral program and her topic will be around antiracism. She shared that the experiences of being a Latina in administration, a mother, and an advocate has propelled her to want to learn more and do more for her community. I recognize regular and intentional equity work does not grow in isolation, and she wants to grow her craft of learning in this area.

Ms. Miller is currently hosting a book study around trauma at her school. The book is called, *Equity Centered Trauma Informed Education* by Alex Chevron Vanessa. The expectation of the book study is to help foster equity initiatives, provide leader development for teachers, and support student-scholars who are experiencing trauma however it manifests in undesired behavior.

A respondent from the survey reflected,

As an assistant principal, my commitment to the students who I serve is to courageously continue to do the hard, but meaningful, work that promotes and fosters equity and accountability for ALL students so that they ALL belong and are equipped with the tools to thrive academically and socially. I can only do this when I am continuously learning.

Unexpected Emerging: Parent/Community Engagement

Of respondents from the online constructed survey, 33% identified *parent/community engagement* as important for an assistant principal leading for educational equity. One

respondent shared, "Communicating with parents who are underrepresented and providing them with the necessary resources and opportunities for their children to be successful demonstrates the actions of an AP leading fairly." Another surveyor stated, "It means I am part of a team willing to stop racisms. Every decision, action, and conversation is interrupting racisms; and mostly it means sharing that with the parents, caregivers, and guardians of the students I serve."

During the interview, Ms. Miller shared,

We cannot forget about the community; the parents of the children we serve. This looks like helping parents understand the educational process. There are some parents who might need more assistance than other parents and so on. As an equity leader it's my job to identify and understand who those communities are and to support them.

Ms. Smith's equity artifact, *Black and Brown Males Monthly Father Chats,* demonstrates her staunch beliefs and actions around the importance of reaching out to the community and meeting families where they are. (See Appendix L for Ms. Smith's equity artifact.) She shared,

An assistant principal who is doing the work of equity would have courageous conversations with staff about how to reach families in unconventional ways. They would create conditions with the community to do that. The monthly father chats do that. Now, of course this is aligned to data. The reason I selected black and brown kids is because when we looked at the data, these are the students who were falling behind and even further we noticed they were either arriving to school late, having many absences or not completing homework assignments. I also noticed when dads would drop kids off or come into the building they would do it quickly and rarely did they attend the larger evening events. So this is why I decided to reach out specifically to this parent

community. It paid off, too! I learned so much about the families, their middle school experiences a s a child, and their expectations for their children.

Mx. Baxter discussed the importance of welcoming the community onto the campus whenever there is opportunity and, more importantly, intentionally creating those opportunities outside of parent teacher conference/meetings. They lament,

> We must be intentional in creating offering that will attract parents to campus. It can't be the first-time parents come to school is for a disciplinary reason or parent-teacher conference. No, we need to have engagement nights, days and planned events that force us to go into the communities we serve. Families must see us as partners in meeting the needs of their children. I love our reading nights, STEAM, and math nights, but I also love our parent drops ins to my mindfulness room.

> Lastly, when reflecting on her self-anchoring scale, Ms. Web commented,

> I cannot be successful with the students I serve if I do not possess a deep understanding of where they come from. So, it is my job to ask questions about the culture, the food, the traditions and even more so, it is my job to show up at the soccer game, or religious confirmation or birthday parties."

This is an important theme. It elevates the construct that school leaders understand that building relationships with all members of a school community is key to leading a successful community of practice both within and outside the school buildings. Relationships built during the pandemic initially centered around safety, well-being, and practical strategies for use of instructional technology, school classrooms, buildings, and schedules. Determining how to effectively engage and communicate with student-scholars, staff, and families in authentic and meaningful ways, building relationships on trust and confidence in the post pandemic world will

lead to a culture of central beliefs that will impact student and adult learning. This looks like inviting the community in to review the school improvement plan and considering other nontraditional ways to build and rebuild trust with the community.

Shaw Arthur School (SAS) District middle school assistant principals were invited to participate in a 15-minute online survey to learn about the innovative and exceptional equity work they were doing in their role leading for educational equity. When asked the question, What does leading for educational equity mean to you? What does it look like? What does it sound like? Table 18 displays the key phrases/words responses in the survey and themes that emerged.

Table 18

Key Phrase and Words Mentioned in Participants' Online Survey Responses

Phrases/Words	Number and Percentage of Respondents (n=15)	Themes
Relationships	8 (53%)	Relationships
All/Every Student	4 (27%)	Relationships
Instruction	8 (53%)	Scheduling
Staff PD	6 (40%)	Professional Development
Hiring	7 (46%)	Staffing/Hiring
		Professional Development
Scheduling	4 (27%)	Scheduling
Supports/Resources		Community engagement
Examining Schedules/Analyzing Decision and Processes	7 (46%)	Scheduling
Coaching	3 (20%)	Relationships
Curriculum/Courses	4 (27%)	Life-long learner
		Professional Development
Observations/Evaluations	3 (20%)	Staffing/Hiring
Management/Discipline	3 (20%)	Relationships
Parent/Community Engagement	5 (33%)	Outreach
		Community engagement
Anti-Racism/Interrupting Racism + Bias	6 (40%)	Professional Development
Analyzing Data	3 (20%)	Professional Development
Courageous Conversations	3 (20%)	Professional Development
		Relationships; Staffing/Hiring

Summary

Chapter 4 presented a review of the purpose and the research questions that guided this study. The research design, the context of the study, selection of participants, and the research methods were presented. The data collection process was accomplished using an online constructed survey, a semi-structured interview with a self-anchoring scale, and artifacts. The semi-structured interviews were conducted using a Zoom platform which also produced transcripts of the interviews. Data were analyzed using the research questions and theoretical framework as guides. The middle school assistant principals' responses reflected their perspectives on beliefs and actions around leading for educational equity and change. The data also explored the assistant principals' experiences in learning about and leading for educational equity, and what they are doing and believing to move the work forward in the industry of educational equity.

Chapter 5 will include discussion of these findings, connections to my personal significance for the research, and analysis and interpretation of the data related to the theories reviewed in Chapters 1 and 2. In Chapter 5, I also present recommendations for supporting assistant principals who are able to lead for educational equity as well as suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to ascertain assistant principals' perspectives in beliefs and actions around leading for educational equity and change, explore the assistant principals' experiences in learning about and leading for educational equity, and understand what assistant principals are doing and believing to move the work forward in the industry of educational equity. This chapter begins with a restatement of the findings described in Chapter 4 followed by the research questions and a discussion of the alignment of findings with the conceptual and theoretical frameworks. The chapter closes with implications for practice and future research as well as a conclusion.

Summary of Findings

By triangulating the rich data collected from assistant principals engaged in leading for educational equity, I identified the following themes described more fully in Chapter 4:

- Theme #1: Building Positive and Genuine Relationships is Key.

- Theme #2: Equity in Scheduling.

- Theme #3: Interviewing and Hiring for Excellence and Diversity.

- Theme #4: Professional Development Around Equity, Anti-racism, and Culturally Responsive Teaching.

- Theme #5: Being a Lifelong Learner.

- Theme #6: Parent/Community Engagement

These findings provide insight on the lived experiences of assistant principals who are leading for educational equity. The findings can support assistant principals to learn from colleagues who are leading for educational equity and use that learning to promote equitable leadership practices on their campuses. The findings also provide heightened awareness and

urgency for providing professional development to support future administrators to become educational equity leaders. Equally important, the findings provide insight to guide the development of knowledge and skills for strategic planning and implementation to support culturally relevant instruction and, ultimately, the overall improved performance for student-scholars. Finally, the results can be used to help school districts and institutions of higher education as they prepare future administrators to be strong, resilient leaders for educational equity.

Research Questions

The following research question and sub questions guided my study:

1. What is the assistant principals' perspective of their role in leading for educational equity?

    1a. What are the assistant principals' beliefs around leading for educational equity?

    1b. What are the assistant principals' actions in leading for educational equity?

Discussion of the Findings

This section will connect the research questions and conceptual and theoretical frameworks to the findings in the study. In the area of assistant principals' perspectives on actions around leading for educational equity and change, the participants highlighted relationships, professional development, and equity in scheduling. The assistant principals shared that these were areas they used to move the work of education equity forward. Additionally, the findings revealed that assistant principals who lead for educational equity believe and actualize the following:

- Believe in the importance of building relationships.
- Practice developing themselves and learning about antiracism through continued

professional development.

- Believe in stating and delivering consistent messaging around educational equity.

- Practice creating schedules that are fair and accessible to all including student-scholars and teaching staff.

- Practice being a life-long learner and exercise humility.

- Believe in, learn about (authentically) engaging in the community being served.

Alignment with the Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

A conceptual framework is the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that support and inform the research. It is a key part of a study design (Miles & Huberman, 2014). Miles and Huberman (2014) defined conceptual framework as a visual or written product, one that, "explains, either graphically or in narrative form; it is the main thing to be studied-the key factors, concepts, or variable-and the presumed relationships among them" (p. 18). Maxwell (2002) described a conceptual framework as the actual ideas and beliefs that a researcher holds about a phenomenon being studied. The conceptual framework used to structure this study was Curtis Linton's growth and equity leadership framework (Linton, 2011). The research design and questions were created from the framework tenets below:

- *Culture:* How does the workplace create conditions to ensure that success, engagement, and inclusion are not predictable by race, ethnicity and culture?

- *Practice:* How does the workplace identify specific strategies, actions, or goals that are designated to eliminate the racial achievement gap?

- *Leadership:* How does the workplace spend time and resources on developing the vision, skills and accountability of its formal and informal leaders to lead for equity?

The conceptual framework for this study was actualized-overall; however, according to some research respondents, there were some inconsistencies at the culture, practice, and leadership levels.

According to the middle school assistant principals participating in this study, school leaders leading for educational equity must:

- build and maintain strong relationship,

- mine the hiring practices of the campus,

- cultivate protocols and procedures to ensure scheduling is equitable,

- engage in continuous professional development around race, culture,

- marginalized identities, and

- commit to genuinely learning about the communities they serve.

Furthermore, the beliefs and actions of the participants in this study fully aligned with components of authentic leadership which comprised the study's theoretical framework. This research study identified the following three viewpoints of authentic leadership: relational transparency, moral grounding, and responsiveness to people's needs and values (Fullan, 2001). These hallmarks of authentic leadership, and the participants' responses aligned with the theoretical framework I used for this study.

According to the study assistant principals, relationships matter and are the foundation for everything else. There is intersectionality between relationships, hiring, beliefs, professional development, community engagement, educational equity, and antiracist leadership. Antiracist leadership is about introspection and changing adult behaviors and practices, and beliefs and mental models (i.e., mindsets). Current beliefs about how children learn and how they should be engaged and supported are leading to improved student-scholar outcomes in literacy, math, and

social emotional learning. Numerous studies have found that part of the opportunity gap or myth is due to student-scholars not being exposed to grade-level standards and best early instruction.

Participants in this study maintained that close attention and equity in scheduling can mitigate injustice. The assistant principal's ability to improve equity in scheduling may have positive outcomes for student-scholars who most often are not exposed to grade-level standards, especially traditionally marginalized student-scholars: Black, Brown, multilingual learners, and those who need specialized instruction. This is an approach to the work that is constant and ongoing. "Like fighting an addiction being an antiracist requires persistent self-awareness, constant self-criticism, and regular self-examination" (Kendi, 2019).

Two facets of authentic leadership are relational transparency and responsiveness to people's needs. Balanced processing, a component of authentic leadership, refers to a leader objectively examining all relevant information before making any decision (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Several of the assistant principals in the study maintained the importance of connecting to the communities they serve and listening to student-scholars and staff to craft leadership decisions. Likewise, participants expressed an urgency for innovation in the continuing work of racial equity by examining practices, leadership, and culture of a campus and the larger school system. The results of this research fit within the body of work that is available on building relationships. My research findings align with and are advancing the scholarship regarding the importance of building relationships. Participants in the sample were doing work around their beliefs and their actions regarding positive relationship building. On the basis of 167 sixth-grade students, Wentzel (1998) shared that relations of perceived support from parents, teachers, and peers to student motivation differed depending on the source of support and motivational outcome: Peer support was a positive predictor of prosocial goal pursuit, teacher support was a

positive predictor of both types of interest and of social responsibility goal pursuit, and parent support was a positive predictor of school-related interest and goal orientations. Moya et al. (2019) touts strengthening teachers' skills to build relationships while protecting their well-being should be a priority. This theme is elevated in my research findings.

Implications for Practice

Since returning to full-time, in-person instruction, schools have been working overtime to identify and meet the needs of student-scholars both socially and academically. Inequity in our schools negatively impacts academic performance, creates a negative school learning experience for student-scholars, and dehumanizes marginalized groups. There are institutional barriers in place that prevent fairness, access, and opportunity for all student-scholars to learn. The implications of this research for practice are clear: Equity-minded assistant principals can believe and show action in three broad commitments: a) a commitment to being relational in all things prior to being operational, b) a commitment to hiring for excellence and diversity, and c) a commitment to ensuring access, fairness, and opportunity in scheduling. These endeavors include a commitment to being explicit and intentional in the work of equity and antiracism. The school's shared vison and understanding around educational equity cannot be clandestine; it must be elevated seamlessly and consistently.

Recommendations for practice gleaned from this study include:

- Providing support for assistant principals to learn best practices from colleagues who are leading for educational equity and use that learning to promote and carry out equitable leadership practices (e.g., building relationships, scheduling, professional learning, and hiring) on their campuses.
- Heightened the awareness and urgency for providing professional development to

support future administrators to become culturally intelligent, equity-minded leaders.

- Develop in assistant principals the knowledge and skills to identify strategic planning and implementation processes to support culturally relevant instruction for all student-scholars at a campus.

- Spearhead and foster community engagement and outreach, support hiring excellence and diversity, and introduce creative perks that keep culturally proficient leadership at the forefront of every decision considered and executed for all student-scholars.

Auerback (2007), in her research published in the *Journal of School Leadership*, espoused the importance of visioning parent engagement, of collaborating with diverse families and communities, and of creating a family-friendly school climate. She advocated thinking about the importance of meeting people, where they are, building those relationships, and making sure that there are events where scholars and their families see themselves, their culture, their voice.

Ferlazzo and Hammond (2009) talked about parent engagement as a strategy that might result in bigger gains and buy-in from students. The report focused on the positive impact of parental involvement on their child's academics and on the school at large. Participants' equity artifacts aligned with this research that stressed the importance of visioning, specifically giving intentionality about meeting the needs of the parent/guardian/caregiver community. This includes thinking about, specifically, what to do on day one to make sure that they are feeling included, that they're feeling welcome, they're feeling a part of this work. The research findings support this as being an effective and best practice for assistant principals leading for educational equity.

Warren et al. (2009) investigated the efforts of community-based organizations to engage parents in schools and how this effort can bring schools a better understanding of the culture and

complexities of the community. My research found that thinking about soliciting and enlisting community members, inclusive of the parent teacher association and the local cafe or grocery store, and including them in discussions about how to make sure the campus inclusive where all are served can lead to stronger student-scholar achievement.

Engagement strategy is equally important including the idea of a continuum of parental involvement. In her research, Goodall (2014) discussed parental engagement as being a continuum and discussed the agency of parents and student-scholars along that continuum. It is not just parent-teacher conferences or open houses at the beginning of school, but it really is checking what's the protocol for investing in school-community partnerships.

<center>Implications for Future Research</center>

The implications for further research that emerged from the data and that informed next steps for further research included conducting a study investigating the scholarship of community engagement that deepens knowledge of stakeholders. Other research could include a study on the timing and effectiveness of professional development on school leaders' implementation of strategies promoting educational equity and cultural competency. Further research is also needed to quantify assistant principals' impact on student-scholar achievement.

Additional areas for future research include studies that address the following questions:

- What role do the school district and assistant principals play in communicating, implementing, and modeling beliefs and actions based on cultural proficiency and antiracist topics?

- How can assistant principals engage in authentic community conversations to deepen their knowledge of racial and cultural diversity?

- What measures help quantify the impact of assistant principals' equity-based

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strategies on student-scholar achievement and social-emotional well-being?

These future research opportunities reflect the gap which exists in previous research and the findings of this research. The research findings advance the notion that the assistant principal is not solely a disciplinarian as outlined in Chapters 1, and 2; likewise, they underscore the importance of recognizing there are career assistant principals who come into administration to be a support to the principal and have no intention of ever becoming principals. It is important for these assistant principals to be equity-minded as they will be the administrative leaders longest on a campus and they know the student-scholars, staff, and community. They are on the front lines stewarding the vision of educational equity. This indicates a re-think in how we view the role of assistant principals. I was able to find research on most of the themes which elevated from my study; however, the role of assistant principal as an equity scheduler as an impactful tool was not immediately found in the research. An equity scheduler is intentional about ensuring student-scholars have access to grade level courses, advanced courses, and enrichment activities. These assistant principals are intentional with creating course opportunities for student-scholars and staff that expose and challenge in meaningful ways. Most importantly, these equity schedulers are not afraid to pivot when they recognize an error has occurred in scheduling. There is limited research in the area of equity scheduling. I am excited this will be an area where my research can make an impact to add to the scholarship of assistant principals leading for educational equity.

This research advances the notion that there is interconnectedness in leading for educational equity; anti-racist leadership is about introspection and changing adult behavior. It is about thinking about one's beliefs and one's reactions as a result of one's beliefs. It is also about making mindset changes and having a growth mindset versus a fixed mindset (Dweck, 2010;

Kendi, 2019) The assistant principal leading for educational equity is one who reflects, is impactful, and executes change as a result of reflection. This study has confirmed the importance in remembering that there is intersectionality among relationships, hiring beliefs, professional development, community engagement, educational equity, and anti-racist leadership.

The participants' equity artifacts helped demystify and provide tangible examples of what providing professional development around cultural competency can look and sound like. Culturally responsive professional development or cultural relevance in practice for equity minded leaders must look and be different. There is the language of the industry—edu-jargon that is shrouded in the way educators communicate and generally understood by those in the field. However, my research provides evidence of what educational equity looks like and what it sounds like in real time, thus, making it more meaning for leadership practitioners. The research provides clear examples of what an equity mindset is and the practices that align with it. This can have an impact on leadership preparation. For institutions of higher education, the equity artifacts presented from the participants in my study are exemplars about what educational equity coursework looks like; they are explicit models to reference so as not to reinforce the same old systems which do not hold anti-racist leader-learning at the forefront. The equity artifacts help to make the mystery of leading for educational equity more concrete and less convoluted. The examples are transparent in nature, manageable to replicate, and examples of further innovation.

Conclusion

This study provided in-depth awareness of assistant principals' beliefs and actions in leading for educational equity. The action-oriented practitioners participating in the study interview revealed their work in educational equity which aligned with positive and impactful decision-making for student-scholars and school improvement. While conducting the study, I

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collected baseline demographic information, conducted semi-structured interviews, administered self-anchoring scales, reviewed artifacts, and analyzed middle school assistant principals' survey data. The robust findings gathered from the data collected afforded a deeper insight on how middle school assistant principals are addressing the task of interrupting, dismantling, mitigating, and resetting factors that negatively impact student-scholars' teaching and learning school experiences especially for students of color. In these settings, race can no longer be a predictor of student-scholar success. According to the National Research Council, "Academic success, as defined by high school graduation, can be predicted with reasonable accuracy based on third grade reading skills." Assistant principals must have courageous conversations with characteristically difficult people while also meeting issues directly and in a non-emotional way.

During the time of this study, we found ourselves in the wake of a health pandemic. Principals, assistant principals, other school leaders and staff were called to be creative, innovative, and, most urgently, malleable to meet the academic, social emotional, and sometimes physical (i.e., food insecurity) needs of the student-scholars and families they served. As shared in Chapters 1 and 2, the research around the role of the assistant principals is scarce and the research around assistant principals' beliefs and actions leading for educational equity is even thinner. Historically, principals were considered the only instructional leaders of their schools, and assistant principals were generally the building managers handling discipline, hiring, managing building service workers, and dealing with transportation issues, substitute coverages, schedules, special education (including being IEP chair); these are just some of the daily responsibilities of assistant principals. Assistant principals who want to lead for educational equity and demonstrate their cultural intelligence and instructional leadership ability recognize "managing up" is a critical skill that allows them to grow and use their skills beyond their daily

responsibilities. The critical work for assistant principals is not only to support the vision of the principal and the operations of the building, but to be a voice of racial consciousness who leads in making data-driven decisions that are inclusive and reflective of the student-scholar population served.

The findings of the study indicate that greater professional learning around race is necessary. It is also important to underscore that, while the types and content of staff professional development matter greatly, the best professional development will fail to be impactful if school leaders have not established the necessary conditions for it to succeed. The assistant principal has the potential and capacity to influence the paradigm shift from managerial taskmaster to instructional equity-intelligent school leader. Navigating the whirlwinds of ever-changing curricular demands, social-emotional demands, and race sensitivity should cause assistant principals to be ever vigilant when looking to identify evidence of behavior that supports articulated beliefs and values of a campus. As it relates to relationships, perhaps this research cements the notion that positive relationships with teachers and school staff can dramatically enhance students' level of motivation and, therefore, promote learning. Student-scholars with access to stronger relationships are more academically engaged, may have enhanced social skills, and experience more positive behavior.

My positionality as a researcher manifested in various ways during the duration of this study. In Chapter 1, I acknowledged the personal significance I have to the servitude of educational equity by virtue of my researcher positionality as a woman of color, a mother of a boy child of color, a school professional who has been a classroom teacher, staff development teacher, curriculum specialist, assistant principal, and now principal—all of this makes me an unapologetic disruptor of racial and civil injustice for all. I recognize I entered the research with

bias. While embarking on this research, I knew it was critical that I conduct member checks, use standardized procedures, and provide participants with reassurance of the confidentially of their data.

This study has provided me the clarity that if I do not trouble myself to lead for educational equity, then I will be a perpetuator in allowing race to predict student-scholar achievement and behavior outcomes. Likewise, since conducting this research I have an even healthier, positive obsession about serving and leading race-conscious communities, creating a culture rooted in beliefs that are welcoming and affirming for all stakeholders, and supporting and nurturing the equity work of my assistant principal. I ache to break the cycle of educational inequity for marginalized student-scholars.

Epilogue

When I began this study, I was interested in the position of assistant principal and, more specifically, the middle school assistant principal position. Studying the position of assistant principal excited me for two reasons. First, at the time I was an assistant principal curious to learn what others in the industry were doing to move the needle in the work of educational equity, and second, I wanted to explore the bankruptcy of scholarship of the position and particularly assistant principals who were leading for educational equity. Through my initial research, I learned it was at the secondary level that the position of assistant principal originated. So, I settled on studying that sector of the role of assistant principal. I learned quickly that the position of assistant principal was under-researched which made me more excited to explore the position as my dissertation topic and to add to body of research on this critical leadership role. I also considered the work I was doing as an assistant principal at the time and was curious to know what others in the field were doing to dismantle, interrupt, and challenge the status quo

around equity. Though I was intentional and hyper aware of my experiences, I worked even harder to bracket them during the study. My former experiences as an gave me an advantage when talking with my study participants: first, because I could relate to them as a professional and, second, because I recognize I also was once, and to some degree still am, one of the marginalized student-scholars whom assistant principals have committed to serving on their campus. I am forever a proud and unapologetic product of that concrete jungle once known as Duncan Projects in Jersey City, New Jersey I reference in Chapter 1.

I would like to briefly return to the personal significance of this research I discussed in Chapter 1. I am that child who benefited from an educational equity leader (before the term was coined), who saw potential in a little North Jersey girl who, by every measure, statistics and the world had given up on due to her social-economic status, skin color, and gender. I do not talk much about my past; however, there are areas of my upbringing and school encounters which both haunt and propel me in my current work as a principal. The unexpected connection of the theme of community engagement and my story is striking. Hearing the stories of my study participants evoked certain memories from my middle-school years that were dormant for some time. I am a starfish on the beach, and I understand my assignment as a school leader to be that: a passerby who picks up the starfish washed on the shore and intentionally places it back in the ocean for I know its survival, its LIFE, depends on it. Schools can do so much for a community. They can provide a place for children to not only learn, grow, and be nurtured, but to be their best selves without limitations put on them because of their melanin richness. This is my story; this is me. If not for the connections and investment made in me by one of my middle school leaders, I may not have had the push I needed to propel to conduct this research.

Schools must be intentional in their outreach and their efforts welcoming the communities they serve. We must work together—educators, parents, guardians, caregivers, and allies of public education—so that every student-scholar can learn, grow, and thrive. Achieving this for all our student-scholars—Black, Brown, and White—will take each of us doing our part. There can be no exceptions. Leadership is a journey, and I look forward to traveling in a space of appreciation to serve. Now that the research is finished, I am rejuvenated.

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APPENDIX A. INVITATION EMAIL

Dear Esteemed ████ Administrator Colleagues,

I know we are in an extremely busy season of staffing, and preparing for end of year procedures; however, I value your experiences as an assistant principal, and I am writing to ask for your support with my doctoral research study. I am principal intern at ████████████ and am currently pursing my doctorate at Hood College centered on assistant principals' perceptions of their beliefs and actions in leading for educational equity. You are invited to participate in a 15-minute online survey, and a semi-structured 60-minute interview. I am eager to learn about the innovative and exceptional equity work you are doing in your role as an assistant principal. Please note, both the online constructed survey and the interview, should you volunteer to participate, are strictly confidential.

If you agree to participate in the interview, I will ask you to 1.) be available to participate in a 60-minute interview by me, 2.) bring and share an artifact which you feel represents how you lead for educational equity- *examples might include: an agenda, flyer, email, photographs, journal musings, quotes, conference literature, book study from PLC, video montage, a program you either initiated or elevated, staff/community feedback/survey, etc.* Any and all data I obtain for this study will be stored in a secure office and on a password protected computer. The original audio files will be stored as electronic files on a computer and password protected. Additionally, any documents that you provide for analysis will be photocopied and the originals will be returned to you. All of the documents will be retained in a locked location. Though, I am not able to provide monetary compensation for your participation, you will receive a $15 gift card to either Starbucks or Dunkin Donuts; whichever you prefer.

I appreciate your consideration in participating in my research, by completing the online survey and consideration of the interview. I believe the information you provide will be extremely valuable in enhancing and helping to potentially add to the literature in the field of educational equity.

If you are interested in participating, please read the attached consent form and click on the survey link below to provide informed consent and to take the survey. Please indicate on the survey (question #10) if you would be interested in participating in an interview.

I greatly appreciate your time and consideration, especially during this busy time of the year. **Two additional reminders will be sent before the survey closes on *Friday, 8 April 2022 at 11:59pm.*** Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.
Survey link: https://forms.gle/xDz7xVdhnbQ3CWFN8

Yours in gratitude,

Ebony-Nicole Kelly
Doctoral Candidate
Hood College, Frederick Maryland
Ms. Ebony-Nicole Kelly, *NBCT*
Principal Intern *(Directora Provisional)*
        SAS District Elementary School

HOOD COLLEGE

Leading for educational equity: Assistant principals' perceptions of their beliefs and actions

Consent Form

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study. *If you decide not to participate, you will be excluded from the study and any future considerations of recruitment for this study.*

Introduction and Purpose
You are invited to participate in a research study about *Leading for educational equity: assistant principals' perceptions of their beliefs and actions. actions* because:
You have at least two years of experience as an AP;
You elected to be a part of the study from the online constructed survey. This study is being conducted by Ebony-Nicole Kelly, Primary Investigator, in affiliation with Hood College, Frederick Maryland as part of her doctoral research program. *It is not part of a study or feedback for MCPS.*

Voluntary Nature of the Study
Your participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Primary Investigator.

Duration and Location
The online constructed survey will take approximately 15 minutes. Completion of this survey constitutes one level of participation. By clicking and responding, you are agreeing to participate in one level of the study. At the end of the survey you will be given an opportunity to indicate your interest in a second level of participation; a follow-up interview. The semi-structured interview is anticipated to take approximately sixty minutes. The interview will be conducted at a mutually agreed upon time via Zoom. Self-identified survey middle school AP participants will participate in the semi-structured interviews. Participants in the interview may be asked in the future follow up questions or for clarification via email contact from the primary investigator.

Procedures
For the interview, please indicate below if you give permission to have this session recorded. You will still be able to participate in the study if you decide you do not want the session to be recorded.
   If you agree to participate in the second level of the study (the interview), I will ask you to do the following:
   ● Participate in a semi-structured interview which will last approximately sixty

      minutes. The interview will be conducted via Zoom on mutual availability of I and

assistant principal and will focus on your beliefs and actions as an assistant principal

leading for educational equity.

- Bring an artifact which represents for you how you lead for equity.

As the primary investigator conducts the interview, notes will be taken. If you give your consent, the primary investigator will audio record the interview, solely to support the note-taking process. You will be able to review the transcript of the interview for accuracy or to correct statements made.

Risks and Benefits
There are no foreseeable risks involved in the study as you will be discussing personal views on professional matters with a professional peer. The beneficial outcomes the primary investigator anticipates are that you may gain an increased understanding of your own views on assistant principal's leading for equity in education as compared with other APs who work in similar situations, gain a greater awareness of the Hood College doctoral program, and support assistant principals in their work as they lead for equity in their buildings. APs in the study could benefit in that they are being reflective about their craft and equity leadership with the teachers they lead. A benefit to your participation can inform future decision making, and further inform future research related to educational equity and leadership. Ultimately, participants may have a benefit from the opportunity of sharing their perceptions in the interview and online constructed survey. Another benefit of your participation can be the $15 gift card to either Starbucks or Dunkin Donuts.

Compensation
You will receive a gift card for your participation. The gift card will be a $15 card to either Starbucks or Dunkin Donuts.

Confidentiality
Though you will be in a one-on-one interview discussing your personal views on the topic, the storage of the data provided as part of this study will be confidential and will be protected to the fullest extent. No statements or perceptions will be identified with named school sites or named participants. All research will be conducted consistently with the highest ethical standards for confidentiality. The names of the participants will be coded when interviews are transcribed and the master coding list associating participant names with interview transcripts will be destroyed by shredding once the study is complete. Only the primary investigator will have access to the master coding list, interview and focus group data. Audio recording files will be kept on a password-protected computer. Your identity will be protected and the information you provide will not be used or shared outside the doctoral dissertation. I will maintain confidentiality of all research materials and products. All data will be destroyed by shredding method after the study is published.

Voluntary Participation
Participation in this study is completely **voluntary**. You may decide to stop taking part in the interview at any time. Withdrawal from the interview will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise permitted.

Contacts and Questions
If you have any additional concerns or questions about the interview and how the information will be used, you are free to contact me at 202.255.3852 or by email
An additional point of contact for questions or concerns is Dr. Jolene Sanders Hood Institutional Review Board, and she can be contacted by e-mail (sanders@hood.edu) or telephone (301.696.3963).

Signatures
By signing this informed consent, you as the participant agree that you understand the purpose and outcomes of the interview and how the information will be used, which has been explained to you. You will be furnished with a copy of this form for your records*If NO is checked you will be excluded from the study and any future considerations of recruitment for this study.*

Please indicate if you give permission to have this session recorded. You will still be able to participate in the study if you decide you do not want the session to be recorded.

I give consent to be audio recorded (focus group and interview): _____YES ____NO

Participant Signature:_____**Date**:_____

Participant Full Name:_____ **Date**:_____

As the research interviewer, I have explained the terms described about and believe the participant understands them fully.

Researcher Signature:_____**Date**:_____

Researcher Full Name:_____ **Date:**_____

APPENDIX C. EMAIL REQUEST FOR FOLLOW-UP INFORMATION

Dear_____:

Thank you for finding the time to participate in my research study. As I begin to work with the data you provided, I have a few additional questions and clarifications I am hoping you will be able to respond to the following questions/comments.

If you prefer to meet again, I am not averse to that either. I have the following days/times available, (   ) however, I can be flexible regarding your needs.

I so appreciate your participation in this study, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Respectfully,

Ebony-Nicole Kelly
Doctoral Candidate
Hood College, Frederick Maryland

APPENDIX D. HOOD COLLEGE IRB APPROVAL LETTER

HOOD COLLEGE

Jan. 28, 2022

Ebony-Nicole Kelly
401 Rosemont Ave.
Frederick, MD 21701

Dear Ms. Kelly,

The Hood College Institutional Review Board has approved your revised research proposal for the study entitled, "Leading for educational equity and change: assistant principals' perceptions of their beliefs and actions" (Proposal # 2122-18). Thank you for clearly identifying the requested points for clarification. It was suggested that you can include your consent form as first page on the online interview schedule rather than have a back-and-forth procedure (you state sending a consent form within two days of participants agreeing to participate). Apologies for the confusion or unnecessary oversight. Recruitment process itself was not clear initially and you may have "over corrected" to meet our recommendations.

If there should be substantial changes to your data collection methodology, the proposal would have to be reviewed by the IRB as a new proposal. All individuals engaged in human subjects research are responsible for compliance with all applicable Hood Research Policies: https://www.hood.edu/sites/default/files/Hood%20IRB%20Policy%20revised%20September%202013.pdf. The Lead Researcher of the study is ultimately responsible for assuring all study team members review and adhere to applicable policies for the conduct of human sciences research.

The Hood College IRB approval (or exempt status) expiration date is Jan. 28, 2023. As a courtesy, approximately 30-60 days prior to expiration of this approval, it is your responsibility to apply for continuing review and receive continuing approval or (exempt status) for the duration of the study as applicable. Lapses in approval should be avoided to protect the safety and welfare of enrolled participants. No substantive changes are to be made to the approved protocol or the approved consent forms without the prior review and approval of the Hood IRB. All substantive changes (e.g. change in procedure, number of subjects, personnel, study locations, study instruments, etc.) must be prospectively reviewed and approved by the IRB before they are implemented.

All research must comply with the Hood College Promise of Fall Plan regarding COVID-19 precautions and any modifications to this plan per the Spring 2022 semester.

Sincerely,

Jolene M. Sanders

Jolene M. Sanders, Ph.D.
Chair, Hood College Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX E. LEADING FOR EDUCATIONAL EQUITY SURVEY

Survey Questions- Leading for educational equity: Assistant principals' perceptions of their beliefs and actions.

Open ended questions:

1.) What does leading for educational equity mean to you? What does it look like? What does it sound like?

2.) Curtis Linton (2019) argues, "Defining equity need not be complex and convoluted. True educational equity will impact who we are, what we do, and how we do it in a practical ground-level way so that real success can happen for all student-scholars, no matter who they are or where they come from." **React to this quote.**

   -

3.) What do you perceive are your top three priorities as an assistant principal who leads for educational equity?

   A.
   B.
   C.

Likert Scale Questions:

4.) How many years have you been an assistant principal either at your current school or at another campus?

   0-2
   3-5
   6-10
   11 or more

5.) The equity initiative unit offers 28 equity trainings. How many have you completed?

   0-2
   3-5
   6-10
   11 or more

6.) React to this statement: *Educational equity is dependent on effective school leadership* (Linton, 2011).

Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

7.) React to this statement: During the COVID-19 school operations, I was able to bring equity to (*fairness, opportunity, and achievement for all student-scholars, the definition used for this study*) the table in most aspects of my work to the best extent possible while in the virtual setting.

Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
N/A

8.) As a percentage of total school improvement efforts, how much time and resources are spent in building an effective learning culture where student-scholars and teachers alike are in a safe learning environment, collaboration is supported, and effort is spent developing competency wherein the educators learn about the culture of themselves and their student-scholars?

Culture time: _____% Culture resources: _____%
(taken from Linton's Equity 101, The Equity Framework)

9.) Would you like to participate in a one-on-one interview?

A. Yes, please contact me with further information. Here is my email address:____

B. Maybe. I would like to learn more information before deciding. Please contact me with further information. Here is my email address:_____

C. No thank you.

APPENDIX F. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Leading for educational equity: Assistant principals' perceptions of their beliefs and actions.

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this study centered on assistant principals' perceptions of their beliefs and actions in leading for educational equity. This qualitative study seeks to examine the assistant principals' perceptions of their beliefs and actions in leading for educational equity. This interview is part of my dissertation research in the Doctorate of Organizational Leadership Program at Hood College. This interview will last approximately 1 hour and will focus on your experiences as an assistant principal leading for educational equity. You will be asked questions regarding your role as an AP that elevates your beliefs and actions in leading for educational equity. You will also have the opportunity to reflect, elaborate and share on a topic I may have asked you about. Lastly, you will be able to expand on the equity artifact you have.

Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by storing data in a secure location, i.e., researcher's password protected computer. In addition, your name will not be identified or linked to the data at any time unless you give your express consent to reveal these identities. Only the principal researcher will have access to the participants' names. Your responses will not be used in any performance evaluative manner.

Additionally, if you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, please contact me, Ebony-Nicole Kelly (Principal Investigator), by telephone (202.255.3852), or e-mail (Ebony-Nicole_Kelly@mcpsmd.org). If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research related-injury, please contact the Institutional Review Board Office at Hood College, by e-mail (irb@hood) or telephone (301.696.3963). This research has been reviewed according to Hood College, Frederick, MD IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

Do you agree to participate? {If yes, continue. If no, stop.}

Again, the interview will last between approximately 1 hour, and I would like to ask your permission to record this interview for accuracy. The recording will only be available to me, and your identity will be kept confidential. Your identity will not be revealed in any report. Instead, a pseudonym of your choice will be used in any references that are made to you. If your words are included in the results section, any identifying information will be removed.

Do you agree for me to record this interview? {If yes, then turn on the zoom recorder. If no, do not record the interview.}

Interview Questions

1) What does leading for educational equity mean to you? What does it look like? What does it sound like?

2) What district level equity professional development trainings have you taken? Is there other equity learning, engagement opportunities you feel have benefited you outside of the district equity offerings?

3) From your perspective, what is the school's shared vision, and understanding around equity? Is it explicit or implicit?

4) How often, if at all, do you engage in purposed conversations around educational equity?

5) How do you intentionally create access and opportunity so that every student-scholar and adult is engaged in rigorous, relevant instruction and professional learning?

6) Describe your views on assistant principals leading for educational equity? What professional development/learning or experiences shape your view?

7) From your viewpoint, how does your campus create conditions for equitable workspaces? Give an example of a time when it occurred.

8) Describe experiences in the workplace where you have either felt or created the conditions for others to feel valued, hopeful and supported.

9) What do you perceive as your top three priorities as an assistant principal who leads for educational equity?

10) What is your equity artifact? Please share why you selected this artifact as being reflective of your equity leadership.

11.) *Self- Anchoring Scale Activity: We will now participate in a self-anchoring exercise.*
   - What are some phrases or words that come to mind describing the beliefs and actions of an ideal assistant principal leading for educational equity? Anything else?
   - What are some phrases or words that come to mind describing the beliefs and actions of an assistant principal who is not leading for educational equity? Anything else?
   - Think about the work of educational equity, then indicate at which step of this ladder would you see yourself today? Where were you on this ladder three years ago? What do you believe caused the change? Where do you see yourself on this ladder five years from now?
   - Can you share why your numbers (stayed the same or were different for "now" versus three years ago?

- Can you share why your numbers (stayed the same or were different for "now" versus in the next five years?

12.) Please react: Given the unpresented shift from in-person, traditional learning to remote, virtual learning due to the COVD-19 pandemic, how do you perceive your actions and beliefs in leading for educational equity?

13.) What has the COVID-19 pandemic revealed to you about your beliefs and actions that you are currently using to help you with the re-opening of schools?

14.) How do you administer equitable disciplinary consequences to scholars when they are sent to the office that still provides them with fairness and access to educational opportunities on campus?

15.) These are all of my questions. Is there anything else you would like to add? Is there anything that we have discussed about which you would like to elaborate? Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you for your time.

Adapted from: Kilpatrick, F. P., & Cantril, H. (1960). Self-anchoring scaling: A measure of individuals' unique reality worlds. *Journal of Individual Psychology, 16*, 158-173.

APPENDIX G. SELF-ANCHORING SCALE: SCALE AND RESPONSE EXAMPLE

1.   SCALE

	Present (now)	Past (three years ago)	Future (three years from now
10 Most Ideal			
5 somewhere in the middle			
0 Not Ideal Less than Optimal Less than Ideal **(worst possible)**			
	Present (now)	**Past (three years ago)**	**Future (three years from now**
	8-but I am always critical of myself.	*5*	*9-always seeking to improve, don't believe I can ever reach. At 10 I believe-the learning stops and I need to leave the profession*

- What are some phrases or words that come to mind describing the beliefs and actions of **an ideal** assistant principal leading for educational equity? Anything else?

Beliefs-creating safe spaces, live in their core values, dig into the work. Believes in the importance of building relations with students, staff and community, believes in hiring diverse populations, every child can learn when given the right opportunities to be successful, access to grade level curriculum, what we have is all we need
Actions-provides feedback, opportunity challenge, constantly learning, having an unwavering commitment to learning about race, and cultural competency, asking question, challenging the status quo, creating schedules that build trust, leading by example, modeling,

- What are some phrases or words that come to mind describing the beliefs and actions of an assistant principal who is **not leading** for educational equity? Anything else? **(worst possible)**

Opportunist in beliefs and actions
Complacency
Do not know the importance of relationship
Supports the status quo
Consistently blaming external factor for students not being able to reach goals
Feel they do not have enough: money, good teachers, parent involvement, do not put forth the same effort they ask students and families

- Think about the work of educational equity, then indicate at which step of this ladder would you see yourself **now?** Where were you on this ladder **three years ago**? Where do you see yourself on this ladder **three years from now**?
- Can you share why your numbers (stayed the same or were different for "now" versus three years ago? What do you believe caused the change?
- Can you share why your numbers (stayed the same or were different for "now" and "future" versus in the next three years?

Additional info: Distinct PD helped, equity offerings, working in Title 1 and Focus schools, school leader rep.

2. Survey Sample Response

	B	What does it mean to you? Definitions Include:			
2. What does leading for educational equity mean to you? What does it look like? What does it sound like?					
It means recognizing that some students require more or different supports to achieve success and continually considering how I am serving all students well in the following: Teacher observation process Managing students and handling concerns Analyzing data with department and teams Parent meetings and conferences Parent engagement Professional Development with SLT and staff Assisting with hiring and staffing Coaching staff in instructional practices/approaches to teaching Examining/Interrogating curriculum materials & text		Supports & Resources 57%	Staff PD/Coaching 50%	Examining Curriculum 29%	Parent Engagement 59%
Leading for educational equity looks like people from every background are working together to tackle educational challenges. This meeting of the minds is done with the, "We are all in this together" spirit. It sounds like many ideas and opinions are discussed and pondered and eventually everyone agreeing on doing what is in the best interest of all children.		Relationships 60%	Access 25%	Interrupting Racism/Anti-Racism 44%	Examining Decisions & Processes 14%
Every student has access to grade-level, engaging, affirming, meaningful instruction, every day					
Ensuring a match between resources, staff and students. The neediest students should get the strongest instruction.					

Key Words ▾ | **Leading Educational Equity** ▾ | Respond to Quote ▾ | Top 3 Priorities ▾ | Q7 ▾ | Q8

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APPENDIX H. SAMPLE ZOOM INTERVIEW CODING RESPONSES

Analyzing Zoom Interview Codes: 1st Pass

1. Staffing/hiring for excellence
2. Building relationships
3. Mirrors/ Reflections/Representation
4. Scheduling
5. Hiring for excellence
6. Equity tools/interviews for excellence
7. Courageous conversations
8. Explicit
9. Implicit
10. Professional development
11. All students succeed, teachers have equity tools
12. Unique educational journey
13. Helping parents/community
14. Transparency
15. Helping the community understand the educational process/systems
16. Frequent and informative communication
17. Facilitating a space where people, regardless of how they self identify feel safe
18. Feeling valued, heard, safe
19. Being at the table to have our voice heard, issues/concerns lifted
20. Global citizenry
21. Students, learn and that we help them to be global citizens, and I would say our equity is very explicit.
22. Book studies
23. Intentional questioning
24. Lifelong learning
25. Equitable structures,
26. Teacher schedules
27. Being visible/present
28. Frequency, rolling PD around equity
29. Attending Monthly PDs
30. Classroom Observations
31. Establishing trust
32. Writing handwritten personal notes
33. Connecting with families
34. Equitable teaching and learning
35. Eliminating bias
36. Shift in learning the technology

Professional Development Schedule

Learning Progression

EML focused professional development will initiate whole school (macro) professional development sessions during the school day. Each session will have an immediate takeaway to implement. Topics will help staff better understand the profile of an EML student and connect to our equity work of Culturally Responsive practices. The book *Unlocking English Learners Potential* will be used to guide our work.

The cohort sessions (micro) will further deepen staff learning, prompt reflection on the effectiveness of implemented strategies, and prompt collaboration among cohort members. These sessions will meet after school on the third Thursday of each month.

Staff Participation

Cohort participation is voluntary. However, staff with an advanced professional degree are eligible to use their cohort participation as a recertification activity by registering for our EML cohort PDO course.

During our pre-service presentation to staff, the rationale and program logistics were shared.

● Required Reading using the Unlocking English Learners' Potential. (1 chapter per month)
● One required meeting per month
● Evidence of learning in your planning and observations
● Approximately 7 hours per month
● Total of 56 hours for recertification credits
● Option to take ELL Praxis upon completion
○ MCPS Reimbursement available

Implementation
Our introduction to EML professional development was presented at the October 11th staff meeting. The objective of the meeting was for staff to examine who their EML student are and what they can do in the classroom. Utilizing the Can Do descriptors and characteristics of multilingual learners, staff

listened and read student samples to determine each students' level in writing and speaking. Staff was then tasked with completing their own Can Do form (sample) for their students and were encouraged to discuss the needs of multilingual learners as they reviewed curriculum with their PLC. Content Specialist dedicated time in department meetings to developing the Can Do forms and facilitating discussions around supporting EML students within their content.

The staff meeting set the framework for our first EML cohort session. The seventeen participants reflected on cultural expectations and how they impact our EML students' experiences in the classroom, then introduced the four guidelines identified in *Unlocking English Learner's Potential* to be a culturally responsive teacher for language learners. Using the guidelines listed below, cohort members set goals to incorporate each guideline into their instruction.

Guideline 1: Culturally Responsive Teaching is Assets based as opposed to deficit based
Guideline 2: Culturally Responsive Teaching Places Students at the center of learning
Guideline 3: Culturally responsive teaching values students' languages, cultures and backgrounds
Guideline 4: Culturally Responsive Teaching simultaneously challenges and supports students.

The second cohort session began with staff sharing their EML teaching goal which were based on the guidelines presented at the previous meeting. Cohort members engaged in a jigsaw sharing their learning of the reading focused on scaffolding instruction. Examples of the different types of scaffolds were presented and staff was then given the opportunity to begin planning how they will implement scaffolding tools in their lessons. By the end of the session, three teachers had defined plan of implementation.

Equity and Mindset Interview Questions

What are you looking for in a candidate for hire? Please consider adding some of these growth mind-set thinking questions to your interview for hire questions.

Things to consider when hiring:
- Capacity and/or approach to relationship building
- Belief in all students' potential "All Means All"
- Commitment to meeting the needs of **all** children
- Behavior Management/Classroom Management practices
- Responsiveness to feedback

Interview Questions   Scenario-based, open-ended questions

1. Think back to a time you heard someone say, "These kids can't _____." Fill in the blank. How did you respond? How do you wish you had responded?

2. At your last three team meetings, your colleague has brought up a different black, male student as a student of concern. How do you respond to her requests for support and action from the Behavior Team?

3. When you redirect a student in class, she responds by cursing at you and flipping over her chair. How do you respond?

4. How has your own race and class privilege contributed to your success?

5. For the third time this school year, one of your students has threatened harm towards another student in your classroom. What are your first three next steps?

Multilingual Cohort Schedule

6th grade			
PERIOD/COHORT			
Pd1	TECH (Y.Edwards) Room: 2014	ENGLISH (Douglas) Room: 2005	MATH (Fanelli) Room: 2009
Pd2	ENGLISH (Douglas) Room: 2005	MATH (Fanelli) Room: 2009	TECH (Y.Edwards) Room: 2014
Pd3	MATH (Fanelli) Room: 2009	TECH (Y.Edwards) Room: 2014	ENGLISH (Douglas) Room: 2005

7th grade			
PERIOD/COHORT			
Pd1	TECH (Fauntroy) Room: 2015	ENGLISH (Rosero) Room: 2006	MATH (Orr) Room: 2011
Pd2	ENGLISH (Rosero) Room: 2006	MATH (Orr) Room: 2011	TECH (Fauntroy) Room: 2015
Pd3	MATH (Orr) Room: 2011	TECH (Fauntroy) Room: 2015	ENGLISH (Rosero) Room: 2006

8th grade			
PERIOD/COHORT			
Pd1	TECH (Melvin) Room: 2017	ENGLISH (ADB) Room: 2008	MATH (RJ) Room: 2012
Pd2	ENGLISH (ADB) Room: 2008	MATH (RJ) Room: 2012	TECH (Melvin) Room: 2017
Pd3	MATH (RJ) Room: 2012	TECH (Melvin) Room: 2017	ENGLISH (ADB) Room: 2008

Middle School

Black Males Focus Group Meeting

Time: 9:00 - 10:30 am
Location: Media Center

By the end of the meeting, we will have:
- Discussed the academic program ██████
- Discussed the challenges
- Discussed possible solutions
- Review the requirements for the AOL grant
- Plan events with dates
- Clarified any question

Agenda

Topic	Facilitator(s)	Process	Time
Welcome and Introductions		Discuss	9:10–9:15
Academic Program Relationships, Relevance and Rigor		Present	9:15-9:25
Challenges: Grades / MSA's Homework Effort Attendance/Tardies Parent involvement		Present Discuss	9:25-9:35
Solutions	All	Discuss	9:35 - 9:55
AOL Grant	All	Discuss Plan	9:55-10:15
Concerns/Questions Date for next meeting	All	Discuss	10:15-10:30