

*WHEN THEY SEE US: A CASE STUDY EXPLORING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE  
SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN A MIDWESTERN SUBURBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL*

Garrett M. Carter

Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in the School of Education,  
Indiana University  
June 2020

Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Doctoral Committee

---

Dionne Danns, Ph.D.

---

Janet Decker, J.D., Ph.D.

---

Jessica Lester, Ph.D.

---

Sylvia Martinez, Ph.D.

May 14, 2020

Copyright © 2020  
Garrett M. Carter

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Beverly Carter, whose encouragement, belief, and unconditional support helped me to complete my Ph.D. Her career as an educator also inspired my own journey in this field. I can recall numerous instances as a child and being out and about with my mom in malls and grocery stores when, all of a sudden, one of her former or current students would spot her from a distance and come running to her filled with excitement and joy. I learned then—some 30 years ago—just how important, special, and life-changing the best educators can be, and I have strived to be the best in my work as well. I am eternally grateful to my mother for all that she has done and continues to do for me. God clearly knew what He was doing in pairing us as mother and son. Thank you, Mom, and I love you.

## **Acknowledgements**

I offer God my highest praise as His word has encouraged and reminded me that I can do all things in Him who strengthens me. While the dissertation journey was ultimately rewarding, it was also intellectually and emotionally exhausting at times. Throughout this journey, I turned to prayer, words of affirmation, and scripture in order to carry me through. I am thankful to God for His presence and also for placing the right people in my life. To God be the glory.

Thanks to my parents, siblings, niece, and other family members for their love, prayers, encouragement, and support throughout this entire process. My mother is truly the one who encouraged me to pursue a Ph.D., and I am grateful for her belief in me. Gratitude to my family extends to loved ones who are no longer here as the fond memories of them have remained with me along the way. Thanks also to B.N.D. who arrived in my life at just the right time. I also thank my friends, near and far, who have supported me in this journey by offering reassurance, prayers, and support over the years. This includes L.I.F.T. members who are my bible study family, and also my church family at Mt. Enon.

I am grateful to my wonderful committee chaired by Dr. Dionne Danns. Her encouragement, guidance, and support were instrumental in me completing this work. Additionally, I thank Dr. Janet Decker, Dr. Jessica Lester, and Dr. Sylvia Martinez for their roles in serving as committee members. I had the opportunity to take classes with each of these faculty members and can truly say they are outstanding and caring educators. I would also like to thank the numerous teachers from both K-12 and higher education who have helped to shape who I am today. Teachers change lives and, in my own teaching, I have strived to personally invest in my students because of the investments that others made in me.

I am thankful to all of my former students for both inspiring and teaching me over the years. Seeing them learn and grow motivated me to do the same. During the more trying times of this journey, I sometimes thought about my students and how my completion of this degree might encourage them to challenge themselves in some new way. Representation also matters and I hope that seeing another Black male with a Ph.D. will encourage others whom I have yet to encounter that we, too, can do this.

Last, but not least, I am sincerely grateful to the participants of this study for allowing me to interview and learn from them. This study would not have been possible without their participation and the insights that I gained proved invaluable. School leaders wear many hats, so I appreciate their time, and I admire the work they do on a daily basis.

Garrett M. Carter

*WHEN THEY SEE US: A CASE STUDY EXPLORING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE  
SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN A MIDWESTERN SUBURBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL*

As suburban school leaders experience more diverse student populations, some have enacted Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) to improve the experiences of underrepresented students. The four CRSL strands include: (1) Critical Self-Awareness, (2) Culturally Responsive Curricula and Teacher Preparation, (3) Culturally Responsive and Inclusive School Environments, and (4) Engaging Students and Parents in Community Contexts.

The purpose of this case study was to explore how suburban school leaders at McKinley Middle School (MMS) enacted CRSL in their efforts to improve Black student experiences, along with the opportunities and challenges that these leaders encountered. At MMS, the student population was White-majority and one-fifth African American. In this study, school leaders were defined as both administrators and teacher leaders. In total, the sample included 16 participants. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and artifacts.

Findings of this study revealed that participation in professional development through the Equity for Student Success Program (ESSP) provided school leaders with the opportunity to enact CRSL efforts related to three of the four strands. While this informed the creation of some entirely new initiatives, other efforts were embedded within existing practices. Another key finding showed that while ESSP efforts addressed one aspect of Black student needs, socioeconomic status emerged as another identity for some students. By expanding school leaders to include teacher leaders, one finding revealed the need for school leaders to better define the teacher leader role and the purpose of leadership teams.

This study’s findings have implications for school leaders, researchers, and policymakers. First, if CRSL were to become inclusive of other student identities, this might provide school leaders with ways to increase their responsiveness. Expanding CRSL literature to include the role of teacher leaders may also provide insights on how to better utilize them in more transformational ways. A final implication of this study related to the calculation of school report card grades. Currently, school leaders are held accountable based primarily on student performance data; however, policymakers should consider ways to assess school leaders in their efforts to become more culturally responsive which may not be measurable by student test scores. Future researchers should study other sites enacting CRSL through ESSP efforts and this should include schools with various demographic compositions.

---

Dionne Danns, Ph.D.

---

Janet Decker, J.D., Ph.D.

---

Jessica Lester, Ph.D.

---

Sylvia Martinez, Ph.D.



## Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Performance Gaps and Equity Issues.....	3
School Leaders.....	6
Purpose of this Study.....	8
Theoretical Framework.....	10
Significance of this Study.....	11
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review</b> .....	<b>15</b>
Historical Context.....	17
Policy Context.....	26
Theoretical Framework.....	35
CRSL Strand 1.....	39
CRSL Strand 2.....	44
CRSL Strand 3.....	50
CRSL Strand 4.....	56
Summary.....	66
<b>Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Methods</b> .....	<b>68</b>
Research Setting.....	68
Research Participants.....	72
Positionality.....	74
Data Collection.....	78
Data Analysis.....	83
Limitations.....	88
<b>Chapter 4: Findings</b> .....	<b>90</b>
Theme 1: Centrality of Student Data & Decision-Making.....	92
Theme 2: Strategic Academic Support Programs & Interventions.....	97
Theme 3: Embedding Cultural Responsiveness within Curricular Practices.....	102
Theme 4: Developing Cultural Awareness & Change of Practices.....	109
Theme 5: Intentionality in Building Meaningful Student Relationships.....	117
Theme 6: Considering Students' Home Lives and Parental Support.....	123
Summary.....	129

<b>Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion.....</b>	<b>131</b>
CRSL Strand 1 .....	132
CRSL Strand 2.....	136
CRSL Strand 3.....	140
CRSL Strand 4.....	144
Conclusion.....	147
Implications.....	151
Future Research.....	154
Final Thoughts.....	155
<b>References.....</b>	<b>157</b>
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>172</b>
Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval.....	172
Appendix B: Informed Consent .....	174
Appendix C: Interview Protocols.....	176
Appendix D: Observation Protocol.....	186
Appendix E: Documentation Protocol.....	187
Appendix F: ESSP Artifacts.....	188
Appendix G: Code Mapping and Cycles of Data Analysis.....	194
<b>Curriculum Vitae</b>	

**List of Tables**

Table 1: MMS Student Demographics from 2004-2019.....70  
Table 2: MMS School Leader Participant Profiles.....73  
Table 3: Data Collection Question Mapping.....83  
Table 4: CRSL Efforts and Thematic Relevancy.....132

**List of Figures**

Figure 1: CRSL Framework.....39  
Figure 2. Thematic Map.....92

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

As an African American male who was raised in a Midwestern suburb, unsurprisingly, most of my formal education experiences have occurred in White-majority spaces. This was also the case for my first full-time work experience when I returned to my hometown as a teacher. However, by this time, the still predominantly White district was experiencing a growing number of Black students. Year after year, as I sat in meetings and reviewed school data showing the disparities between White and Black students in both achievement and discipline, I became increasingly frustrated but also curious as to why this occurred. My students often outperformed others in the state and this was especially true for my Black students who usually exceeded expected growth; in fact, I was asked to serve as a participant in a principal's dissertation study of effective teachers due to my students' high performance. Throughout my time teaching, I also prided myself on forming strong student-teacher relationships with all of my students, yet, I often found that some of my Black students connected with me and the only other Black teacher at the school in a way that was different than they did with their White teachers. There were countless instances when my White colleagues mentioned Black students who were skipping homework assignments and behaving poorly for them while these same students were some of my best and brightest. As the meetings highlighting disparities among White and Black students continued, it was apparent that aspects of the school environment were not working equitably for all students.

I will never forget the afternoon when I was leaving school after a day of teaching and saw approximately 30 Black students lined up outside of the closed library doors. I remember questioning if I had missed something. *Was there a new Black student organization that I was unaware of?* I approached the end of the line and asked a group of the students what they were

waiting for and they responded, “Wednesday School Detention.” I could not comprehend what I had just heard. Thirty Black students—and no White students—were there because they were in trouble. Still unsure, I asked, “All of you?” and they confirmed that I had in fact heard correctly. *Why had this happened and why was this seemingly okay?* After all, I saw no other staff members looking baffled or asking questions about the scene. The next morning, after a sleepless night, I had an impromptu meeting with the building principal and shared my concerns. What I had witnessed was unacceptable, and I immediately called for the creation of a diversity task force to investigate achievement and discipline gaps between White and Black students at the school. We formed a team, and began meeting in order to determine what was going on and why. While I was unable to complete this work as I soon left the school to pursue my Ph.D., this showed me the important role that teachers as leaders can have in working with administrators to improve the school environment. In hindsight, this experience was a life-changing moment and one that ultimately influenced my dissertation research interests.

My teaching experiences in a diverse suburban middle school highlight the issues, opportunities, and challenges that can occur as minority student enrollment increases and previous practices no longer meet the needs of students being served; such ideas are discussed in recent scholarly work (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016; Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Welton, Diem, & Holme, 2013; Wepner & Gómez, 2017). Unlike private schools, public schools cannot choose their students and principals are ultimately responsible for the performance of all students in their building. Further, principals are tasked with developing and preparing their teachers to be effective with students from a variety of backgrounds. In their efforts to achieve building goals and reach all teachers in their building, principals often rely on their teacher leaders, comprised of team leaders and department chairs, to assist them in school improvement efforts. In schools

experiencing increased student diversity, it is necessary for school leaders to evaluate and make changes to their own practices in order to meet the needs of their new student populations (Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Wepner & Gómez, 2017). Such actions are particularly important in suburban schools that now serve an increasing number of students of color with trends expected to continue (Chapman, 2014; Geiger, 2017; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; Wepner & Gómez, 2017). Next, I explore performance gaps and equity issues found in schools, particularly among Black students including those attending suburban schools. In doing so, I also explore the role that school leaders play in narrowing or contributing to such inequities. Essentially, the background context section builds the case for this work in advance of presenting this study's purpose, theoretical framework, and significance.

## **Background Context**

### **Performance Gaps and Equity Issues**

As students of color transition to suburban schools, a number of issues may arise because demographic shifts have an impact on teaching, learning, and achievement (Kaplan & Owings, 2013). Further, changing student populations present social, educational, and administrative challenges (Wepner & Gómez, 2017, p. xv). Thus, as suburban school leaders experience increased student diversity, their leadership practices and approaches must change by becoming more culturally responsive (Khalifa et al., 2016; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). Diamond (2006) examined the racial terrain that African American students in White-majority suburban schools must navigate, placing them at a disadvantage in three primary ways:

- (a) structurally by having limited access to valued resources outside of schools, (b) institutionally by being positioned systematically in the least advantaged locations for learning inside schools, and (c) ideologically by having their intellectual capacity

questioned and their cultural styles devalued both within schools and in the broader social discourse. These disadvantages are key ingredients that contribute to racial achievement disparities generally, and, particularly, within suburban contexts. (p. 496)

While families of color may move to the suburbs to improve their children's educational outcome, Diamond's study shows that these students face many obstacles which may negatively impact their performance and experience. Further, Chapman (2014) found that educators in diverse schools may exhibit, "imbalanced approaches to subjective grading, student recommendations, and parent relationships, which can create an underrepresentation of students of color in advanced classes" (p. 314). The way that school leaders manage and navigate new student enrollment impacts the quality and effectiveness of instruction and whether students feel a sense of inclusiveness in their schooling (Turner, 2015). Some schools acknowledge race on a surface level but, due to colorblind and colormute conversations and policies, they have inadequate responses to changing student populations and fail to provide an equitable education for all students (Turner, 2015; Welton et al., 2013). Together, this shows that school leaders should accept ownership relating to their role in performance gaps and disparities instead of pointing the finger at marginalized students who often receive the blame.

While academic performance has improved for both White and Black students since the 1990s, achievement gaps in reading and math continue to persist (Vanneman, Hamilton, Anderson, & Rahman, 2009). White students in suburban schools receive higher grades, test scores, and complete college at higher rates than their African American peers (Diamond, 2006). The most recent National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data showed that White and Black eighth grade students remain 25 points apart in reading achievement levels and 30 points apart in math and these gaps have persisted for nearly 25 years (National Center for Education

Statistics, 2019). Similar gaps are seen among Hispanic students as well. Importantly, such gaps may be partially attributed to an education system that is not equitable or culturally responsive to the needs of minority students (Gay, 2002; Khalifa et al., 2016). Indeed, students of color often feel a lower level of connectedness in school environments that are White-majority which could present not only academic problems but also behavioral problems as evidenced by disparities in discipline (Chapman, 2014; Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004).

While achievement gaps are often discussed in terms of race, shifting student demographics are changing the conversation as students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are no longer confined to inner city areas (Anyon, 2005). Similarly, Wepner and Gómez (2017) argued, “[White] suburban schools can no longer “succeed” just by doing better than schools with less-advantaged populations, since they now often serve those same students themselves” (p. x). Growing diversity in suburban schools means that the performance of minority students and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds is increasingly difficult for school leaders in White-majority schools to ignore, especially due to increased state and federal accountability pressures (Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Wepner & Gómez, 2017). Thus, problems do not simply end when students of color move to White-majority suburban schools; instead, the problems change forms. Without school leaders in place willing to become more culturally responsive and equitable in their practices, it is often students of color left navigating the new terrain (Diamond, 2006). This can present challenges for suburban school leaders because new students may come to them from schools that performed poorly, lacked technology, and had undemanding pedagogy and unchallenging content (Anyon, 2005, p. 95), which is likely to differ from their new school environment. However, this can also present school leaders with opportunities to further develop and enhance their own practices by utilizing more culturally responsive strategies that better



meet the needs of underrepresented students. As such, the school leader role in relation to student achievement is explored next.

### **School Leaders**

School leader responsiveness to student needs can have a significant impact on student performance and school leaders play an important role as they make curricula, programming, policy, and other decisions that impact students and staff (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Khalifa et al., 2016). School leaders may include any number of individuals and be defined in a number of ways; however, I am interested in those who hold formal leadership titles at the middle school level. As such, school leaders consist of both administrators and teacher leaders. Building-level leaders such as assistant principals and principals are often best positioned to be knowledgeable of and involved in school reform efforts and they play an important role in working with teacher leaders (Khalifa et al., 2016; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Rottier, 2000). Administrators are recognized as a school's top leaders and are granted the most authority at the building level when it comes to district and state policy; however, they are also held most accountable when it comes to a school's performance (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1274). Not only are principals tasked with evaluating individual teacher performance, they are also expected to design effective leadership teams and monitor and support teachers in improving their performance (Rottier, 2000).

Teacher leaders are those with formalized leadership roles in the school including team leaders and department chairs. Team leaders meet daily with their colleagues whom they share students with in order to take care of housekeeping tasks, set goals, and discuss students' social, learning, and behavioral problems and needs (Rottier, 2000, p. 215). Department chairs are subject area experts who support teaching and learning by leading their peers in best practices (Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007). With their formal and unique position in the department, they are

responsible for teaching and also resource management, managerial tasks, and leading their colleagues (DeAngelis, 2013). In more recent times, department chairs focus on accountability in teacher quality, student learning, and building planning in order to achieve school goals (DeAngelis, 2013, p. 109). With increased pressures from high-stakes testing and accountability, department chairs have an increasingly important role in school improvement efforts (Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007) as do team leaders who play a significant role in team performance (Rottier, 2000). Together, team leaders and department chairs are teacher leaders who reach other teachers in all areas of the building making them important school leaders. While the teacher leader role has traditionally been examined in terms of distributive leadership, scholars argue that, like principals, teacher leaders often exhibit behaviors of transformational leaders and play an important role in improving the school environment (Alger, 2008; Anderson, 2008; Pounder, 2006).

Thus administrators and teacher leaders—as school leaders—are powerful influencers whose actions and decisions can significantly impact student experiences as their beliefs, decisions, and actions impact the school environment. For example, curricula decisions shape discussions in classrooms and discipline policies define acceptable and unacceptable student behaviors. Further, educators’ deficit-level thinking can result in students of color being placed in lower academic tracks even when they achieve high test scores (Chapman, 2014; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Welton, 2013). Classroom discussions, discipline, and course placement are just a few ways that speak to the wide-ranging impact that school leaders have on shaping student experiences within the school environment. When a school’s population is experiencing increased racial and socioeconomic student diversity, its culture may also change and this can influence school practices (Claro, Nussbaum, Lopez, & Contardo, 2017). How

suburban school leaders respond—or not—to increased student diversity may significantly impact the experience that these students have for better or worse. For these reasons, the actions of suburban school leaders play a crucial role relating to this study’s purpose, which is discussed next.

### **Purpose of this Study**

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore how suburban school leaders enacted Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) in efforts to improve Black student experiences. This study also seeks to learn about the opportunities and challenges that school leaders face in promoting their CRSL efforts. Learning more about the strategies that school leaders utilize in efforts to become more culturally responsive to improve Black student experiences is particularly important in suburban schools, which are becoming more diverse but not significantly narrowing disparities in achievement and discipline (Geiger, 2017; Kaplan & Owings, 2013; Wepner & Gómez, 2017). As CRSL has traditionally been examined in urban school settings, this study contributes to the literature by providing insights as to how CRSL efforts look in suburban schools. Additionally, by expanding school leaders to include not only principals but also teacher leaders, this study builds upon work by Khalifa et al. (2016) who acknowledged the important role and impact that teacher leaders may have in CRSL, but maintained their focus on the actions of school principals. Guiding this study are the following research questions:

**RQ1:** How, if at all, do suburban school leaders promote CRSL in their efforts to improve Black student experiences?

**RQ2:** What opportunities and challenges, if any, do suburban school leaders encounter as they promote CRSL?

With an increasing number of suburban schools across the country serving more minority students or projected to in the near future, this study provides insights as to the culturally responsive actions these school leaders take to better respond to marginalized populations. I conducted my research at McKinley Middle School (MMS), pseudonym, which is located in a Midwestern suburban city undergoing significant demographic change. Selecting MMS as a research site was a convenience sample, however, this school was ideal for this study for multiple reasons. Over the past 15 years, MMS has and continues to experience an increasing Black student population, a decreasing White student population, and an increasing number of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. In efforts to become more culturally responsive, MMS school leaders participated in a newly developed professional development initiative called the Equity for Student Success Program (ESSP), pseudonym, in hopes to better address Black student needs and improve their experiences. School leaders' participation in ESSP was their strategy to promote CRSL in order to improve Black student experiences. For these reasons, MMS served as an ideal site for such research which also contributes to the literature by providing insights as to how a new professional development program in equity can impact school leaders' CRSL efforts. This case study involved interviews with 16 school leaders—a combination of team leaders, department chairs, and administrators—and it provides understanding as to how these leaders enacted CRSL efforts throughout the building. Thematic analysis of interviews, observational field notes, documents, and artifacts was employed in order to identify key themes among MMS school leaders. This study contributes to existing CRSL literature by deepening the understanding of school leaders' efforts, exploring their efforts in a suburban context, and providing insights on how participation in a new professional development initiative impacts CRSL efforts.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study is Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) as developed by Khalifa et al. (2016). Suburban school leaders experiencing increased student diversity are challenged by maintaining what works and identifying what does not as the dynamics of the student population change (Wepner & Gómez, 2017). If a school is experiencing academic excellence as determined by student performance, then it is charged with maintaining practices that work for the majority while at the same time being responsive to the needs of underrepresented students by providing them with the support that they need to succeed (Wepner & Gómez, 2017). As such, the CRSL framework is a way to study school leaders' efforts designed to be responsive to the needs of minority students. Such a framework is needed because minority student populations are increasing and leadership approaches must respond accordingly (Khalifa et al., 2016, Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). CRSL is a way to describe behaviors that, "highlight practices and actions, mannerisms, policies, and discourses that influence school climate, school structure, teacher efficacy, or student outcomes," in relation to minority students (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1274). Specifically, this study explored the four strands of CRSL, including: (1) Critical Self-Awareness, (2) Culturally Responsive Curricula and Teacher Preparation, (3) Culturally Responsive and Inclusive School Environments, and (4) Engaging Students and Parents in Community Contexts. CRSL is an aspect of transformational leadership which requires making deep, second-order changes within schools (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006), and it should also be noted that these strands complement ideas related to social justice and equity and, more significantly, work in Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) done by Ladson-Billings (1995), Gay (2002), and Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011), particularly around curricula

and inclusive school environments. All four CRSL strands and related ideas are more fully explored in the next chapter.

A CRSL framework is useful when examining school leader response to improve Black student experiences because educator perspectives, attitudes, beliefs, actions, and behaviors can impact learning outcomes and achievement gaps among students (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Gay, 2002; Khalifa et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995). When acknowledging issues of race, school leaders are better able to help students of color, and themselves, succeed (Garces & Cogburn, 2015). CRSL values these ideas and they are aspects of the framework by Khalifa et al. (2016). With schools facing accountability pressures to close achievement gaps and promote the success of all students, such a framework is appropriate for this study which explores how suburban school leaders enacted CRSL in their efforts to improve Black student experiences.

### **Significance of this Study**

Much is written around improvement efforts in urban schools, however, Lewis-McCoy (2014) and Wepner and Gómez (2017) found that less is written around suburban school leaders' efforts to respond to the needs of minority students in White-majority schools. Thus, this study fills a gap and contributes to CRSL literature by focusing on suburban school leaders' culturally responsive efforts aimed at improving Black student experiences. While numerous scholars find that school leaders have the ability to improve schools in transformational and equity-enhancing ways (Alger, 2008; Pounder, 2006; Theoharis, 2010), additional research is needed to learn more about suburban school leaders' CRSL efforts as these leaders are serving new student populations with needs they may not be used to addressing (Wepner & Gómez, 2017). Further, by including teacher leaders as school leaders, this study fills a gap in the literature by providing insights into school leaders' actions outside of those with the word *principal* in their job title.

Importantly, current works in CRSL focus on leadership at the principal level even as a number of scholars cite the importance of teacher leaders in schools (Alger, 2008; Anderson, 2008; Khalifa et al., 2016; Rottier, 2000; Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007). Thus, by exploring school leaders more broadly with the inclusion of principals and teacher leaders, this study offers a more holistic view of leadership actions within and across one suburban middle school.

This study also contributes to the literature by exploring how school leaders utilized a new professional development initiative in order to promote CRSL and improve the experiences of Black students. ESSP was a county-wide professional development program that encouraged school leaders from participating districts to enact culturally responsive practices within their schools with targeted efforts to support underrepresented students. ESSP was in its second year at MMS and second year of existence in the region. At MMS, these efforts aimed to improve Black student experiences as this was the most prevalent minority population at the school in terms of numbers. Since ESSP was in the early stages of its development, there was little research that explored how, if at all, this specific program helps school leaders to promote CRSL. It was also unknown what opportunities and challenges school leaders faced in their ESSP efforts. As such, this study contributes to the literature by filling a gap in knowledge about a new equity professional development program by generating new empirically grounded insights about the changes school leaders introduced in one suburban school.

As school assignments are typically based on one's residency (Danielsen, Fairbanks, & Zhao, 2015; Saporito & Sohoni, 2006), this study may prove significant to suburban school leaders working to improve the experiences of their growing minority populations. Given that school report cards, educator evaluations, and other school accountability measures appear to be here for the foreseeable future along with increased student diversity, this study is needed to

provide additional insights as to how school leaders process and respond to change in order to promote culturally responsive practices that ensure the environment is supportive and inclusive of those from underrepresented populations. As such, learning about school leaders' CRSL efforts could be useful in helping other districts to better plan and prepare should their schools experience a similar change in student populations.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I highlighted performance gaps and equity issues to show that school leaders need to take action to improve the experience of minority students in today's schools. I also discussed the importance of school leaders and the role and responsibility they have in making culturally responsive changes in their buildings. When school leaders promote CRSL, they may be able to identify problematic practices and narrow performance gaps and equity issues impacting underrepresented students. In exploring efforts to enact CRSL at MMS, the goal was to learn how, if at all, school leaders improved Black student experiences along with the challenges and opportunities that they faced in their efforts. This study contributes to existing literature by learning about the ways in which both administrators and teacher leaders in suburban settings promote CRSL and also how participation in a new professional development program, ESSP, may help leaders to achieve their CRSL goals.

This introduction is followed by four additional chapters. Chapter two is a literature review pertinent to the scope of this study. Chapter three describes this study's research methods and methodology, specifically the study's research design, data sources, and data collection. Chapter four presents the study's findings. Finally, chapter five provides a discussion speaking to the ways in which this study's findings are congruent—and not—to the four strands of the CRSL framework developed by Khalifa et al. (2016). Further, the conclusion offers implications that



this study has for school leaders, researchers, and policymakers, along with recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

The purpose of this study was to explore how suburban school leaders enacted Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) in efforts to improve Black student experiences. Multiple literature search techniques were utilized to locate relevant research texts. Keyword searching was utilized in academic databases (EBSCOHost, Jstor, Google Scholar, etc.) using relevant vocabulary and search terms to identify scholarly journal articles. Search terms included, but were not limited to: U.S. suburbanization, suburban school demographics, demographic changes, school accountability and minority students, African American students, culturally responsive practices, culturally responsive leadership, culturally responsive school leadership, culturally relevant pedagogy, achievement gaps, opportunity gaps, deficit thinking, school equity, teacher leaders, transformational leadership, continuous school improvement, social justice, and school reform. This included searching by subject headings and terms to locate texts of interest. Cited reference searching was used to see how other scholars were citing particular authors.

Bibliographic mining was used by reviewing references in seminal texts. Finally, browsing was used to locate potentially relevant text by sifting through search optimization recommendations based on selected texts. Next, this chapter is briefly foregrounded in literature pertaining to Black student experiences followed by an explanation of this chapter's organization.

For too many Black students in the U.S., the schooling experience has been negatively impacted due to biased, discriminatory, and inequitable school practices (Banks et al., 2001; Biegel, 1995; Bieneman, 2011; Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Diamond, 2006; Scherff & Spector, 2011; Tyson, 2011; Wade, 1980, Welton et al., 2013). Indeed, deficit-thinking has shaped some school improvement efforts that seek to “fix” Black students who are seen as

inferior due to internal deficiencies (Bieneman, 2011; Welton et al., 2013). Alternatively, when Black students excel, it is often viewed as a rarity (Scherff & Spector, 2011). Such deficit-thinking is often cited as a contributing factor in the overrepresentation of Black students in low-level and special education classes and their underrepresentation in advanced courses, which has promoted within-school segregation nationally (Chapman, 2014; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Tyson, 2011; Welton, 2013). In addition to deficit-thinking, culturally-biased curricula and even culturally-biased IQ tests have been found to negatively impact Black student experiences by creating school environments that lack inclusivity (Banks et al., 2001; Biegel, 1995; Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Wade, 1980). In light of this information, it should come as little surprise that achievement gaps between White and Black students have long been documented (Diamond, 2006; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; Vanneman et al., 2009), along with disparities in discipline (Chapman, 2014; Crosnoe et al., 2004). Scholars find that these problems exist not only in urban areas, but in suburban schools serving an increasing number of African American students (Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015; Wepner & Gómez, 2017). While these ideas and others related to Black student experiences will be discussed more in-depth, this information has been foregrounded to enhance understanding throughout the remainder of the chapter.

This chapter first provides necessary historical context in suburbanization, housing policies, and changing demographics because this is part of the CRSL story, particularly for suburban school leaders turning to CRSL because of their increased student diversity. As the site of this study was a middle school located in a suburban area undergoing demographic shifts, it is important to provide a context as to why these areas are changing especially since where one lives often dictates where one attends school (Danielsen et al., 2015; Saporito & Sohoni, 2006).

Indeed, participants from McKinley Middle School (MMS) learned aspects of this history through their Equity for Student Success Program (ESSP) professional development in order to increase their understanding as to why their student population had changed and how this required that they, too, change. America's past actions and discriminatory laws have had long lasting consequences and, blending perspectives from history, sociology, and policy, I show how these consequences are still evident today and why some suburban school leaders are embracing culturally responsive practices. Next, I present a policy context section highlighting major school reform efforts—partially needed as a result of equity issues magnified by suburban development—that have aimed to improve the quality of education for all students often through accountability measures. Many of these policies originated to address issues in urban education, however, they highlight problems that suburban schools are now beginning to experience due to changing student demographics (Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Wepner & Gómez, 2017). Finally, I discuss Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) which is the theoretical framework for this study. Indeed, one goal of this study is to fill the gap in knowledge about CRSL in suburban as opposed to urban schools. Essentially, I move from a historical overview of suburbanization to legal changes that resulted in increased neighborhood and school diversity to education policy changes aimed at improving minority student achievement which all leads to the theoretical framework. With suburban school leaders experiencing growing student diversity and increased accountability pressures, I explore their CRSL efforts to improve Black student experiences.

### **Historical Context**

It would be remiss to discuss CRSL without discussing suburbanization, housing policies, and changing demographics because school leaders experiencing increased student diversity are turning to CRSL in response to these issues. Indeed, the leaders at MMS discussed many of these

ideas in order to anchor their ESSP within a larger context. Therefore, this section offers historical context and is designed to help readers understand why today's suburban schools are experiencing increased student diversity. As discriminatory housing laws and practices were outlawed, suburban areas and schools became more accessible to minority families (Danielsen, et al. 2015; Saporito & Sohoni, 2006). In promoting CRSL, MMS school leaders participated in and presented aspects of this history to their teachers to help them understand why their student population was changing and to promote buy-in with ESSP.

### **Suburbanization, Housing, and Schools**

The suburbanization of the United States did not occur by chance but through intentional planning which had long-lasting consequences on neighborhoods and schools. Many assume that the suburbs simply developed as cities grew beyond capacity, but in his well-known book, *Crabgrass Frontier*, historian Kenneth Jackson provides a comprehensive account of how American's suburbs came to exist. Jackson (1985) defined suburbanization as, "a process involving the systematic growth of fringe areas at a pace more rapid than that of core cities" (p. 13). Other historians discussed suburban development in terms of sprawl which is low-density expansion from metropolitan areas that is often scattered (Bruegmann, 2005; Teaford, 2008). However, these historians agreed that actions and policies by the rich and powerful contributed to suburban development as their decisions made it easy for mainly middle and upper income White families to move out of cities and into new communities, but difficult, if not illegal, for people of color or those with low incomes to join (Bruegmann, 2005; Jackson, 1985; Teaford, 2008). While it is not necessary to address the full history of U.S. suburbanization for the purposes of this study, Jackson (1985) found that advances in technology and transportation, city conditions, wealth, city municipalities, and federal housing policies all shaped the development

of the nation's suburbs and, thus, its schools. Next, I briefly highlight key federal housing policies as this was the last significant aspect of suburbanization, and it was the changing of these discriminatory policies that eventually contributed to the increased diversity seen in some suburban neighborhoods and schools today.

**Federal Housing Programs.** While advances in transportation, city conditions, wealth, and city municipalities all contributed to White suburbanization—especially for the middle class and wealthy—the last and arguably greatest push toward suburban development was a result of federal housing programs (Jackson, 1985; Kimble, 2007). These programs also impacted schools which relied on taxes to operate (Gamson, McDermott, & Reed, 2015). During the Great Depression in the late 1920s and early 1930s, foreclosures reached an all-time high and middle-class families were hurting; in fact, annual U.S. home foreclosures grew from 68,000 in 1926 to 250,000 in 1932 and reached half of all mortgages by 1933 (Jackson, 1985, p. 193). As part of the Roosevelt Administration's New Deal, the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) were created to help protect homeowners against foreclosure. These loans lasted for up to 20 years allowing homeowners to have smaller monthly payments which resulted in cheaper mortgages in the suburbs compared to more expensive rent in the cities (Jackson, 1985). Thus, for those who could obtain loans, largely White middle and upper class families, it was in their financial interest to relocate to the suburbs which also meant segregated suburban schools.

In order to decide who to approve or deny for loans, HOLC created a number and color system of appraising city neighborhoods based on residents' occupation, age, income, and ethnicity, among other factors, and this ultimately impacted schools as changes in home values shaped neighborhood desirability (Jackson, 1985). The HOLC system gave rise to the term “red

lining” as almost all neighborhoods with Black residents were classified as D and red (Jackson, 1985; Massey, 2015). The D-red classification, along with the denial of loans to Black families and also White flight, resulted in more housing vacancies for African Americans in the cities further contributing to segregated cities and suburbs (Massey, 2015). Discriminatory housing actions and practices included, “segregated location and tenant assignment for subsidized housing projects; administration of housing voucher and certificate programs in ways that undermine and resegregate integrated neighborhoods; the use of zoning power to block minority housing; and discrimination in federally supervised mortgage lending” (Orfield, 1995, p. 1404). Additionally, lot size requirements and restrictions against multifamily housing kept Black families out of the suburbs (Berry, 2001; Larco, 2010). FHA also openly advised neighborhood associations to implement racially-based covenants that prevented Black occupancy in White neighborhoods (Jackson, 1985; Trifun, 2009). With Black families essentially zoned out of White neighborhoods, Black students were also zoned out of White schools as they lived outside of the geographic catchment areas serving White students (Danielsen et al., 2015; Saporito & Sohoni, 2006). Rothwell (2011) pointed out that all of these tactics were ways around the U.S. Supreme Court’s verdict in *Buchanan v. Warley* (1917) which found that zoning based on race was unconstitutional. While HOLC and FHA were described by the government as programs meant to protect homeowners, they are more accurately described as programs meant to protect White homeowners and White families seeking to become homeowners.

**Legal Challenges.** While a full history of the Civil Rights Movement is beyond the scope of this section, there were significant policy changes that occurred during this period which opened the doors to integrated neighborhoods and schools. Legally, the U.S. Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) reversed the “separate but equal” doctrine. While housing

was still largely segregated, this ruling officially opened the door to integration in America's schools as it attempted to, "redress past inequalities, promote equality of opportunity in public education, and extend equal protections of law for racial minorities who at the time were legally denied access to adequate education" (Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014, p. 385). After *Brown* opened the door to integration, this meant that historically White schools would, in theory, have to serve African American students. However, due to the resistance efforts of many districts and states, the Supreme Court provided implementation guidance in *Brown v. Board of Education II* (1955) to ensure that integration occurred "with all deliberate speed" (*Brown v. Board of Educ.*, 1954). Despite this new ruling, efforts to avoid desegregation resulted in new vouchers for White parents to enroll their children in private schools and even the closure of some school districts (Carson, 2004; Hunter, 2004).

In 1968, the Fair Housing Act banned discrimination by race in sales and rentals of homes which is important to schools because segregation in housing produces segregation in schools (Anyon, 2005; Massey, 2015). The hope among civil rights activists was that outlawing redlining would increase other desegregation efforts (Massey, 2015). While the Fair Housing Act was a starting point, it would take other legislation including the Equal Credit Opportunity Act (1974) which outlawed discrimination by race and the Community Reinvestment Act (1977) which outlawed discrimination against minority neighborhoods to more fully eliminate the practice of redlining (Massey, 2015). While these practices have now ended, problems continue today as laws are, at times, violated and legal forms of discrimination and segregation persist. For example, de facto segregation remains due to the remnants of past de jure segregation (Lewis-McCoy, 2014). In other words, despite some efforts to address past wrongs, residential preferences continue to result in neighborhood and, subsequently, school segregation today. For



example, most White families prefer to live in White-majority neighborhoods while families of color prefer more diverse spaces (Billingham & Hunt, 2016; Saporito & Sohoni, 2006). Further, legal practices such as geographic steering, which occurs when real estate agents tend to show home buyers neighborhoods that match their ethnicity, are still common (Trifun, 2009). As such, the effects of past and present racist policies may continue to impact housing patterns for decades to come and current laws are not designed to actively promote integration. The federal government's housing programs played a significant role in creating segregated neighborhoods and, thus, segregated schools contributing to societal inequities.

**Housing and School Equity.** The relationship between housing and school is not hierarchical but mutually exclusive and this has an impact on school equity (Highsmith & Erickson, 2015, p. 565). As school desegregation efforts faced resistance and the rise of the suburbs created equity issues, Black activists demanded immediate improvements in urban neighborhoods and schools (Jackson, 1985). With increased minority populations in the cities, more funds were needed for health and social services putting additional strain on schools that were losing tax dollars due to White flight (Jackson, 1985). In suburban areas, new school districts were incorporated serving those who could afford to be there: White middle and upper-income families. These communities operated well-funded districts and opened new facilities believing that first-rate public schools would prepare their children for the best colleges and perpetuate privilege to the next generation (Teaford, 2008); as a result, many school districts mirrored the housing situation where some places thrived as others experienced poor conditions. Gamson et al. (2015) explained that:

The early 1960s focus on poverty once again drew attention to the role the federal government might play in ensuring that all Americans were offered equal educational

opportunity. The decentralized nature of American education, and the reliance of schools on local property taxes for their funding, had long contributed to the disparities in education. (p. 7)

Thus, some schools had the facilities, materials, and resources that they needed in order to provide a quality education while others did not which contributed to achievement gaps, largely along lines of race and socioeconomic status. Achievement gaps between White students and students of color—particularly Black students—have long been documented; more recently however, some scholars are framing differences in academic performance as opportunity gaps (LaCour, York, Welner, Valladares, & Kelley, 2017; Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015).

Mayfield and Garrison-Wade (2015) argued that, “Unconscious racism and our lack of ability to confront it present the most salient reason for the indefatigable prevalence of inequitable opportunities for children of color which undeniably result in achievement gaps” (p. 1).

Relatedly, LaCour et al. (2017) explained that test score differences are often related to out-of-school opportunities and that millions of students underperform due to the lack of resources and opportunities at their school and also because some students—particularly those of color—are excluded from academic opportunities including certain programs and courses (p. 9). As such, disparities in academic performance can be viewed as issues of equity and social justice that are not simply about race but also class and other characteristics (Theoharis, 2010). To address these issues at least in part, school leaders must evaluate and modify their pedagogical, curricular, and evaluative practices to ensure all students are provided with the opportunities they need to succeed (Smith, 1988). Indeed, these are actions that suburban school leaders should increasingly practice due to significant changes in student demographics.

**Demographic Changes.** Today, U.S. schools are experiencing demographic shifts resulting in increased minority student enrollment and decreased White student enrollment (Geiger, 2017; Kaplan & Owings, 2013; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; Wepner & Gómez, 2017). Demographics refer to, “the characteristics of human populations, such as gender, race, ethnicity, income, educational attainment, mobility, disability, location, or other vital data” (Kaplan & Owings, 2013, p. 15). In this study, two characteristics were of particular interest: race and socioeconomic status. Race focused on the White-Black dynamic as MMS was a White-majority school that experienced a substantial increase in Black students which prompted school leaders to enact CRSL. At times, however, the term *underrepresented students* or something similar was used to include the small but growing number of Asian and Hispanic students at the site. This study also focused on socioeconomic status—termed economically disadvantaged on the state report card—as this group more than doubled in the last 15 years. Indeed, while suburban schools are becoming more racially diverse, the socioeconomic status of students is also changing as 37 percent of suburban students in the 2013-2014 school year received free or reduced lunch (Wepner & Gómez, 2017, p. 4). Thus, changing student demographics in suburban schools is not only a matter of race but also socioeconomic status.

According to the Pew Research Center, White students were the majority racial group in U.S. public schools accounting for 49.5 percent of all students in 2014 but this was down almost 15 percent from 1995 numbers (Geiger, 2017, para. 7). Suburban minority student enrollment has risen to almost 40 percent as White student enrollment has decreased (Wepner & Gómez, 2017). Since the mid 1990s there has been an 82 percent increase (3.4 million students) in minority student representation in the nation’s 3,259 suburban schools, largely due to an increase in Black and Latino students (Chapman, 2014, p. 312). Further, 38 percent of all Black students

and 40 percent of all Latino students attended suburban schools in the 2013-2014 school year (Wepner & Gómez, 2017, p. 3). These shifts are confirmed by NCES which found that, from 2000 to 2015, White student enrollment decreased to 49 percent, Black enrollment remained relatively flat at 15 percent, Asian student enrollment increased slightly to five percent, and Hispanic enrollment increased to 26 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Census data also reveals a growing number of students identified as multiracial, particularly those who are both Black and White, with the largest multiracial populations located in the South and Midwest (Harris, 2013). According to both the Pew Research Center and NCES, public school trends of increased minority enrollment and decreased White enrollment are expected to continue for at least the next ten years. While some suburban schools remain highly segregated, White students located in small to medium suburban, metropolitan areas now attend schools with more Black and Latino students in recent years (Chapman, 2014; Wepner & Gómez, 2017). As such, suburban school leaders in these areas are challenged to meet the needs of more diversified populations.

As highlighted above, while suburban schools are experiencing increased minority populations, they are also experiencing a decrease in White student enrollment. Scholars long ago anticipated that White flight would occur in response to increased integration due to prejudice and preference (Bankston & Caldas, 2000; Coleman et al., 1966). In her study involving school leaders, Turner (2015) found that administrators attributed White flight to racial and class bias held by White parents who believed that increased diversity and poverty were causing schools to decline (p. 21). Families leaving as a result of White flight may then migrate to homogeneous White communities with little diversity in schools; in fact, Bankston and Caldas

(2000) find in their study that there is a correlation between minority student concentration in a district and the percentage of White students enrolled outside of the same district (p. 548).

This section has highlighted how suburbanization was largely segregated by design, particularly through federal housing programs which also resulted in segregated schools. Not only were schools segregated by race, they were also unequal in terms of facilities, materials, and opportunities causing issues of equity. Though discriminatory laws and practices have been deemed illegal, de facto segregation remains. Today's laws may not actively promote or support integration, but school leaders can by embracing the demographic shifts in culturally responsive ways. The increased presence of students of color along with the simultaneous loss of White students are the primary factors driving changing student demographics in today's suburban schools. Culturally responsive school leaders, in seeking to respond to these trends, are not only promoting CRSL but also educating staffs on why populations are changing as part of professional development efforts. In addition, school leaders are responding to past and present policies that are increasingly playing an important role in the nation's schools.

### **Policy Context**

In this section, I highlight governmental policy actions in K-12 school improvement efforts beginning in the 1960s when calls grew for addressing unequal schools. As seen in the previous section, this converges with the challenges to the nation's discriminatory housing practices. First, this section explores the government's initial role in school improvement efforts through federal policy which laid the groundwork for its current role in American education. Next, the discussion on standardization shows the movement towards common and more challenging standards across states. Then, this section examines a significant federal policy shift at the beginning of this century that influenced the accountability pressures on today's schools

and school leaders as it relates to improving the performance of all students. Notably, this includes students from underrepresented populations in suburban schools who have often been overlooked in White-majority environments (Wepner & Gómez, 2017). This section is designed to provide understanding of federal policy attempts to make visible some of the issues that urban school leaders have traditionally faced and now, due to increased student diversity, are issues that impact suburban school leaders as well. This section also serves as a bridge to understanding improvement efforts and challenges in today's suburban schools, and highlights why this study exploring suburban school leaders' CRSL efforts is needed.

**Federal Policy.** According to federal law, school leaders have legal responsibilities to their students and this includes students of color. Indeed, under the Fourteenth Amendment, minority students are considered a protected class and are entitled to equal protections and similar treatment of the laws (Biegel, 1995; Eckes, 2004; Wade, 1980). Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits racial discrimination by institutions, including schools, that receive federal funds (Cambron-McCabe, McCarthy, & Thomas, 2004, p. 16). Additionally, Title VII cites the “disparate impact model” which examines practices that produce discriminatory effects for protected classes, including school actions and procedures that disproportionately impact students of color (Biegel, 1995). In fact, litigants may use Title VII with Title VI to challenge inequitable practices and ensure equal educational opportunities for minority students (Biegel, 1995, p. 1550). For example, in *Larry P. v Riles*, Superintendent Riles was sued after Larry P., an African American student, was placed in special education classes as a result of the San Francisco Unified School District's culturally-biased IQ test which disproportionately impacted Black students (Biegel, 1995; Wade, 1980). Ultimately, this practice was found to violate the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause (Wade, 1980, p. 1195). As such, school

leaders must be mindful of their practices to ensure that all students have equal access to a quality education.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was a significant development in the U.S. education system that was aimed at compensatory education and improving the quality of education for economically disadvantaged students typically in urban areas (Gamson et al., 2015; House, 1978); however, it fell short of dismantling income and class inequities that impact education (Edmonds & Moore, 1973). Due to ESEA, Title I funds helped schools purchase books, increased educational research and opportunities, and charged states with taking a more active role in school improvement efforts (Gordon & Reber, 2015; Jennings, 2015). Further, ESEA benefited children from a variety of backgrounds including students who were minority, low-income, gifted, and spoke English as a second language (Jennings, 2015). However, “The federal programs of the 1960s were based on assumptions that precluded their favorable impact on poor and minority children. The deficit model of programming viewed the children as disadvantaged and deprived—that is, inferior” (Edmonds & Moore, 1973, p. 63). Indeed, Coleman’s 1966 Equality of Educational Opportunity Report found that a student’s family background was a significant factor in student learning and this may have contributed to such deficit models in policies targeting minority students. While Congress intended for districts to use ESEA funds on its high-poverty and urban schools most in need, this was difficult for the government to regulate and possibly hindered efforts by encouraging school-wide programs that did not trickle down to students most in need (Gordon & Reber, 2015). Even those who championed ESEA, particularly politicians, had concerns about providing millions of dollars in educational funding without a way to measure its effectiveness; as a result, the federal government’s entrance into school improvement was accompanied by program reviews and

evaluations as a form of accountability (House, 1978; Jennings, 2015). This was the beginning of the government calling for school improvements and using evaluations to measure effectiveness as a form of accountability. Also resulting was a push for more uniformity in the quality and content of what was being taught.

**Standardization.** Establishing rigorous academic standards and increased standardized testing are other ways that districts, states, and the federal government have sought to pressure school leaders in improving student performance. Indeed, there have been efforts from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to shape and standardize what is being taught and when (Doppen & Yeager, 1998; Harris, Maxwell, Nightingale, DeGarmo, & Greenwood, 1894). As was the case in the previous centuries, today's calls for high-quality standards have been made by those not only in education, but also by business communities and national associations seeking to ensure that citizens are prepared in a more global world (Doppen & Yeager, 1998). After *A Nation at Risk* (1983) painted a bleak picture of American education, the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) was tasked with examining the curricula and standards in K-12 and higher education, and studying how they compared to other advanced countries (Hewitt, 2008).

As a result of NCEE recommendations and Edmonds' influential work around effective schools, presidential administrations drafted plans to reform education and states turned to organizations including the National Council for Social Studies and the National Research Council for high quality standards (Doyle, 1991; Francis, 1996). With America 2000, the Bush Administration created a program that encouraged communities to set and achieve education goals and track progress using a report card system (Doyle, 1991). Through Goals 2000, the Clinton Administration strived to mandate national history standards for states, however, these



attempts failed (Ducea, 1995). Most recently, Common Core State Standards were voluntarily adopted in mathematics and English Languages Arts by over 40 states in 2013 (Common Core State Standards Initiative). As school improvement efforts have called for more rigorous and common standards among states, the importance of standardized testing has been used to measure and report student performance, largely due to the influential No Child Left Behind.

**NCLB.** In 2001, Congress reauthorized ESEA (1965) and renamed it, the No Child Left Behind Act. This federal statute mandated schools to report student performance data from all subgroups and this reporting requirement remains in place today. Disclosing student subgroup performance data is designed to hold school leaders accountable for the growth of all students, including those in demographic categories that White-majority suburban schools may not be used to educating (Wepner & Gómez, 2017). Kaplan and Owings (2013) argue all schools are impacted by student demographics as they are accountable to meet state and federal targets for all students across ethnicity, ability, English proficiency, or socioeconomic status (p. 16).

Harrison-Jones (2007) explained that No Child Left Behind required:

States to make demonstrable annual progress toward (a) raising the percentage of students who are proficient in reading and mathematics, and (b) in narrowing the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students. Furthermore, the law requires all students in grades 3 through 8 in each racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic group, and whether or not they have special needs or are native English speakers, to be proficient in mathematics and reading by 2014. (p. 346)

While NCLB goals were not met and the law has since been reauthorized and renamed the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), this was a significant policy shift that prompted school leaders to pay attention to some subgroups that had been previously overlooked because student

performance was tied to continued employment and funding (Wepner & Gómez, 2017, p. 34). Additionally, subgroup performance is reported on school report cards putting pressure on school leaders to improve student achievement levels. In many states, school report cards also provide a summative score in the form of an overall letter grade which may fill school leaders with pride or shame (Jacobsen, Saultz & Snyder, 2013). Indeed, Wepner and Gómez (2017) discussed the chaos that one district experienced when it dropped from an “A” to a “B” on its state report card largely attributed to the underperformance of minority students. This included an angry community and a school board clashing with a superintendent over funding programs and services targeted to minority students (Wepner & Gómez, 2017, p. 32). Similarly, Lewis-McCoy (2014) found that the public reporting of standardized test scores has encouraged some school leaders to work quickly to improve student performance (p. 160). As school improvement and accountability efforts have progressed from implementing challenging standards to assessing students over these standards, another focus is on the evaluations of teachers and administrators.

**Accountability.** With student performance being measured by standardized test scores, state and federal governments are using this data to hold both schools and educators accountable for student scores through the use of evaluations. For schools, data from Value-added Measures (VAM) is often used to calculate report card grades and, for educators, this comes by way of performance evaluations which often include some percentage of student performance (Wepner & Gómez, 2017). This has left many districts and states utilizing VAM data in their evaluations and continued employment of not only teachers, but also administrators. While proponents of VAM argue that it can measure teacher impact on student growth from year to year, Amrein-Beardsley (2016) and Darling-Hammond (2015) have argued that VAM is ineffective in measuring teacher quality because the tests may not measure learning, students are not always

randomly assigned to teachers or schools, and there are other factors that may contribute to student learning outside of classroom instruction. Even so, in many states including the one where this study is situated, VAM is used in staff performance evaluations. Thus, VAM is an accountability tool that is impacting school leaders by pressuring them to respond to the performance of all student groups, including those from underrepresented populations. Whether motivated by changes in state and federal policy or evaluation systems, culturally responsive suburban school leaders are attempting to address student needs because the performance of subpopulations cannot be ignored without consequences.

### **Continuous School Improvement**

In response to policy changes and increased accountability, school leaders work to meet growth targets and improve student performance data by utilizing continuous school improvement (CSI) efforts to ensure that educators are using available data to make the best decisions for their students. While federal level policy changes are largely implemented from the top-down, CSI allows for school leaders to make data-based decisions in their buildings providing them with ongoing opportunities to take ownership of school data and make changes designed to help students. Thus, CSI offers insights into how leaders are making changes. While CSI was a result of previous ESSA iterations, it is now more formalized with the tools and approaches that school leaders utilize throughout the CSI cycle. Based in systems thinking theories, CSI recognizes that schools are living systems consisting of many interconnected parts including students, teachers, and leaders, and that a school's success relies on its understanding of these interconnections (Elgart, 2017). CSI is an improvement cycle in which the basic components are to assess, analyze, adjust, and repeat in order to improve teaching and learning; subsequently, many districts and states require school leaders adhere to some version of this

cycle in their school improvement efforts (Elgart, 2017). O'Day and Smith (2016) explained one representation of this plan, do, study, act model:

Continuous improvement processes generally start with identification and analysis of a problem of practice in the given system, followed by repeated cycles of inquiry in which a plan for addressing that problem is developed, tested, revised based on data, and then implemented more broadly (or retested anew), followed by new data and more refinement. (p. 9)

In essence, CSI involves educators consistently making data-based decisions with the intent to improve student performance and continually making changes to reach targets and goals.

School leaders engage in CSI efforts due to district, state, and federal accountability measures often overshadowing the commitment and understanding necessary to make the right decisions; as a result, educators simply go through the motions without understanding the principles or purpose (Elgart, 2017, p. 55). Subsequently, organizational routines emerge that provide stability, but lack the clear mission and vision needed to create change (Feldman & Pentland, 2003). In suburban schools experiencing increased student diversity, more of the same and routine actions are the exact opposite of what should occur; instead, school leaders should be culturally responsive to the needs of their new students. To do so, they must develop their teachers' understanding and implementation of CSI cycles by providing clarity of purpose through the various steps. Indeed, teachers alone may resist or be incapable of making the necessary changes to support subgroup performance (Wepner & Gómez, 2017, p. 35), which is why this study examines the roles of both principals and teacher leaders.

Teacher leaders influence other teachers by serving as content-area experts and addressing student needs which are essential to improving teacher quality and student learning

(York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Rottier, 2000). Principals, too, have an influential role in their ability to deeply impact instructional practices and student learning (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1274).

Together, these groups can help teachers navigate the CSI cycles with a better understanding of what they are doing and why as they work to improve student learning experiences. For districts experiencing demographic shifts, this is especially important as it can promote data-based actions for new student populations as opposed to deficit-based decisions. As achievement gaps between White and minority students continue to persist (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; Vanneman et al., 2009), CSI efforts provide an opportunity for suburban school leaders to more effectively respond to these populations. This involves data-driven decision making which has been shown to improve student performance (Wohlstetter, Datnow, & Park, 2008).

In order for schools to be successful in their CSI efforts, the literature suggests certain approaches that school leaders should take. Leaders implementing CSI efforts must: determine and focus on the factors most important for improvement; address all of the factors that impact student performance; organize and prioritize issues and actions; set specific goals which engage school and community members; create a culture that welcomes improvement for all (Elgart, 2017, p. 55). While most schools have various leadership teams and committees in place, enacting CSI with these approaches provides practical guidance for school leaders as they make changes designed to better meet the needs of underrepresented populations. Such approaches to school improvement are particularly helpful in schools undergoing demographic shifts because it has the potential to respond to population changes and emergent student needs as they occur.

In this section, I have highlighted government policy changes designed to improve student performance in schools. ESEA (1965) was implemented to address educational inequity

largely attributed to both race and poverty. However, there were concerns about use of funds leading to increased accountability and calls for more uniformity. As initiatives to standardize curriculum expanded, NCLB and, later, ESSA, issued achievement targets for all student groups, including those from underrepresented populations. These scores impacted not only school report cards, but also evaluations of principals and teachers. In response to these policy changes and to better address student learning needs in real-time, many school leaders adopted CSI practices in order to continually utilize data to improve student performance. With several policy efforts initially designed to improve conditions in inner city schools, particularly for Black and marginalized students, many suburban schools now serve these populations. As such, a critique of school improvement literature by some scholars currently doing work in suburban areas is that the focus on urbanicity has resulted in a missed opportunity to explore issues facing suburban leaders and their schools (Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Wepner & Gómez, 2017). Next, I discuss this study's theoretical framework and how it can be used to address this gap in the literature.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Culturally Responsive School Leadership**

Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) challenges all aspects of the teaching and learning environment to improve responsiveness to the needs of minority students (Khalifa et al. 2016). On the “CR” side of CRSL, the literature base addressing the learning needs of marginalized students was centered around multicultural education and, later, culturally responsive practices and teaching (Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015). This work examined how student success and achievement were defined, imagined how academic and cultural success could complement one another in an environment that may perpetuate inequities, and determined the role that pedagogy could play by looking at structural issues (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Such a

model was important in minority students' school environments due to deficit perspectives, attitudes, and beliefs which produced poor learning outcomes and achievement gaps because teachers were not culturally responsive to student needs (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2002; Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). In their Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) model, Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) identified five key principles of CRP: identity and achievement, equity and excellence, developmental appropriateness, teaching the whole child, and student-teacher relationships. These principles also promote ideas of social justice in education by encouraging practices that result in educational opportunities for all students to reach their full potential regardless of race, class, and other characteristics (Smith, 1988). While "CR" focused largely on teacher actions in classrooms, leadership practices have centered on principal actions in schools.

On the "SL" side of CRSL, the literature base has largely been studied in regard to principals' actions in urban schools. This may be attributed to the school reform and improvement work in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s that focused on effective school practices in urban areas (Khalifa et al., 2016). In his influential study, and due to the fact that it contradicted previous findings by Coleman et al. (1966), Edmonds (1979) examined more than 2,500 students across 20 schools serving primarily low income and minority students and concluded that family background and social class did not cause or preclude instructional effectiveness and that a school's actions were crucial in promoting a quality education (p. 21). With principals often leading school actions, research efforts revolved around the role of school principals, often in urban areas, which remains the focus of most CRSL literature today. More recently, scholars have studied the role of teacher leaders in school improvement efforts arguing that their importance has been underestimated and understudied (Alger, 2008; Anderson, 2008). Specifically, the teacher leader role has been examined in terms of transformational leadership,

of which CRSL is an aspect. Current literature, however, has not widely explored teacher leaders as transformational leaders within a CRSL context leaving a gap of knowledge in the literature.

In their CRSL framework, Khalifa et al. (2016) focused on urban school principals as they examined behaviors, practices, policies, and actions that can influence teaching and school environments in ways to better respond to the needs of minority students rather than marginalizing them (p. 1274). The CRSL framework is centered on four strands: (1) Critical Self-Awareness, (2) Culturally Responsive Curricula and Teacher Preparation, (3) Culturally Responsive and Inclusive School Environments, and (4) Engaging Students and Parents in Community Contexts. As previously discussed, CRSL is inclusive of CRP work done by Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011), Gay (2002), and Ladson-Billings (1995), and builds on ideas of multicultural education (Banks et al., 2001) and social justice and equity (Theoharis, 2010) concerning the needs of underrepresented students. As such, these ideas are discussed in exploring CRSL. Before investigating the four CRSL strands, I briefly highlight transformational leadership in which Khalifa et al. (2016) determined CRSL is an aspect. Understanding transformational leadership provides insights into the leadership actions needed in order to promote CRSL in schools.

**CRSL and Transformational Leadership.** CRSL is an aspect of transformational leadership and, as such, the latter is also discussed throughout this work. Transformational leadership involves making systemic changes which are needed in CRSL in order to improve the experience of students from underrepresented populations. Khalifa et al. (2016) argued that, “Creating a culturally responsive classroom and school environment in general is a joint effort particularly between school leaders and teachers, and it is an aspect of transformational leadership” (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1288). While noting this joint effort, a critique of the CRSL



framework is that it is focused on the role of principals and not teacher leaders who also serve in leadership roles. Other scholars, for instance, have examined how teacher leaders also possess qualities of transformational leadership as they operate as both teachers and leaders (Anderson, 2008; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Pounder, 2006). Therefore, this study contributes insights to the gap in the CRSL literature base with its inclusion of teacher leaders. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) explained that, “Transformational leadership moves schools beyond first-order, surface changes to second-order, deeper transformations that alter the ‘core technologies’ of schooling, such as pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment” (p. 99). In CRSL, this means making meaningful changes that challenge and end practices that have been harmful for underrepresented students. Further, transformational leadership achieves these ends through professional development, teacher empowerment, common goals, and creating a collaborative culture (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). These ideas in transformational leadership are discussed further within the CRSL strands, particularly the second strand regarding curricula and teacher preparation which involves utilizing professional development efforts to promote cultural responsiveness in these areas.

While transformational leadership—which Khalifa et al. (2016) argued CRSL is an aspect of—calls for principals to collaborate and empower others to have leadership roles, a problem is that teacher leaders sometimes find their leadership roles poorly defined in the school structure (Muijs & Harris, 2007, p. 127). This is important because teacher leaders such as department chairs and team leaders play important roles in improving student experiences and outcomes (Rottier, 2000; Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007). Thus, if CRSL is an aspect of transformational leadership, it is necessary to learn more about the role that teacher leaders play in CRSL efforts. Notably, Khalifa et al. (2016) acknowledged the importance of teacher leaders yet still based their work on the role of administrators. As such, this study addresses this gap of

knowledge and contributes to the literature by defining school leaders as both principals and teacher leaders in order to produce new insights in CRSL. Next, the four CRSL strands pertaining to leadership behavior are explored.

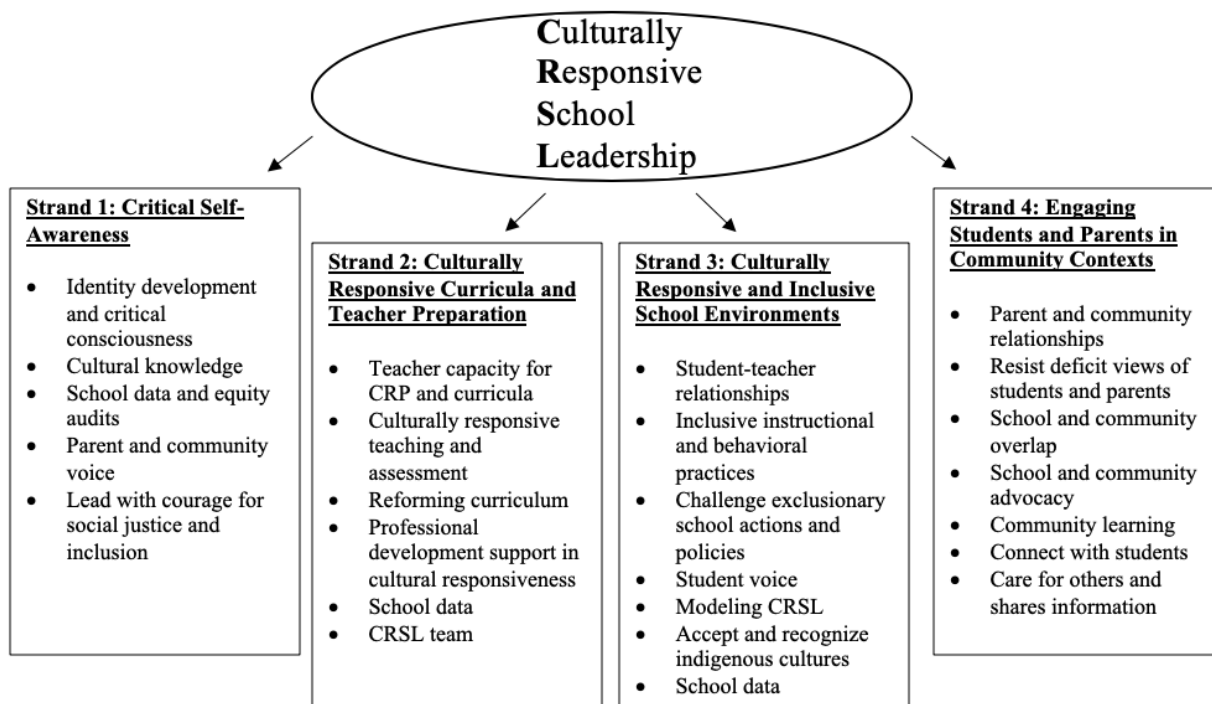


Figure 1. Adapted from the CRSL Framework by Khalifa et al. (2016).

**CRSL Strand 1: Critical Self-Awareness.** This CRSL strand encourages school leaders to improve critical self-awareness and consciousness through identity development, cultural knowledge, school data and equity audits, and parent and community voice, and these ideas require courageous leading in social justice and inclusion. Identity refers to one’s self concept as well as their concept of others and this includes both student and educator identities (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) argued that identity is a cultural construct that includes, “ethnicity and race, as well as gender, class, language, region, religion, exceptionality, and other diversities” (p. 72) as ways in which individuals may identify themselves as well as others. School leaders working with students of

color must be self-aware of their identities, norms, values, beliefs, and positions as this can impact students, families, and communities that the school serves (Khalifa et al., 2016; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). CRSL Strand 1 also promotes ideas of social justice by encouraging practices that advance educational opportunities for all students to reach their full potential regardless of race, class, and other characteristics (Smith, 1988).

By being critically conscious of culture and race, school leaders enhance self-awareness and better understand the ways in which they can lead (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1281). This is important because educators often frame minority students with deficit views which results in Black students being disproportionately placed into low-level special education programs and less-challenging academic tracks (Chapman, 2014; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Welton, 2013). Scherff and Spector (2011) concurred finding that, “African Americans’ achievement is seen as a rarity and a shortcoming of the group; therefore, they are treated as inferior, and their access to opportunities is restricted as a result” (p. 29). To counter these effects, culturally responsive leaders must be, “...aware of inequitable factors that adversely affect their students’ potential. Likewise, they must be willing to interrogate personal assumptions about race and culture and their impact on the school organization” (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1281). When school leaders promote the CRSL strand of critical self-awareness, often through professional development and analyzing student data, they evaluate how expectations impact practice to determine if these practices impact student opportunities (Scherff & Spector, 2011, p. 29).

In examining themselves, school leaders have honest conversations and identify areas in which their actions are driven by their beliefs so that they can shift to a more data-driven approach. Such dialogue is necessary to become more culturally responsive to diverse student populations and reduce the bias that may exist. Deficit-level thinking is based around the idea

that students fail due to internal deficiencies resulting in, “instructional practices and educational assumptions that...mask organizational and social issues, often overshadowing the abilities of students and teachers” (Bieneman, 2011, p. 231). As a result, Black students are underrepresented in gifted programs, even when they achieve qualifying test scores (Chapman, 2014; Ford & Grantham, 2003). In her study examining staff racial attitudes and institutional barriers impacting students of color, Welton (2013) found that most minority transfer students were assigned to the lowest academic tracks which negatively impacted their opportunities and created structural inequities. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that the thoughts and actions of educators have consequences on student achievement which is why it is important for school leaders to initiate conversations and professional development around teacher beliefs. While this literature provides numerous reasons to study CRSL and the actions of urban school principals, it also highlights gaps in the literature regarding CRSL efforts in suburban schools as well as the actions of teacher leaders.

As suburban schools have historically been associated as being populated by White, middle-class students from two-parent households (Wepner & Gómez, 2017), the identity of these schools is based around these characteristics. That is, curriculum, programming, resources, and other practices have been situated around these students and families (Lewis-McCoy, 2014). These ideas also relate to CRSL Strands 2 and 3, both of which are discussed later. In her work of urban schools, Diem (2015) found that, “differential educational outcomes for students of color are as much attributed to their unequal access to key education resources as they are their race, socioeconomic status (SES), and culture” (p. 842). Welton (2013) and Lewis-McCoy (2014) found that this is true for suburban and racially diverse schools as well. As such, suburban school leaders must assess if their practices are built upon the identities of all of their students

rather than the majority and also provide a trusting and supportive environment where minority students can feel secure in their identity (Anyon, 2005). This may be especially challenging for suburban school leaders experiencing demographic shifts due to dynamics that may differ from CRSL efforts in urban schools. While critical self-awareness may provide suburban school leaders with insights that might help them to better respond to improving the achievement of underrepresented groups, they minimally discuss race, if at all, and seldom in ways that lead to systemic changes (Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Welton et al., 2013). This CRSL strand may be a way to promote critical self-awareness among suburban school leaders but it might look different from efforts in urban settings which is why this study is necessary.

Another aspect of CRSL Strand 1 involves the importance of principals making data-based decisions. While principals may be more knowledgeable about building-wide data, teacher leaders are more likely to have subject-area expertise (Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007) and familiarity with data in their departments which is why it is important to understand how, they too, use school data to make decisions. As discussed previously, transformational leadership requires that school leaders recognize and respond to challenges within the context of their organizational structure (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006, p. 100), and school data can highlight areas to improve by auditing data through an equity lens. This also relates to CSI cycles, explained earlier, which encourage school leaders to use student data as they participate in the steps of school improvement cycles (Elgart, 2017). While CRSL has focused on the actions of principals, they often engage their teacher leaders in making decisions and, therefore, were included in this study to fill gaps of current knowledge surrounding their leadership role.

In using data to make decisions, this CRSL strand also calls for school leaders to engage with parents and the community and use their voice in order to measure the effectiveness of their

culturally responsive efforts. Promoting such genuine engagement requires two-way communication to build trusting relationships (Moore, Bagin, & Gallagher, 2016) and also relates to aspects of CRSL Strand 4 which is discussed later. This can also provide school leaders with opportunities to make data-based decisions by gathering parental data which may result in less criticism and more acceptance of decisions (Moore et al., 2016, p. 21). Engaging parents and appreciating their value can result in improved student achievement due to the trust and respect that is built among educators, students, and families (Anyon, 2005, p. 181). If parents do not feel valued, they may be less likely to engage with the school which can have a negative impact on students' academic success and experiences, attendance, time spent on homework, and aspirations (Hill & Taylor, 2004). In addition to using parent voice, culturally responsive school leaders engage with the community as student performance may be linked to socioeconomic factors and other conditions that require more collaboration (Nyhan & Alkadry, 1999). For suburban school leaders in communities experiencing increased student diversity and varying student needs, this may be challenging because there might be multiple communities with different needs making it difficult to hear the voices of all stakeholders.

CRSL Strand 1 has highlighted the importance of school leaders engaging in critical self-awareness and consciousness which requires identity development, cultural knowledge, school data and equity audits, and parent and community voice, and these ideas call for courageous leadership in social justice and inclusion. This strand can impact not only how school leaders view themselves, but also the actions they take that impact students. While CRSL literature has traditionally studied principal actions in urban settings, this study contributes to the literature by exploring CRSL in suburban schools and also by broadening school leaders to include teacher leaders. When school leaders better understand their own views and identities, they can confront

old ideologies and engender new ones which are more inclusive of all student groups (Evans, 2007, p. 185). This has implications for suburban schools as well, especially in light of increased student diversity. As such, it is important to study how suburban school leaders engage in critical self-awareness along with the opportunities and challenges they face in order to provide new insights related to this CRSL strand outside of what has been seen in urban schools.

**CRSL Strand 2: Culturally Responsive Curricula and Teacher Preparation.** This CRSL strand encourages school leaders to promote culturally responsive curricula and teacher preparation through building teacher capacity in CRP, reforming curriculum, providing professional development support in cultural responsiveness, and using school data in these efforts often led by a CRSL team. Teacher capacity involves ensuring that teachers are equipped to offer curricula that is culturally responsive to student needs and this relates closely to the work of Brown-Jeffy Cooper (2011), Gay (2002), and Ladson-Billings (1995) in CRP. Professional development in this strand relates to school leaders developing teachers to become more culturally responsive in their curricula and teaching practices and this also relates to transformational leadership as these practices often require systemic change. School leaders should utilize data in their efforts to identify disparities and aspects of the school environment that marginalize minority students in order to make changes that may result in improved student experiences. These ideas also relate to CRSL Strand 3 with regards to inclusive environments and this is explored in the next section.

In building teacher capacity, school leaders promote more equitable practices that value differentiation, multicultural curriculum content, and teaching based on students' needs (Brown-Jeffy, 2011; Marshall, 2016). In relation to CRP, this means that school leaders interested in seeing growth in students of color should subscribe to the belief that, "(a) difference is good, (b)

differentiated instruction is essential for some, and (c) CRP practices can enhance learning” (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011, p. 74). It is when school leaders have this disposition that they are able to incorporate multicultural curriculum, equal access, and high expectations for all students in their school improvement efforts. Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) argue that a color-blind approach does not promote equity in teaching and learning nor does it promote CRP practices (p. 74). In Ladson-Billings’ (1995) study, she found that the most successful teachers working with students from underrepresented backgrounds were those who were color-conscious as they were better able to meet the needs of their students. For example, Ladson-Billings (1995) describes one culturally responsive teacher who read a book featuring a Black princess after realizing her African American students were under the impression that princesses had to be White with blonde hair. While this teacher incorporated multicultural content to respond to her students’ beliefs, it cannot be taken for granted that all teachers will make such moves. Current CRSL frameworks explore how principals can support such efforts; however, Zepeda and Kruskamp (2007) argued that this is also a responsibility of teacher leaders, while Gay (2002) found there is room to promote cultural diversity in all academic subject areas. For this reason, this study includes teacher leaders as school leaders in order to address this gap in the CRSL literature.

School leaders building teacher capacity also modify teaching and curriculum to better respond to minority students’ needs. In their review of curriculum and textbooks, Banks et al. (2001) found that students largely study events and topics based on the point of view of the victors. In subjects such as history and literature, teaching materials and content can privilege White students while causing students of color to feel excluded from not only curriculum but also the American story (Banks et al., 2001, p. 198). While CRSL and CRP do not explicitly argue for multicultural education as Banks does, this idea promotes the belief that curricular



materials should represent the cultures of the students using them. However, Gay (2002) cautioned against equivocating multicultural education with meeting the needs of minority students as this alone does not result in culturally responsive teaching. Still, it is important for school leaders, particularly teacher leaders, to ensure that curriculum content is providing equitable opportunities for all students to see themselves and their cultures displayed in a positive light. The need for diverse curricula extends to music and the arts as multicultural art education in particular can instill cultural pride and appreciation (Adejumo, 2002). In order for teachers to turn to new curricula and teaching practices, they need school leaders' support in training them in culturally responsive teaching. Again, an expanded study of CRSL to include teacher leaders may provide additional insights into how department chairs encourage those they lead to adopt such practices which can offer additional insight into the transformational leadership actions of teacher leaders.

In building teacher capacity, it is important for school leaders to ensure that their teachers have high expectations for all students as this can impact student access to educational opportunities. Putting it bluntly, Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) argued that Whiteness should not function as a gatekeeper to rigorous courses and programs because equity and excellence are not exclusive to Whiteness (p. 75). While teachers may express their belief that all of their students can succeed, many possess deficit-level thinking regarding the ability of their students, especially those who are African American (Lipman, 1993). Subsequently, students of color are placed in lower academic tracks and excluded from certain programs not because they lack capability, but because educators possess deficit-level thinking (Chapman, 2014; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Welton, 2013). Such inequities highlight the importance of CRSL Strand 1, discussed previously, because school leaders must become more self-aware of deficit thoughts

that, left unchecked, promote hurtful actions. Indeed, some teachers pay more attention, give preferential treatment, and provide more assistance to students from more elite backgrounds (DiMaggio, 1982; Jaeger 2011), and this too can result in lower expectations and less opportunities for underrepresented students. Even in suburban schools with growing minority populations, many classrooms are largely segregated. Tyson (2011) noted that within-school segregation has not prompted the same type of attention and outrage seen before *Brown* (p. 10). Therefore, it is important to explore CRSL in a suburban context to provide insights as to how these school leaders respond to increased student diversity in their buildings.

As CRSL is an aspect of transformational leadership, the literature suggests that school leaders can utilize professional development as a tool to encourage culturally responsiveness in race-conscious ways (Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015; Theoharis, 2010). This is particularly important in suburban schools experiencing increased student diversity as many teachers are not adequately prepared to teach students from underrepresented populations (Gay, 2002).

Professional development is a strategy school leaders can use to get staff working towards common goals. Bieneman (2011) found that transformational leadership can utilize professional development in ways that, “deconstruct and rebuild existing social and cultural knowledge frameworks about power and privilege, equity and access, and achievement” (p. 223). In the process of prompting change, professional development encourages school leaders to make data-based decisions to ensure that bias is not preventing access to certain programs and opportunities. However, Bieneman (2011) argued that in order to implement meaningful changes for diverse populations, there first has to be acknowledgement about the deficit-level thinking and racial bias that educators may possess. As such, professional development that promotes culturally responsive and relevant frameworks is a way that transformational leaders can have

critical conversations and implement changes that address the needs of emerging student populations. This is important because muted conversations about race in schools ignore the everyday experiences of bias and racism that students may encounter (Garces & Cogburn, 2015). While professional development efforts in current CRSL literature have focused on the role of principals, Muijs and Harris (2007) found teacher leaders have pedagogical and management responsibilities (p. 112) and this study hopes to shed additional light on their role in promoting this CRSL strand.

In utilizing professional development to become more culturally responsive, Welton et al. (2013) found that school leaders may inadvertently promote deficit-based programs (p. 711). The authors specifically cited the widespread adoption of Ruby Payne's *Framework for Understanding Poverty* which they argue encourages deficit level thinking by promoting the idea that students need to be "fixed" rather than schools finding ways to become more responsive to student needs (Welton et al., 2013). Therefore, professional development may present itself as both an opportunity and a challenge for transformational school leaders seeking to advance CRSL goals. This study occurred at site in its second year of a new professional development program designed to promote culturally responsive practices in order to improve Black student experiences. Therefore, this work contributes to the CRSL literature by examining the impact of a professional development program in suburban school leaders' efforts to improve the experiences of Black students.

To advance improvement efforts, school leaders often utilize their teacher leaders to facilitate professional development, often empowering them in their roles as instructional leaders. Alger (2008) conducted a quantitative study of 88 teacher leaders and their principals who completed a leadership inventory survey assessing leadership behaviors. The study found

that principals overestimated the frequency in which their teacher leaders employed transformational leadership behaviors compared to how teacher leaders rated themselves (Alger, 2008, p. 6). This finding took into account a critique of this study as Alger (2008) allowed principals to choose which teacher leader would complete the survey assessing them, meaning they could have chosen individuals they felt would provide positive responses. As such, even in the best circumstances, this finding suggests that teacher leaders may not feel as empowered in their role as principals believe. This may be a result of teacher leaders viewing their role as ambiguous (Muijs & Harris, 2007). Together, this implies that the teacher leader role may need to be better defined to ensure that teacher leaders are fully empowered in their roles.

Empowering teacher leaders is important because they lead other teachers and are a part of administrative teams (Jun, 2011; Muijs & Harris, 2007). When properly empowered, teacher leaders may be positioned to influence lessons and pedagogical practices in order to better meet the needs of all students (Jun, 2011). By including teacher leaders in this study, this contributes to CRSL literature by providing insights into their level of empowerment, professional development efforts, and the amount of influence that they have on those they lead.

While professional development efforts can allow school leaders to make real changes in schools, the literature also suggests approaches that are ineffective when trying to be culturally responsive to the needs of minority students. Race-neutral and color-mute approaches in schools can overlook and fail the needs of minority students (Welton et al., 2013). Strictly focusing on student data may promote discussions about what marginalized students cannot do and do not know rather than examining what needs to be changed within the system (Anyon, 2005; Jun, 2011). Also ineffective are the single-day events or celebrations to promote diversity utilized by some schools because these actions do not challenge problematic practices in the school

environment (Holme, Diem, & Welton, 2013). Knowing what scholars recommend—or not—is helpful to this study that explores suburban school leaders' CRSL efforts to improve Black student experiences.

CRSL Strand 2 has examined how school leaders build teacher capacity which is increasingly important in suburban schools due to increasing student diversity. While CRSL has traditionally focused on urban school settings, this study contributes to the literature by exploring how suburban school leaders build teacher capacity which may present different opportunities and challenges than seen in urban schools. Additionally, school leaders should use professional development as an opportunity and tool to encourage data-based decisions that promote culturally responsive changes and a CRSL team often leads such efforts. This study also contributes to the literature by highlighting how both principals and teacher leaders in suburban schools use professional development and also how their participation in a new professional development program impacts these actions. Importantly, the literature in transformational leadership points to both effective and ineffective approaches which is useful for understanding the findings and discussion in later chapters.

**CRSL Strand 3: Culturally Responsive and Inclusive School Environments.** This CRSL strand argues that school leaders must work to ensure that the school environment is responsive and inclusive of students from marginalized populations. Additionally, school leaders must be able to recognize and challenge practices that negatively impact specific groups of students in areas of pedagogy, curriculum, discipline, and evaluation practices (Khalifa et al., 2016; Smith, 1988). As school leaders review data and identify gaps among student groups, they should examine and end practices and teacher actions that negatively impact students in order to close such gaps and increase student success (Khalifa et al., 2016; Mayfield, 2015). To achieve a

more culturally responsive and inclusive school environment, CRSL Strand 3 calls for school leaders to establish and encourage strong student-teacher relationships by listening to student voices along with promoting inclusive instructional and behavioral practices. School leaders should use data to guide these efforts.

Culturally responsive school leaders should build and encourage strong student-teacher relationships as this is critical for student learning (Nieto, 1999). Relationships must extend beyond that of the teacher managing students to one where the teacher conveys that she cares about her students and their interests and needs. Further, Ladson-Billings (1994) argued that student-teacher relationships must be equitable and reciprocal (p. 480). That is, both students and teachers have opportunities to lead and learn from one another. It is important that school leaders support teachers in classroom management strategies and other areas to help them develop positive relationships with all students, including those from underrepresented backgrounds who may have different needs. Building genuine relationships with students impacts all aspects of the classroom and Woodly (2018) found that students may work harder for not only themselves but also for teachers with whom they have formed good relationships.

In order for student-teacher relationships to develop in meaningful ways, students must feel that teachers care about them. Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) explained that, “Caring is demonstrated through patience and persistence with learners. These teachers facilitate learning, validate learners’ knowledge construction, and empower learners’ individual and collective learning capacity” (p. 78). Whether or not students believe their teachers care about them has real consequences in the classroom (Crosnoe et al., 2004). Regardless of background, Crosnoe et al. (2004) found that students who had positive relationships with their teachers had less problems in school while the opposite was true for students who had negative relationships (p.

75). Additionally, Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) argued that, “positive responses from both students and teachers to diversity enhance the student-teacher relationship” (p. 77). In suburban schools experiencing increased student diversity, it is especially important for school leaders to develop and encourage positive relationships with all students regardless of background and, in order for this to occur, teachers must demonstrate—and students must believe—that their teachers truly care about them. While CRSL has traditionally been explored in urban settings, this study provides insights as to how suburban school leaders establish strong relationships in racially diverse settings.

Other aspects of building strong student-teacher relationships include interactions within classrooms and the school environment as a whole. This involves interactions that students have with their teachers and also interactions that teachers promote between students to establish a positive learning environment. Ladson-Billings (1994) argued that culturally responsive teachers must show connectedness with their students and also promote it between students (p. 25). Further, Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) advised that, “Teachers should not only recognize students’ individual value and importance, but they should also consciously recognize what their students have in common. Together, students and teachers need to build classroom community, making it a safe place” (p. 78). Classroom teaching is not only about instruction but also about utilizing the power of relationships (Woodly, 2018, p. 87). For schools experiencing growing student diversity, creating a positive classroom atmosphere presents school leaders with opportunities to grow but this may also challenge them due to the variety of backgrounds present and the new skills that may be needed to help underrepresented students succeed. Indeed, some schools may appear diverse from the outside while within-school segregation is visible in classrooms (Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Theoharis, 2010; Tyson, 2011). Current CRSL literature

centers on the actions of principals as it relates to this strand; however, teacher leaders are in classrooms on a daily basis interacting with students, and they also lead their colleagues in best practices. As such, this study fills gaps of knowledge in the literature by providing new ideas related to this CRSL strand from teacher leaders who are uniquely positioned to offer insights as both leaders and teachers.

CRSL Strand 3 also argues for school leaders to promote inclusive instructional and behavioral practices in their buildings. To achieve this goal, school leaders can utilize data as a tool to identify aspects of the environment that may not be effective for students of color. Inclusive instructional practices match the cognitive and psychosocial needs of students in their development (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011, p. 75), making it important for school leaders to have knowledge of best practices and actively work with teachers to ensure that they are teaching in culturally responsive ways. This includes knowing what students can and want to do while still teaching the required curriculum. Inclusive instructional practices also incorporate ways for students' home knowledge to be utilized and explored within schools and classroom instruction (Ladson-Billings, 1995). These ideas also connect to CRSL Strand 2, discussed previously, because they relate to aspects dealing with curricula and teacher capacity. For example, Scherff and Spector (2011) cited how teachers had students create autobiographies, research community issues, and write reviews about movies and music in which they identified with culturally (p. 123). These learning activities were ways to bring students' culture and knowledge into the classroom while still anchoring instruction in standards-based academic skills (Scherff & Spector, 2011, p. 123). Anyon (2005) found that when middle and high school teachers engaged low-income students of color in civic activism regarding issues that they cared about there was improved academic engagement and achievement (p. 188). Administrators interested in



promoting social justice practices in school curriculum encourage such approaches to student learning (Theoharis, 2010, p. 361). As such, it is important for culturally responsive school leaders to reassess what and how they are teaching. This is an aspect of social justice in schools that requires a more responsive and consultative leadership style (Smith, 1998). For this reason, this study includes teacher leaders in order to contribute new insights in CRSL literature from individuals charged with both leading and teaching roles.

In promoting more inclusive instructional and behavioral practices in the school environment, leaders should also support student development through motivation, morale, engagement, and collaboration (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Gay, 2002). What motivates one group of students may not motivate another and not all students are motivated by achieving high grades, especially when students do not feel that their culture is valued in the school environment (Cokley, McClain, Jones, & Johnson, 2012). When students do not feel valued, they may be less likely to care about the values of the school and this has implications on student achievement as being able to identify with academics is a fundamental aspect of learning (Cokley et al., 2012, p. 15). This should concern school leaders as they increasingly face accountability pressures to improve student performance data as discussed earlier. Subsequently, school leaders must determine what motivates their students and find ways to incorporate and promote these ideas.

Inclusive school environments recognize that morale may also impact the academic performance of minority students. Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) argued that, “Students of color may already believe that the educational system is stacked against them, leading them to a defeatist relationship with the educational process” (p. 76). School leaders play an important role in the motivation and morale of students and they must learn what students want, treat all students with respect, and find opportunities for students to feel a sense of pride in themselves

and their work (Bowman, 2007). Posting student work samples in classrooms and hallways, including artwork, may also help to instill pride and promote an inclusive environment (Adejumo, 2002). In order to increase motivation and morale, school leaders must also promote student engagement and collaboration. A key aspect of culturally relevant teaching involves encouraging community among learners and not simply self-achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 480). Similarly, McGlynn and Kozlowski (2016) stressed the importance of student engagement and collaboration finding that collaboration, particularly in the middle grades, can help students struggling academically while challenging students of all ability levels (p. 67). For suburban school leaders experiencing increased student diversity and also disparities in discipline and achievement, it is important that they find ways to implement these ideas through their improvement efforts as doing so in classrooms and other areas of the school, collectively, does so within the school environment as a whole.

To achieve strong student-teacher relationships and inclusive instructional and behavioral practices, school leaders must seek to provide students with an equitable education. Jordan, Brown, and Gutierrez (2010) argued that educational equity is not about treating all students the same regardless of race or class, but about providing them with the support that they need in order to succeed. Current CRSL literature has focused on principal actions in urban schools but some of these schools may have less racial diversity than today's suburban schools due to changing student demographics. Therefore, this study contributes insights to the literature by examining suburban school leaders' CRSL efforts in a more racially diverse setting as the response may look differently.

CRSL Strand 3 has highlighted the importance of school leaders encouraging positive student-teacher relationships and inclusive instructional and behavioral practices within their

buildings. This relates to all aspects of the school environment and school leaders can utilize data to identify areas of concern. In building strong student-teacher relationships, students must feel cared for, safe, and heard, and teachers must be willing to listen and learn from their students. Inclusive instructional and behavioral practices require school leaders to support teaching efforts that meet the needs of marginalized students in areas such as motivation, morale, engagement, and collaboration. While current CRSL is largely situated around principal actions in urban schools, this study contributes knowledge to gaps in the literature by examining the actions of principals and teacher leaders in suburban contexts. While principals may encourage student-teacher relationships, teacher leaders are actually in them allowing this study to provide new understanding in this area. Similarly, teacher leaders may provide insights in inclusive instructional and behavioral practices since they have more frequent interactions with students. Finally, this strand incorporates aspects of social justice and educational equity so exploring suburban school leaders' CRSL efforts contributes to this literature base by better understanding the opportunities and challenges that leaders in suburban schools face in addressing student racial needs differently.

**CRSL Strand 4: Engaging Students and Parents in Community Contexts.** This CRSL strand encourages school leaders to engage students and parents by learning and connecting to aspects of their home lives and community. As such, this strand differs from the others as many of the suggested actions and efforts extend beyond a school's physical walls. However, like the other strands, these efforts can impact student experiences and academic performance. Khalifa et. al (2016) argued that engaging students and parents in community contexts involves building better relationships between the school and students, parents, and families, and not forming deficit views of these groups. Additionally, this involves developing

school and community relationships by finding areas in which the school and community overlap. By promoting such actions, CRSL Strand 4 also provides opportunities for school leaders to demonstrate caring through advocacy in school and community issues that impact students.

To build stronger relationships and better engage with parents, school leaders may need to alter their practices in order to address parent needs (Khalifa et al., 2016). As students advance to middle and high school, Kim and Hill (2015) found that parental engagement often decreases because parents feel inferior and ill-equipped to support their children academically largely due to increasingly complex material. On the other hand, Lareau (2000) found in her seminal research study that parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may be less involved in their children's academics due to their work occupations. Lareau (2000) explained that parents' jobs in skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled areas are separate from their home lives causing them to view their children's education as separate from home as well. Lareau (2000) argued this caused less engagement because parents respected the expertise of teachers and did not typically see a need to intervene, question, or challenge teachers' actions. While Lareau did an excellent job of supporting her claims with interview excerpts, her sample of families lacked diversity which she cited as a limitation explaining her intention was to, "prevent the confounding factor of race" (Lareau, 2000, p. 12). However, in a subsequent work, Lareau (2011) found that both Black and White middle class parents were highly involved in shaping and developing their children's activities and skills. As the site for this study was in a school experiencing increased student and, thus, parent diversity, these works provide reasons behind parental (dis)engagement that can be compared to MMS school leaders' perceptions. While these issues may serve as barriers to building strong relationships with parents, instead of forming deficit views of parents due to their

perceived disengagement, it is important that school leaders address their needs and overcome these obstacles because parental involvement in middle and upper grades impacts academic achievement and long-term educational success (Kim & Hill, 2015; Wang, Hill, & Hofkens, 2014).

As school leaders in suburban settings continue to experience increased racial and economic diversity, they should respond in culturally appropriate ways in order to connect and engage with parents. In their study of 22 preservice teachers, Zygmunt-Fillwalk, Malaby, & Clausen (2010) found that when participants learned about the history, housing, and community values of the neighborhoods surrounding their schools, it decreased preconceptions that they possessed and increased their worldly lens. Further, Zygmunt-Fillwalk et al. (2010) argued that, without this type of development, educators may, “miss a valuable piece of the puzzle required in maximizing family investment in education and subsequent student learning” (p. 56). A likely barrier in replicating the work of Zygmunt-Fillwalk et al. (2010) with school leaders is that these researchers examined participants who were required to complete these actions for a course assignment; however, these findings still provide insights into culturally responsive actions that leaders might promote due to the benefits they produce.

CRSL Strand 4 also advises that school leaders should build relationships with the communities from which their students reside. While this might seem unrelated to improving student experiences at school, Nyhan and Alkadry (1999) found that student backgrounds, particularly as it relates to socioeconomic status, are often indicative of their academic performance and that school-community collaboration may help to address these issues. In addition to building relationships with parents and families, this also involves opening school spaces to community businesses and organizations. School leaders play an important role in

creating community collaboration, and their school improvement plans should provide clear communication and participation goals. Moore et al. (2016) argued that it is important to involve professional community members in schools due to their contacts with parents and the larger community (p. 65). With CRSL being traditionally explored in urban areas, this study provides insights as to efforts in suburban settings which could look significantly different due to vast differences in business and residential patterns between these areas.

Culturally responsive school leaders also look for connections and overlaps between schools and communities. These overlaps may relate to class and school projects or community issues that impact students at home and in school. CRSL Strand 4 relates to aspects of CRP as teaching to the whole child acknowledges that students are not only members of a school, but also members of families and communities. Additionally, it relates to CRSL Strand 3, discussed previously, as it can promote a more inclusive school environment. When school leaders provide pedagogical bridges from school to students' homes and communities, they are better able to integrate culture into the school environment which can improve student achievement (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) found that, "Influences from initial cultural socialization experiences in the family and community shape the academic identity of students who enter our classrooms" (p. 76). While CRSL focuses on principal actions in this area, it is important to include teacher leaders in this work because they may be equally or even better positioned to see overlaps between schools and communities based upon their daily experiences with students in the classroom. Indeed, Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) argued that culturally responsive teachers tap into cultural knowledge funds that students develop outside of school to promote their academic achievement. Ladson-Billing (1995) provided a clear example of this in her study:

One teacher used the community as the basis of her curriculum. Her students searched the county historical archives, interviewed long-term residents, constructed and administered surveys and a questionnaire, and invited and listened to guest speakers to get a sense of the historical development of their community. Their ultimate goal was to develop a land use proposal for an abandoned shopping center that was a magnet for illegal drug use and other dangerous activities. (p. 479)

Instructional practices such as this place students in their community context and can have an impact on learning outcomes. While some teachers may make these changes on their own, teacher leaders play an important role in leading their colleagues to change (DeAngelis, 2013). This also relates to CRSL Strand 2 regarding professional development as teacher leaders often lead these efforts with their department members which highlights the need to explore their roles in CRSL research.

As school leaders build better relationships with parents and communities and find ways in which school and communities overlap, they may better understand, respond, and even advocate for issues that impact their students (Khalifa et al., 2016). Ladson-Billings (1995) found that CRP teachers made decisions to immerse themselves in their students' community validating its importance and place in student learning (p. 479). It is particularly important for minority students to know that their teachers care about them and school leaders advocating for issues that impact students and their communities is a crucial part of this CRSL strand (Khalifa et al., 2016). This also relates to CRSL Strand 3 regarding student-teacher relationships. While the CRSL literature has explored this strand in urban schools, little is known about how, if at all, this strand is promoted by suburban school leaders.

CRSL Strand 4 has discussed the role of school leaders in engaging students and parents in community contexts by connecting school, home, and community together and appealing to the various aspects of their students' identities and lives. Building strong relationships with parents is important to student learning and, like students, parents may have different needs for school leaders to address. It is also important for school leaders to build community relationships and promote the school as a welcoming place for students, parents, families, community members, businesses, and organizations. Doing so may not only encourage improved relationships and connections, but it may also allow school leaders to better understand the ways in which the school and community overlap resulting in better ways to address the whole child. Additionally, this may increase school leaders' knowledge of issues impacting students and their communities, positioning leaders to serve as advocates who work to improve student experiences both in and out of school walls. While CRSL has explored this strand among urban school principals, the actions they take may look differently than those of suburban school leaders as the different settings may result in varying dynamics. As such, this study contributes to CRSL literature by exploring suburban school leaders' efforts in relation to this strand along with the opportunities and challenges they encounter.

**CRSL Conclusion.** The CRSL framework by Khalifa et al. (2016) explores areas that school leaders must examine and change in order to make the classroom, school, and even community environment more culturally responsive to the needs of minority students. As discussed above, the CRSL framework is based upon four strands: (1) Critical Self-Awareness, (2) Culturally Responsive Curricula and Teacher Preparation, (3) Culturally Responsive and Inclusive School Environments, and (4) Engaging Students and Parents in Community Contexts. As highlighted throughout this section, aspects of some of these strands are interconnected. In



modifying and improving school practices, culturally responsive school leaders often exhibit behaviors of transformational leadership due to the systemic changes that need to be made in order to improve minority student experiences, and this is true for both principals and teacher leaders (Alger, 2008; Anderson, 2008; Pounder, 2006). Indeed, CRSL is an aspect of transformational leadership (Khalifa et al., 2016; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) and it also relates to ideas in multicultural education, social justice and equity, and CRP. As school leaders utilize data in attempts to identify and address various disparities, their actions can impact areas including identity development, curriculum and instruction, inclusivity and relationships, disciplinary practices, and academic performance which is increasingly important due to state and federal accountability pressures.

While current CRSL literature has produced valuable knowledge relating to principals' actions in urban schools, there is a gap in CRSL literature about principals' culturally responsive actions in suburban areas and this is increasingly important due to the growing student diversity in these schools. Further, while examining the role of principals is critical to understanding CRSL, principals as transformational leaders must take a collaborative approach when assessing the school environment in order to scrutinize inequitable policies, structures, and procedures, and implement systemic changes (DeMatthews, 2016). Undoubtedly, principals need help in these actions. Therefore, this study expands the CRSL leadership focus beyond the role of principals and defines school leaders as both principals and teacher leaders. This study also explores school leaders' CRSL efforts in suburban settings. Importantly, this innovative approach to studying CRSL addresses gaps of knowledge and contributes to the literature by examining CRSL in broader ways. Next, two more-recent case studies are explored to highlight prior work that is more closely related to the aims of this study. As previously highlighted, much of the CRSL

work has been done in urban areas with school principals, but these case studies occurred in more diverse settings and also included additional stakeholders. While these studies did not use the CRSL framework by Khalifa et al. (2016), they explored ideas in cultural responsiveness, transformational leadership, and occurred in non-urban racially diverse settings. Thus, these case studies offer insights into culturally responsive practices found in schools which offers insights for this study.

**Related Case Studies.** In addition to guidance that transformational leadership practices and the four CRSL strands provide, these two case studies highlight specific actions seen in culturally responsive schools and do so with a leadership focus. While numerous scholars and works are cited throughout this study, these two works are featured separately and explored more in-depth as they offered insights to culturally responses practices in schools closer in profile to the suburban site of this study. Additionally, both of these case studies went beyond examining the role of school principals as does this work. However, critiques of these works are also discussed along with how this study addresses them.

Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) conducted a case study in a diverse high school which explored the culturally responsive leadership practices of one assistant principal, Faith. In addition to interviewing and shadowing Faith along with teachers in her building, parents were interviewed in order to learn more about Faith's practices. Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) found that three areas of particular importance emerged in their data analysis in relation to culturally responsive leaders: relationships, curriculum and instruction, and school environment (p. 182). Importantly, all three of these ideas fit within the CRSL framework developed by Khalifa et al. (2016). Within these three areas, Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) identified six culturally responsive practices that Faith employed in her leadership efforts: caring for others,

building relationships, persistence and persuasiveness, being present and communicating, modeling cultural responsiveness, and fostering cultural responsiveness among others (p. 177). Similarly, many of these ideas are related to the CRSL sub-strands in the model by Khalifa et al. (2016). Some of Faith's specific practices, many of which were transformational in nature, included engaging parents in curricula decisions and classroom observations, providing staff with articles and promoting culturally responsiveness in professional development, widening her leadership base by utilizing her teachers through delegation, using collaborative walkthroughs, introducing a mentoring program for minority students, and promoting culturally relevant teaching ideas (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012).

While choosing to highlight one school leader's practices allowed for the rich, thick description that the authors sought to provide, a critique of this work concerns how Faith was selected as the primary subject of the study. Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) explained that expert panelists in equity and social justice identified eight potential candidates for this study, but they failed to identify the criteria that established what made these panelists experts. A second critique is that while the authors explain that they interviewed the candidates, performed observations, and surveyed teachers in order to ultimately select Faith as their subject, Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) did not offer specifics regarding the interview and survey questions that they asked in order to determine that Faith was the best participant to select. This study addresses this critique by clearly explaining how participants were selected (see Chapter 3). Even so, Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) were still credible as the claims that the authors made were supported with strong evidence and detailed information regarding Faith's actions and practices as a culturally responsive leader. As such, this work by Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) provided insights into culturally responsive leadership practices in a non-urban but

diverse area which is more similar to the site for this study than the CRSL work done in urban schools.

Also offering insights into culturally responsive practices was work by Mayfield and Garrison-Wade (2015) who conducted a single site case study in a school that was selected due to its success in closing achievement gaps among White and Black students. They interviewed 27 staff members, including administrators and teachers, to study their use of culturally responsive practices in areas of leadership, parent engagement, learning environment, pedagogy, student management, and shared beliefs (p. 6). Again, many of these ideas are represented within the CRSL framework by Khalifa et al. (2016). Despite conducting observations at the site for just one week, which is a critique of their work, the information they gathered revealed that this diverse middle school promoted culturally responsive practices and often transformational leadership ideas by using professional development as a way to promote and discuss issues of race, including parents in professional development efforts to train staff on communicating with parents, developing student leadership teams along racial and gender lines, offering parents the opportunity to observe lessons and offer feedback to staff, utilizing parents and grandparents as volunteer hall monitors; and recruiting a diverse and active parent teacher association (Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015).

Out of the six culturally responsive areas that they studied, the authors concluded that administrators and teachers displayed culturally responsive practices in all areas except for student management (Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015, p. 12). Further, professional development played a key role in boosting culturally responsive practices at the site, though a small number of staff resisted these efforts insisting that they were colorblind (Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015, p. 13). In his study of principals advancing practices in social justice and

equity, Theoharis (2010) also found instances of resistance from both within the school and also at the district and community levels (p. 339). However, Mayfield and Garrison-Wade (2015) concluded, “Schools cannot close opportunity/achievement gaps without culturally responsive practices” (p. 15), so it is important for school leaders to overcome such resistance. The work by Mayfield and Garrison-Wade (2015) is important to this study as it included both administrators and teachers, and it examined culturally responsive practices at a school that successfully closed achievement gaps between White and Black students. This work provides some specific practices to look for in this study exploring how school leaders enact CRSL to improve Black student experiences. While the study by Mayfield and Garrison-Wade (2015) is somewhat similar to this one in the sense that it also included principals and teachers, had Mayfield and Garrison-Wade (2015) focused on teachers in leadership roles, their study may have revealed even more about the school-wide implementation practices and strategies of culturally responsive leaders. In addressing said critique, this study includes principals and teacher leaders who often drive and implement change efforts.

## **Summary**

This literature review began by providing historical context related to suburbanization, housing policies, and changing demographics because all of these factors have contributed to the need for CRSL, especially for suburban school leaders seeking to become more culturally responsive to meet the needs of their minority students. Suburbanization in America was largely segregated due to discriminatory laws and housing practices which contributed to segregated neighborhoods and schools. As these practices were dismantled, some suburban areas have experienced increased racial and socioeconomic diversity as evidenced by the growing student diversity in suburban schools (Wepner & Gómez, 2017). In the policy context section, significant

school reform efforts were highlighted—many of which were needed as a result of equity issues advanced by suburbanization—that sought to improve the education of students in urban areas. As many of these reform efforts fell short of their goals, some of these same issues are now appearing in suburban schools due to demographic changes (Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Wepner & Gómez, 2017). Today, as school leaders face accountability pressures, many are using school and student data in their improvement efforts to promote student growth. In suburban schools, some leaders are enacting CRSL as a way to improve the experiences of their minority students. The CRSL framework is comprised of four strands and has traditionally been used to examine the actions of principals in urban schools; however, this study expands the literature by exploring the CRSL efforts of principals and teacher leaders in suburban contexts. Due to increased student diversity in suburban schools, this may provide valuable insights in narrowing achievement gaps and improving the experiences of underrepresented students in these areas.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Research Methodology and Methods**

Case study methodology was used at a single site to complete this research. A case study is defined by its, “choice of the individual unit of study and the setting of its boundaries, its casing” (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 301). Yin (1981) explained, “the distinguishing characteristic of the case study is that it attempts to examine: (a) a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when (b) the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 59). Additionally, case study methodology was a way to examine the individual case in its setting allowing for closeness to the subject of interest through both observation and access to thoughts, feelings, and desires that may exist (Bromley, 1986, pp. xi & 23). As such, case studies provide, “detail, richness, completeness, and variance” that may not be found in more quantitative, statistical studies (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 301). In this study, I viewed the school site as the “bounded case”, within which I focused exclusively on studying school leaders’ perceptions and actions. When researching a new concept, focusing on a single site can serve as a strength by allowing for thick descriptions which is important when exploring new ideas. As this study examined CRSL efforts in the context of suburban school leaders who were also participating in a new professional development program, exploring a single site was appropriate. The next sections discuss the research setting and participants, data collection, data analysis, and limitations of this study.

#### **Research Setting**

This research was conducted at McKinley Middle School (pseudonym), which is located in a suburban area in a Midwestern state. Focusing my study at a single site allowed for a situated, deep analysis of school leaders’ CRSL efforts to improve Black student experiences

with thick, rich descriptions. Bounding this case study to one site provided a more holistic account of MMS school leaders' efforts. The school serves around 750 students in grades seven and eight. Having previously attended and taught at MMS, this site was a convenience sample due to its ready availability (Yin, 2016). However, I believed this site would be rich to study for several reasons. First, according to the most recent data from a financial news company report (not named in order to protect site anonymity), this school is located in a suburban city near one of the most segregated metro areas in America. However, due to a significant increase of African American students from the metro area now enrolled at MMS, the school opted to participate in county-wide professional development called the Equity for Student Success Program (ESSP) which encourages school leaders to address issues of equity and race that impact students in their buildings. Indeed, participation in this program is a second reason that MMS was an interesting site to study. Essentially, ESSP follows a train the trainer model where school leaders from area schools receive monthly professional development at the county educational center and then return to their schools to set specific goals and lead improvement efforts. The county began offering ESSP two years ago in response to persistent achievement gaps in area schools, particularly among White and Black students. Three standards anchor ESSP efforts: (1) Foundations for engaging in equity, (2) Skills for engaging in equity, and (3) Mindset for engaging in equity. These standards challenge and educate school leaders in areas such as oppression, privilege, student expectations, vision, identity, bias, inclusivity, equity, data-driven decisions, and courage (see Appendices for more information). As such, conducting my research at this site provided understanding as to how suburban school leaders used ESSP to promote CRSL efforts in improving Black student experiences.



Table 1

*MMS Student Demographics from 2004-2019*

<b>Subgroup</b>	<b>2004-2005</b>		<b>2010-2011</b>		<b>2018-2019</b>	
	(1025 students)		(903 students)		(754 students)	
African American	135	13.2%	159	17.7%	164	21.7%
American Indian	--	N/A	--	N/A	--	N/A
Asian	11	1.1%	12	1.4%	21	2.7%
Hispanic	--	N/A	--	N/A	21	2.8%
Multiracial	46	4.5%	61	6.8%	58	7.7%
White	826	80.6%	660	73.1%	491	65.1%
Economically Disadvantaged	174	17.0%	281	31.2%	276	36.6%
Limited English Proficient	--	N/A	--	N/A	12	1.6%
Students with Disabilities	119	11.6%	134	14.9%	95	12.6%

*Source.* Data comes from State Report Card Information.

In addition to the reasons above, MMS made for a rich site to explore because, over the last 15 years, its student demographics have shifted significantly as evidenced by student enrollment trends (see Table 1). The Asian American population has grown slightly and is now 2.7%. The Hispanic population, too small to register in 2004-2005 and 2010-2011, is now at 2.8%. The multiracial population has increased to 7.7%. Most notably, the African American population has grown from 13.2% to 21.7%. With the exception of the American Indian

demographic, all of the minority student populations have increased within the last 15 years. However, the White student population has decreased over this same 15-year period from 80.6% to 65.1%. In addition to race and ethnicity subgroups, the other notable change was the substantial increase in the number of students who are identified by what the state calls economically disadvantaged. This figure has more than doubled from 17.0% in 2004-2005 to 36.6% today.

As this data shows, MMS is in the midst of changing student demographics in both racial composition and socioeconomic background which made this school an excellent site for a study exploring how suburban school leaders enact CRSL in their efforts to improve Black student experiences. Indeed, Lewis-McCoy (2014) argued that as racial and economic diversity increases at suburban schools it is important to understand how schools respond and that this is key to promoting paths to equality (p. 2). At MMS, the principals have expressed their desire to better understand and respond to the needs of all students, including those from minority populations. Additionally, as I sought site access, administrators shared that recent professional development—which I later learned was ESSP—centered on diversity and equity as the school sought to become more culturally responsive, and three participants in this study were leaders of the ESSP team. As such, this school was seemingly engaged in several efforts to address the needs of underrepresented students and close disparities among racial groups.

When it comes to selecting a research site, it is not a given that one will be granted access to enter the setting. Yin (2016) cautioned that researchers must pay particular attention to how they ask gatekeepers for permission to study the site and additional opportunities for site access (p. 121). In addition to this site being a natural fit for my study due to its demographic shifts over the past 15 years and participation in ESSP, I also selected this site because it is one in which I

am familiar having been both a student and, later, a teacher at the school. While this did not mean I would be automatically granted permission to complete the study at MMS, it did mean that there was a preexisting professional relationship between myself and the gatekeepers or institutional officials (Yin, 2016). When I approached the MMS principals and district superintendent about site access, I was granted approval to move forward with my study (following IRB approval) and there were no school or district forms that I needed to complete.

### **Research Participants**

As I was interested in studying suburban school leaders' CRSL efforts, I selected participants in a purposeful manner in order to, "yield the most relevant and plentiful data" or information-rich data (Yin, 2016, p. 93). Saldaña and Omasta (2018) found that, "Most qualitative research employs purposive sampling, in which participants are deliberately selected because they are most likely to provide insight into the phenomenon being investigated due to their position, experience, and/or identity markers" (p. 96). Further, Saldaña and Omasta (2018) note that recruitment of participants may be based around the roles held within an organization (p. 97). Such a recruitment approach was utilized for this study. By inviting all MMS department chairs, team leaders, and administrators to participate rather than just a sample, I hoped to minimize bias or the perception that I chose only certain school leaders as a way to influence results (Yin, 2016). The only criteria to participate in this study was that participants served as a department chair, team leader, or administrator and, of these 20 individuals, only four opted not to participate.

Table 2

*MMS School Leader Participant Profiles*

<b>Participant Pseudonym</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Years as an Educator</b>	<b>Years in District</b>	<b>Current Role</b>	<b>Years in a Leadership Role</b>
Mary	F	White	20	20	Dept. Chair	2
Lisa	F	White	29	29	Dept. Chair	2
Chantel	F	Black	23	17	Dept. Chair	6
Rebecca	F	White	28	19	Dept. Chair	6
Nicole	F	White	20	18	Dept. Chair	5
Crystal	F	White	23	20	Dept. Chair	2
Beth	F	White	15	6	Dept. Chair	9
Christine	F	White	29	27	Dept. Chair	23
Evelyn	F	White	36	32	Dept. Chair	20
Caleb	M	White	9	5	Dept. Chair	2
Stacy	F	White	5	5	Team Leader	3
Marie	F	White	19	19	Team Leader	6
Rachael	F	White	19	19	Team Leader	6
Deena	F	Black	26	6	Asst. Principal	14
Michael	M	White	21	21	Asst. Principal	7
Aaron	M	White	16	6	Building Principal	12

*Source.* Self-reported data by research participants, who were assigned pseudonyms.

Sixteen school leaders from MMS served as research participants in this study (see Table 2). I use the term school leaders to include principals and also teacher leaders who hold formal leadership positions in organizational and instructional practices often helping administrators make building decisions (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). At MMS, teacher leaders consisted of department chairs who led their colleagues in content-related matters and team leaders who led their colleagues concerning students that were shared among a set group of teachers. I invited a total of 20 MMS school leaders to participate in this study: 11 department chairs, six team

leaders, and three administrators. In total, 16 school leaders agreed to participate: 10 department chairs, three team leaders, and all three building administrators. Thirteen females and three males were interviewed. Two participants were African American and 14 were Caucasian.

Participants have served in a leadership capacity between two and 23 years, with the average time being approximately eight years.

### **Positionality**

This section contains a brief personal biography to explain my interest in this topic and provide insights into my positionality. Growing up as an African American child—sometimes the only one in my classes—who attended White-majority schools, I have lived the experience of feeling different. I know what it is like to be asked by my peers and even teachers, “Why do Black people...?” as if I am the sole representative of African Americans. Yet, I recognize that these questions are often asked out of curiosity with no ill intent. When I began my teaching career, I accepted a position at the district where I received my own K-12 education as the district continued to diversify. While part of me wanted to explore a new city, I ultimately decided that I wanted to be the teacher that I never had growing up; I wanted students in my hometown to be able to see themselves in me. As one of two African American teachers and the only Black male staff, I also wanted to play some part in a school trying to navigate change. Just as important, I wanted to build meaningful relationships with White students and staff and present new perspectives that only increased diversity can bring. I wanted White students and staff to know that people like me—Black educated males—exist and, we too, can thrive and excel just like everyone else with the proper support. I wanted others to understand that we are more alike than we are different. While it has been several years since I taught at this school, I returned to this site to conduct my study because my hometown community matters to me.

As a former teacher who currently possesses a school administrator's license, both experience and coursework have shaped my thinking about leadership. This thinking informed how I collected and made sense of data. Schools experiencing increased diversity undergo transformations in the sense that the culture is no longer the same. I believe that CRSL, which is an aspect of transformational leadership, can help school leaders to implement deep changes that impact a school's core operations and culture rather than making superficial surface-level changes that do not result in real improvement (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). What positions CRSL as a unique and transformational approach is its framework which challenges school leaders to assess all aspects of the school environment to ensure that minority students' needs are being met (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1272). In conducting a thorough review of the cultural responsiveness of the school environment, systemic change can be achieved through strategies such as curriculum innovations, targeted professional development, and school planning teams (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Such leadership involves more than just a single school administrator, which is why this study included the entire administrative team along with department chairs and team leaders. While all of these individuals had their own unique roles and responsibilities, collectively, they were MMS school leaders and had the potential to shape the culture, goals, operations, and vision of the school. My belief that transformational leadership involves collaboration and empowering others shaped who I collected data from. Specifically, I included teacher leaders in this study along with administrators because they jointly help develop and communicate the school's goals and actions to other teachers. Because I believe that transformational leadership is shared, I included teacher leaders as research participants because a school's organizational structure may, by design, empower these individuals. The inclusion of teacher leaders also expands current CRSL literature which has largely focused on principals.

One's beliefs, assumptions, and past experiences can potentially influence how data is collected or interpreted. This has the ability to skew, filter, and shape a research study (Peshkin, 1988). As a former teacher with an administrator's license, I have been trained to believe that leaders have the potential to influence school practices and stakeholders. In fact, during my time as a teacher, I remember being informed by my department chair about various changes as a result of decisions made at department meetings. As such, I chose to focus this study on school leaders' CRSL efforts to improve Black student experiences. While my assumption was that there were likely some attempts to address school disparities, I did not assume that these attempts were effective or ineffective. However, I operated under the belief that school leaders were best situated to provide rich data regarding the building's efforts to become more culturally responsive. This is because teacher leaders and administrators, collectively, interacted and met regularly with all teachers in the school. As a result, they were well-positioned to inform me about CRSL efforts that may have occurred throughout all areas of the building.

A researcher's own characteristics can sometimes pose challenges and my identity as an African American male in an environment that was largely Caucasian and female is worth noting. The site for this study was experiencing an increase in its minority student population and a decrease in its White student population. Exploring CRSL necessitates speaking about race which could make some participants uncomfortable or unsure of how to respond to certain questions. Groves, Fowler, Couper, Lepkowski, Singer, and Tourangeau (2009) found that discussion of sensitive topics such as race can result in biased responses due to social desirability which is the tendency to portray oneself in a more favorable manner by limiting undesirable attributes in favor of more desirable ones (p. 224). Indeed, Caucasians sometimes display more positive responses about issues involving race when being interviewed by African Americans

resulting in race of interviewer effects (Hatchett & Schuman, 1975; Krysan & Couper, 2003). Qu and Dumay (2011) also noted that in studies involving interviews there is always the chance that interviewees change responses based on how they relate to the interviewer. I believe that my positionality as it related to this site actually encouraged more honest answers and rich data from participants due to my previous teaching role at the school. Participants appeared comfortable with me as a researcher, possibly because I was previously a member of the school community.

As a former teacher at the site, I had prior professional relationships with some of the research participants. Specifically, I served on a team with three of the teacher leaders and interacted with these individuals daily during team planning time. However, it had been five years since I was a teacher in the building and this was the first time I heard from participants in any depth regarding ideas and concepts related to CRSL. As a former student at the site, 20 years had passed and the building staff had changed almost entirely. Additionally, participants were not chosen based on whom I knew; instead, participants were selected based on having a formal leadership position at the site. As such, the data I collected was not impacted based on prior professional relationships. If another researcher entered this site interested in interviewing school leaders, he would need to interview the same individuals that I invited to participate in this study.

While data never speaks alone and is shaped by the researcher's interpretation and analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018), I made low level inferences in early coding cycles to ensure that data decisions were made as a result of what the data showed and not what I assumed about the research participants. Carspecken (1996) explained that this involves paraphrasing statements made by participants without moving too far contextually from what participants meant. This involved frequently reviewing data points and reviewing them within context to ensure that unsupported higher-level inferences were not being made. When it



became necessary to make higher-level inferences in order to reach a thematic level, I recorded how and why I made decisions based on the data. In light of my positionality, it was necessary to explain my analytic approach and sensemaking of the data at this site. For these reasons, I utilized a researcher's journal in an electronic format to record my feelings, thoughts, and hunches throughout this qualitative process. This journal also served as an audit trail and provided me with the opportunity to observe both the research site and myself which Peshkin (1986) advised.

### **Data Collection**

For this study, interview data, observational data, and documents were collected over a four-month period spanning from November 2019 through February 2020. Prior to beginning this study, however, I sought and secured approval from the Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A). All 16 participants also read and signed an informed consent document (see Appendix B). Interview data from school leaders was collected and analyzed in order to help answer my research questions. School and meeting observations also provided rich data for this study by capturing what actually occurred. Documents and artifacts were collected in order to see if and how written words articulated and shaped school leaders' CRSL efforts (see Appendices C, D, and E for protocols). I focused on these data sources as they provided insights into school leaders' thoughts, discussions, and actions related to the concepts of the CRSL strands. Further, these sources provided understanding regarding the opportunities and challenges school leaders faced in their CRSL efforts. Below, I elaborate on data collection sources, methodological information, and what I gained from each source.

**Interviews.** I conducted two interviews with each of the 16 school leader participants for a total of 32 semi-structured interviews. I developed interview protocols for both rounds of

interviews in order to ensure that participants were asked the same questions (see Appendix C). Using interview protocols, participants were asked a variety of questions related to aspects of the CRSL framework in order to help me answer my research questions. I was especially interested in school leaders' thoughts and actions as well as any changes, initiatives, or interventions that they implemented in their school improvement efforts aimed at African American students. Participants were also asked about the opportunities and challenges that they faced in their CRSL efforts. Prior to conducting this study, protocols were piloted with two doctoral student peers, including a former teacher who had some knowledge of the CRSL framework and this allowed me to improve the quality of interviews by gathering feedback, testing the clarity of questions, and also establishing a timeframe for interview questions. Interviews typically lasted from 30 to 45 minutes with the average time closer to 30 minutes. For teacher leaders, interviews occurred during their prep period and most often in their classrooms. Interviews with principals took place in their offices and were scheduled at their convenience, most often at the beginning of the day. Interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder. Upon completion of the interviews, files were stored electronically on a password-protected computer. Since I interviewed 16 school leaders across various departments, it is likely that unstructured interviews would have resulted in very different topics being discussed. However, at the end of all interviews, participants were asked an open-ended question about any additional information that they would like to add that they felt was pertinent to the interview or study. Concluding interviews in this manner allowed participants to present new information, at times information that I did not anticipate, and I was able to ask follow-up questions as necessary. In addition to asking the remaining questions from my protocols, the second round of interviews provided me with the opportunity to gather more information about ESSP. After this professional development initiative was mentioned in the

first round of interviews by all 16 participants, I believed that this program would play an important role in this study's findings. After interviewing all school leaders once initially, my plan was to conduct additional interviews based on those which resulted in rich data. However, I found that all school leaders shared valuable information respective to their departments or areas so all participants were asked and agreed to participate in the second round of interviews.

**Observations.** I conducted 19 hours of observations consisting of Building Leadership Team (BLT) and Team Leader (TL) meetings (4 hours), department meetings (3 hours), team meetings (3 hours), ESSP meetings (4 hours), a building-wide staff meeting (1 hour), and district-wide professional development (4 hours). During all of my observations, I was a non-participant with two exceptions. In one ESSP meeting, I was asked for my thoughts on a culture day that was being planned but kept my comments minimal primarily because I was in agreement with the suggestions that others made. The second instance was during a district-wide professional development session where all attendees participated in a race-based simulation designed to educate staff on societal inequities and institutional racism as it related to past discriminatory laws and how this negatively impacted African Americans and privileged Caucasians. During this simulation, I was provided a card randomly assigning me to a racial and socioeconomic background and I contributed to group discussions with educators at the table who were also given cards. The BLT meetings consisted of all department chairs, the two assistant principals, and the building principal. The TL meetings were comprised of three seventh and three eighth grade teacher leaders and also administration. As such, most of these observations provided me with the opportunity to witness the target population of my study—MMS school leaders—interact with one another in group settings and also in smaller meetings that they led with others.

While interviews helped me to learn about individual participants' perceptions and culturally responsive actions, observing groups act as a collective allowed me to see what was discussed or omitted among larger bodies. Observations provided understanding as to how individual department and team experiences, opportunities, challenges, and goals fit into larger school improvement efforts which helped me to answer my research questions. In attending department meetings in which department chairs shared information with teachers from the BLT meetings, I was able to better understand how information is being interpreted by department chairs and how they are communicating that information to other teachers. I attended TL meetings for the same reasons. After I conducted the first round of interviews and realized the importance of school leaders' ESSP efforts in promoting CRSL, I attended and observed both school and county-level ESSP meetings which helped me to better understand how school leader response at MMS was being shaped by this professional development program.

All meeting and observation notes were recorded on a laptop. Others present at meetings used their computers, so recording jottings on my computer minimized my presence more than using a recorder. Of particular interests during observations were discussions on school improvement plans or efforts, opportunities and challenges departments and teams faced, and comments that alluded to the schools' increased Black student population. Essentially, I was most interested in words and actions relating to CRSL strands in order to capture ideas that were relevant to the framework as well as my research questions. After all, Yin (1988) argued that building a case study on clear conceptual frameworks results in findings that are more structured in terms of both writing and reading (p. 64).

**Documents or Artifacts.** In order to help answer my research questions, a variety of documents were collected. Meeting agendas allowed me to see what school leaders spent their

time discussing. I also collected meeting minutes which reflected discussions that were had but not originally on the agenda. This highlighted areas, questions, and concerns that diverted attention from the building's goals or provided insights into leadership response to the unexpected. Documents from the ESSP team and county meetings were also collected allowing me to better understand the scope of CRSL efforts. These documents contained MMS school data, disparities, and specific goals to address these disparities among Black students along with the rationale behind their actions (see Appendix F). State report card data was expressed verbally in participant interviews, so this information was captured in interview transcripts. However, ESSP artifacts (see Appendix F), particularly information regarding gaps in performance and discipline, allowed for additional data collection and also triangulation through the verification of findings (Yin, 2016). Given my research questions, these documents were useful in examining school leader actions to improve Black student experiences. All documents that I received were copied, scanned, and uploaded to a password-protected computer. To ensure anonymity of the school site, identifiable information was redacted. Having data from interviews, observations, and documents allowed me to use a triangulated data approach in answering my research questions (see Table 3). Yin (2016) described this method as having a minimum of three ways to corroborate or verify data and findings (p. 87). Having multiple data sources from interviews, observations, and documents ensured that I did not rely on a single source to answer my research question.

Table 3

*Data Collection Question Mapping*

<b>Data Source</b>	<b>RQ 1</b>	<b>RQ 2</b>
<b>Documents</b>		
Meeting Agendas and Minutes	X	X
ESSP Artifacts	X	X
<b>Interviews</b>		
Protocols	X	X
<b>Observation</b>		
Protocols	X	X

**Data Analysis**

In order to analyze data for this study, I conducted a thematic analysis which involved transcription, coding, analysis, and written report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I utilized a five-step process in order to move from transcription to coding to identifying themes: Step 1: Transcription and Preparation, Step 2: First Cycle Coding, Step 3: Second Cycle Coding, Step 4: Third Cycle Coding, and Step 5: Production of Themes. To support my analysis process, I used Atlas.ti which is qualitative data analysis software. Ultimately, my goal with this data was to produce themes to answer my research questions. Step 1: Transcriptions and Preparation involved making sure that my interview data was accurate since these transcripts were used during each step of this process. Saldaña and Omasta (2018) explained how important accuracy is when it comes to transcriptions noting that changing or omitting words can impact the data’s meaning (p. 114). I used a digital recorder for all 32 interviews and uploaded the files to Rev.com to utilize the automated transcription service which estimates 80 percent accuracy.

Prior to coding, however, I listened to each interview and corrected transcription errors to ensure that the verbatim transcripts were accurate.

Before explaining the steps of my actual coding process, it is important to note how my theoretical framework informed the development of my coding schemes. The CRSL framework by Khalifa et al. (2016) largely informed the development of my coding in the sense that it shaped my interview protocol and the types of questions that I asked participants. The four strands of CRSL are: (1) Critical Self-Awareness, (2) Culturally Responsive Curricula and Teacher Preparation, (3) Culturally Responsive and Inclusive School Environments, and (4) Engaging Students and Parents in Community Contexts (Khalifa et al., 2016). As such, the development of my coding scheme involved keywords of this framework to be coded in advance. In other words, some of my codes were a priori or, “Determined beforehand, such as codes and categories formulated before fieldwork and data analysis” (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018, p. 411).

Steps two through four involved the actual coding of transcript data. Step 2: First Cycle Codes involved coding data using low-level inferences in order to stay close to the data. This included descriptive coding which, “summarizes in a word or short phrase—most often as a noun—the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018, p. 217). I also utilized in vivo coding in which, “a code is assigned in the analysis of qualitative data and represented by a word or phrase that is taken directly from the data being coded” (Yin, 2016, p. 337). This extended to repetitious words as they can signal patterns or themes. As noted above, some codes were a priori drawing from the CRSL theoretical framework (see Appendix G). At the end of my first cycle of coding, I had a total of 196 codes. However, after consolidation of similar ideas (i.e. *support at home* and *home support*), I ended up with 123 codes (see Appendix G).

Step 3: Second Cycle Codes were elevated in their level of inference but still based in the data. Here, I began to formulate possible categories by beginning to align my codes with concepts as they related to the CRSL theoretical framework. As such, some a priori codes were used particularly those directly stated in the CRSL strands and sub-strands of this study's framework such as "professional development" and "student-teacher relationships" which were still largely descriptive at a low-level. Saldaña and Omasta (2018) explained that, "Low-level inferences address and summarize what is happening within the particulars of the case or field site" (p. 246). During Step 3, I began to move beyond codes and towards categorical development. At the end of my second cycle of coding, I had a total of 15 categories (see Appendix G).

Step 4: Third Cycle Codes moved towards higher-level inferences. Saldaña and Omasta (2018) explained that, "High-level inferences extend beyond the particulars to speculate on what they mean in the more general social scheme of things" (p. 246). Keeping this in mind, I made higher-level inferences as they related to the CRSL framework and also my research questions. Utilizing the CRSL framework lent itself to categorical development though additional categories also emerged. To generate categories, related codes were grouped together around similar topics, in this case, around some of the CRSL strands but also other ideas. When moving from category to theme development, I delved deeper into the categories which were largely topical to see what is "coherent, consistent, and distinctive" about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 96). During Step 4, I made higher-level inferences and moved towards identifying themes. At the end of my third cycle of coding, I had a total of 10 categories and candidate themes (see Appendix G).



Step 5: Production of Themes resulted in key themes that related to my research questions. For example, two of my candidate themes were “Leadership Behaviors, Influences, and Responsibilities” and “Equity Training & Professional Development.” Together, these ideas led to a theme of “Developing Cultural Awareness & Change of Practices” as both related to each other in the context of my research. In making higher-level inferences, my researcher notes were instrumental in helping me to understand my own thinking and interpretations as this was a very iterative process. Further, in creating a thematic map (see Chapter 4), researcher notes allowed me to identify what worked, what did not work, and how my thinking changed over time. This was also helpful when engaging peers for feedback. During this step, I also narrowed down my list of quotes from interview transcripts to include in my final manuscript. Most quotes that were chosen served as representative samples of common ideas and expressions. However, I also chose certain quotes that were outliers to illustrate ideas that differed from that of the majority as this can have some significance to the research questions. The intent with step five was to move from raw data to the highest data-based inferences that I could make. At the end of this process, I identified six themes to answer my research questions all of which are explored in the next chapter (see Appendix G).

I took several steps in order to assure validity and trustworthiness. First, I collected data through multiple sources rather than relying on any single source of data. Yin (2016) described triangulation as using multiple ways of verifying data and exploring the convergence and divergence of findings. With observations of multiple groups, a variety of artifacts, and a total of 32 interviews from 16 participants, I did not rely on only one data source. A specific example of how I engaged in triangulation is highlighted in the information I learned about ESSP. After several participants discussed this professional development initiative in their interviews, I

collected documents and artifacts to learn more about the program. I also conducted observations by attending two ESSP meetings, one at MMS and one at the county educational center. Thus, I was able to verify and analyze the convergence and divergence of data and findings regarding ESSP in multiple ways. I kept an electronic researcher's journal to record my own thoughts and feelings throughout this process which allowed me to make observations of the site and also myself as a researcher which is an action recommended by Peshkin (1986). Prior to my data collection I decided this was a practice that I would observe since it is recommended by scholars, however, I underestimated how valuable this would be to me as a researcher. This also helped to create an audit trail by detailing my research steps and promoting transparency. Additionally, interview transcripts and observational field notes were maintained to show how my findings developed over the course of this study. In order to foster trustworthiness and transparency, the appendices contain documents and artifacts, including a code map.

To further promote validity, I also engaged in peer review as part of my data analysis. In addition to meeting with my dissertation chair to obtain feedback on my interpretations and thematic maps, I had regular meetings with Suraj Uttamchandani from Indiana University's Graduate Research Consultation Service offered through the Inquiry Methodology Program in the School of Education. Finally, I had the opportunity to discuss my findings with three MMS administrators who served as participants in this study, a process known as member checking (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Participants expressed agreement with the findings of this work, discussing and confirming how ESSP has shaped their efforts to improve Black student experiences. Thus, member checking served as another way to validate this study's findings (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). While all of these steps were designed to promote validity and trustworthiness, no study is perfect. Next, I explore the limitations of this work.

## **Limitations**

As with any study, this research had limitations. One potential limitation is that I focused on individuals who held formalized leadership roles at the site. Specifically, I defined school leaders as team leaders, department chairs, and administrators because these individuals hold official leadership titles in the building. However, it is conceivable that some MMS staff do not perceive some of these individuals to be school leaders. Conversely, it is possible that there are other individuals at MMS who play informal but central leadership roles within the school as it relates to promoting CRSL. For instance, this could include veteran staff members who are valued as school leaders due to their longevity in the building, and whose support is highly sought-after by administrators and teacher leaders for the implementation of new initiatives. Indeed, this may point to the need for future research that aims to more broadly understand how CRSL becomes enacted across a school. I do not believe that this limitation had a significant impact on my research design because I was most interested in those with formal leadership roles and responsibilities. Further, the 16 participants in this study represent departments throughout the building and, through interviews, they had opportunities to share information about other staff members that they led and several did so. I also began this study open to the possibility of including additional participants should others have emerged as being key leaders at MMS, but my interviews with participants yielded no additional recommendations.

My positionality as a researcher at this site is another potential limitation. As both a former student and teacher at the site, I could be considered an insider as I am familiar with the school, district, and community. I also had a professional relationship with some of those interviewed for this study. However, five years had passed since I taught at MMS and I no longer had regular communication with those at the site. As such, my positionality falls between that of

an insider and outsider. Importantly, whether positioned as an insider, outsider, or somewhere in between, some level of subjectivity may exist. To address this potential limitation, I took numerous measures to promote validity and trustworthiness, as discussed earlier. Though I am still somewhat familiar with the site and some of the staff, this time away enabled me to re-enter the environment with a fresh lens. Indeed, this was true for Galam (2015) who returned to his former community to conduct research. Galam (2015) found that, even as a native, he had experiences similar to and different from those he studied. Additionally, Galam (2015) explained that returning to his community was, “important to my capacity for reflection, to my capacity to step back in order to see things more critically and to disabuse myself of common-sense assumptions” (p. 45). Utilizing a researcher’s journal throughout my research process served as a way for me to step back, see critically, and check assumptions.

## Chapter 4

### Findings

#### Overview of Findings

In exploring how school leaders enacted Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) in their efforts to improve Black student experiences (RQ1), I found that participation in the Equity for Student Success Program (ESSP) informed practices at MMS and was used as the strategy to promote CRSL. Initially, my knowledge of ESSP was limited; I simply knew that school leaders were participating in a new professional development initiative to become more culturally responsive to the needs of minority students. However, after conducting my first round of interviews with MMS school leaders, ESSP efforts were consistently referenced by all 16 participants so I inquired more about these efforts in the second round of interviews. Three school leaders who participated in this study also led the ESSP Team at MMS, which essentially functioned as a CRSL team, and provided important insights for this study. Further, after finding that ESSP was being utilized by school leaders in efforts to promote CRSL, I collected ESSP artifacts and conducted observations of ESSP meetings to learn more about this initiative. While some of MMS school leaders' changes attributed to ESSP efforts were minor, others reflected ideas of transformational leadership since they were second-order, deep changes that targeted the school's core technologies (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006, p. 99). I also found that in their ESSP efforts to become more culturally responsive, school leaders have faced numerous opportunities and challenges (RQ2). At MMS, both interviews and artifacts confirmed disparities in student data for African American students in achievement and discipline (see Appendix F), which led to specific efforts aimed at Black students. In this chapter, the terms *ESSP efforts* and *CRSL efforts* were at times used interchangeably because *ESSP efforts* were *CRSL efforts*; in other words, the

former was the strategy of the latter but both were efforts to improve Black student experiences by better responding to their needs. I provide this explanation before identifying and explaining themes because both of these terms are heavily featured throughout this chapter.

Thematic findings through data analysis resulted in the identification of six themes: (1) Centrality of Student Data & Decision-Making, (2) Strategic Academic Support Programs & Interventions, (3) Embedding Cultural Responsiveness within Curricular Practices, (4) Developing Cultural Awareness & Change of Practices, (5) Intentionality in Building Meaningful Student Relationships, and (6) Considering Students' Home Lives and Parental Support. In creating these themes, I considered the number of participants who spoke to these ideas and also the depth at which they spoke; that is, if an idea was simply referenced in passing or if participants spoke in detail or provided specific examples. For themes one through five, ESSP efforts shaped practices in each of these areas to improve the experiences of African American students specifically. While theme six did not exclusively focus on race and, thus, fell outside of the scope of CRSL efforts, this theme showed school leader response to changing student needs with a particular focus on students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. As participants shared in interviews that many Black students at MMS were also classified by what the state calls economically disadvantaged, this theme highlights other ways that some African American students were being supported by school efforts but more so because of their socioeconomic status. As the thematic map highlights (see Figure 2), themes one through five are placed inside of the circle to show that ESSP efforts shaped practices in terms of improving Black student experiences. However, theme six fell outside of the circle because it was responsive to student needs but not because of ESSP efforts which were raced-focused at this particular site. Next, in addressing my research questions, I discuss the six themes in-depth,

explaining how each relates to CRSL efforts while also highlighting the opportunities and challenges that school leaders encountered in their efforts.



Figure 2. Thematic Map.

**Theme 1: Centrality of Student Data & Decision-Making**

At MMS, school leaders’ collection and use of student data was central to their efforts in decision-making and providing additional support to students. Data was generated from a number of sources at both the classroom and building level, though the FastBridge assessment, emerged as a significant data source as it was named across all 16 participants. FastBridge offers computer-based assessments that students used throughout the year and it is unique in that it collected both academic data in English Language Arts (ELA) and math and also social emotional data which provided information about students’ overall well-being. This section begins by highlighting school leaders’ efforts to utilize data to support the learning of all students and later shows how CRSL efforts have informed practices by providing additional support to African American students specifically. Mary, a department chair, explained how central the use of student data is in her department:

That is all we do, especially with this new FastBridge. We target the bottom 20 percent of our students and we are really trying to hone in on our tier one instruction to help those students. But then, on the side, to help them with intervention to not necessarily try to

catch them up, but just to make them stronger where they are at so that they grow. So we use that. We also use AIR data, our value-added data. We use lots of data.

This excerpt shows the significant role that student data had in helping school leaders to make instructional decisions and allowed for them to audit their effectiveness. In essence, this participant was describing her engagement in aspects of the continuous school improvement (CSI) cycle, discussed earlier, which shows how school leaders used data to assess, analyze, adjust, and repeat these steps in order to improve both teaching and learning (Elgart, 2017; O'Day & Smith, 2016). The department chair and her teachers used data from the lowest performing 20 percent of students to shape their whole class instruction which impacted all students. Further, students who scored in the lowest 20 percent received additional support outside of class that was focused on supporting them at their current level in order to help them grow. This help was designed to address gaps in knowledge that prevented students from understanding current grade level material. Several participants shared that report card data for MMS revealed students who are African American, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged scored lower than White students in both math and ELA, respectively. Academic disparities in math were especially highlighted in interviews and this information was also evident in artifacts (see Appendix F). As such, a focus on using data to provide targeted support was more likely to have a greater impact on these populations which is a goal of CRSL. While collecting and using student data provided school leaders with the opportunity to make the best decisions for student learning, this excerpt also highlights a possible challenge. When Mary stated, “We use lots of data,” and, “That is all we do,” there was the sense that this process was time consuming, in terms of both collecting the data and analyzing it. Still, this practice presented an opportunity for



school leaders to make data-based decisions and provide students with the support that they needed.

In addition to how data was used by department chairs, Aaron, the building principal, stated how data is used in other areas as well:

We have things set up with advisories, and we are using some FastBridge data in language arts and math. This year, we just did a social emotional learning screener that we are going to use to look at, to find out what ways we either are meeting or are not meeting student needs. We use grades, grade checks, and then check-ins with teachers. So, various ways we tried to utilize the data that we can gather on those things to hopefully meet the needs of students in various ways throughout the day.

This response shows that FastBridge data extended beyond the reach of the academic subjects and was also being used to assess students' social emotional needs. The principal also highlighted the importance of seeing what worked, which acknowledged that there was room to make improvements in some areas. Together, these excerpts show there were numerous other data sources that school leaders utilized including grades, conversations with teachers, state testing data, and value-added data. Other participants also referenced surveys, student feedback, and conversations with students and parents as data sources. Thus far, these excerpts highlight how school leaders collected and used data to guide decisions and provide support for all students.

CRSL efforts have added a new layer to collecting and using student data in order to provide targeted support to African American students specifically. Through their participation in the Equity for Student Success Program (ESSP), discussed earlier, MMS school leaders received professional development in issues of equity, identity, and race, and they set and

implemented specific data-based goals for their school concerning their Black students (see Appendix F). At MMS, student data revealed disproportionate results for African American students leading to particular efforts aimed at this group. Deena, the seventh grade assistant principal and also a member on the ESSP team, explained what a close look at school data revealed:

African Americans are a lot lower than their counterparts looking at math. In particular, I think our White students are maybe closer to 70 percent where minorities are maybe 30 percent passage rate in our state testing. And that is a huge, huge, huge discrepancy. So staff members know that, we have presented that this year. So we are setting goals to help students achieve, all students achieve. But especially looking at our African American students, why is it they are not, they are not grasping the knowledge that the other White students are.

With such a sizeable achievement gap, Deena was interested in determining why Black students were not understanding and performing similar to White students though Welton et al. (2013) found this can result in deficit thinking and efforts to “fix” students instead of fixing practices that contribute to such gaps. However, this was not the case at MMS as participants shared in interviews and artifacts supported (see Appendix F) that participation in ESSP raised not only awareness but pushed school leaders to set goals to improve the performance of Black students and also change some of their practices. An artifact from this site revealed one goal related to this area: “Decrease the disparity between the percent of White students and students of color who are recommended for Algebra 1” (see Appendix F). A primary purpose of CRSL is to implement practices designed to support minority students and increasing awareness is key to providing additional support to these students. This also speaks to transformational leadership

where school leaders are working towards common goals (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). At MMS, ESSP participation helped to increase awareness of this goal as evidenced in the example below.

Marie, a team leader, elaborated on one way that school leaders worked to reach this goal as a result of ESSP:

So right now we have a couple of initiatives going on. I think both of them are pretty much from the Equity group. But one is that we were supposed to focus on four minority kids per team that are like really close to passing the test, maybe failed the state test by a couple points. So, we are really, our goal is to get them to pass this year. So really focusing on those four, working one on one a little bit more with them or making sure that when we do these benchmarks that they are passing them and getting them the help they need so they will pass the state test.

As this excerpt highlights, the participant linked “initiatives” with “our goal is to...” demonstrating how ESSP has encouraged teachers to provide additional help to Black students that were close to passing the state test. Instead of simply increasing the awareness of Black student performance and data which can promote the idea that students need “fixing” (Welton et al., 2013), ESSP better informed school leaders about their practices providing them with opportunities to make modifications and work more closely with Black students, as evidenced in Marie’s excerpt above. This is important as some teachers have been found to offer more attention and assistance to students from elite backgrounds (DiMaggio, 1982; Jaeger 2011). While school leaders reported they have long been utilizing student data for decision-making in order to support students through CSI cycles, these excerpts demonstrate how ESSP efforts to reduce math achievement gaps for Black students shaped the practices of school leaders who began more actively supporting these students.

While the first two excerpts explain how school leaders collected and used student data to guide decisions for the support of all students, including those of color, the last two excerpts reveal how ESSP advanced CRSL efforts by specifically using data as a way to provide additional support to Black students. While school leaders faced the challenge of closing significant achievement gaps, this also provided them with the opportunity to use data to provide targeted support to the students who needed it most according to the data. Theme 1 highlights how school leaders' existing practice of collecting and using student data was later informed by CRSL efforts in order to provide additional support to Black students and reach their ESSP goal.

**Theme 2: Strategic Academic Support Programs & Interventions**

School leaders at MMS have developed a vast number of support programs and interventions to address a variety of student needs, and ESSP efforts informed new, strategic supports for African American students specifically (see Appendix F). Previous academic support programs and interventions for all students included targeted intervention during study hall, alternative classrooms with computer-based programs, and an after school homework club. While these supports did not begin exclusively to support African American students, many Black students participated in these programs and interventions and received additional help as a result. However, findings revealed two specific ways in which ESSP allowed MMS to expand its CRSL efforts to improve the experiences of African American students in terms of support programs and interventions.

After the ESSP team found a disparity in the number of Black students taking Algebra One relative to their population (see Appendix F), school leaders decided to implement a math mentoring program that paired Black middle school students with Black high school students who excelled in math. In their study, Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) also found that mentoring

programs were introduced to provide minority students with additional support. With the middle and high school located on the same grounds, there were few barriers to creating this new program. Deena, the seventh grade assistant principal, explained:

With our Equity program, one of our goals is eighth grade math. I am looking at the disparities between minority students and White students passing the end of year exam, the AIR assessment. And it is a huge difference. So this year we are strategically looking at their scores from last year. Our African American students, male and female, those students we are really trying to partner with the high school since we are neighbors and having high school students mentor our students who are just right there, a few questions and they would have passed. And that the teachers are aware that these are the students that we are really focused on this year and how are you supporting them in the classroom. I pulled in each student on that list and had a meeting with them about how they learn, would they like to work with a high school student, would they like to be pulled out during their study hall to work with a teacher that is off that period. So they had a choice. And then, after every benchmark assessment, we would go back as the Equity team and look at the progress those students are making.

The school's CRSL efforts to improve the performance of Black students in math was informed by ESSP participation. After reviewing the data and discovering disparities in math, school leaders became more intentional about setting goals for Black students in math and implemented new supports in order to reach these goals. This was made visible in interviews, observations of ESSP meetings, and also ESSP artifacts (see Appendix F). Notably, the assistant principal involved students in these decisions. This mentoring program was not being pushed upon them; instead, students were given the opportunity to have a voice in their learning. In addition to

receiving additional support from teachers, Black students were supported by their older peers in high school. While not directly explained in this excerpt, Deena appeared to have implied that there was something that students were able to get from a Black peer and mentor that teachers were unable to provide.

Crystal, a team leader, provided additional insight on this point:

We are doing a mentorship program with the high school now where we are trying to get kids from the high school to mentor and work with kids that look like them so that they can see like-success. Because we found with a lot of African American boys it is not cool to be smart, you know, you do not want to show how smart you are kind of thing. So, just trying to bridge those gaps for those kids is huge.

Chantel, a department chair, expanded on this idea of coolness and tied it to achievement gaps:

“With African American students there is a stigma of being White, being too White, and not being cool enough. So there is an achievement gap there as a result of that. Because you do not try as hard, you do not learn as much.” Supporting this idea of a stigma, Tyson (2011) found that high-achieving Black students in more racially diverse schools were, at times, taunted for trying to “act White” when demonstrating their intelligence. While this is not true for all Black students nor is this the sole cause of achievement gaps as discussed earlier, together, these excerpts show that in pairing Black students who were close to passing the state test with high-achieving Black high school students, they would see that there were high schoolers who looked like them that were successful in math. In his study of principals advancing social justice practices, Theoharis (2010) cited a principal who reimagined the school schedule to provide marginalized students with new learning opportunities outside of “kill and drill” practices (p. 344). The new mentoring program at MMS also involved reimagining as Black students not only received additional help

in math, but also had the opportunity to build relationships with other Black students who exemplified the idea that being smart was cool. While there was no guarantee that students would be paired with someone they perceived to be cool as in popular, at the very least, this effort allowed students to see that intelligence was not exclusive to skin color. Black students benefit when they have Black teachers who can serve as role models (Wepner & Gómez, 2017) and, while this was not a possibility at MMS as there were no African American math teachers, this CRSL effort of pairing them with students who looked like them might have been the next best option.

A second ESSP effort at MMS designed to help school leaders become more culturally responsive to improve Black student experiences was to hear from them directly through the use of focus groups. With the ESSP highlighting disparities in academics and discipline, school leaders formed focus groups with African American students in order to learn more about their thoughts, feelings, and experiences regarding the school environment and culture (see Appendix F). Marie, a team leader, explained that the intent was to have a representative sample of all Black students to hear about a variety of experiences:

The Equity group is also doing a focus group right now, which is African American students, where they wanted all levels of African American students, high level, middle, and low. And they just did the focus group yesterday to kind of find out the needs and what we need to do for minority groups in our district.

In hearing from Black students performing at all levels, school leaders demonstrated their understanding that not all Black students experienced school in a uniform manner. Importantly, this shows that they did not view all Black students as the same, but as a group with varying needs which may help them to respond more effectively. As such, this focus group presented

school leaders with an opportunity to become more culturally responsive by listening to what Black students had to say. Rachael, a team leader, added: “I do not know what they are asking them, but I think we are listening to them more to see. I mean, we do not know what they need until we ask them. So, I think we are asking them more.” While Rachael acknowledged the importance of learning more about the needs of African American students, her other comments revealed her concerns about what this meant for non-Black students:

Sometimes I think that I just do not want all the other kids to be left out though. I know we are focusing on that [Black student experiences] and I think that is wonderful, but sometimes I am afraid our focus does not shift so far the other direction that other kids get kind of pushed aside. So, I feel like we are moving in the right direction, but I still feel like we have a lot to learn.

While Rachael was the only participant out of 16 to express this concern, meaning that this excerpt was not representative, her comments present a possible challenge for suburban school leaders when focusing improvement efforts exclusively on African American students. In their work, Wepner and Gómez (2017) also found that school leaders faced challenges in responding to minority students’ needs while also remaining sensitive to their White students. In one instance, a suburban district leader experienced pushback from the school board when he attempted to move funds to provide programming support to improve minority student outcomes (Wepner & Gómez, 2017, p. 32). Rachael was supportive of the efforts to learn and respond to the needs of Black students, but the challenge to this CRSL effort was that she feared this could come at the expense of White students. This excerpt underscores the importance that, as school leaders promote CRSL efforts, they continually explain that these support programs and interventions are data-based and in line with the steps in the CSI cycle. In other words, data



helped to identify what was not working in the school and the response was to provide help for those most impacted. Further, addressing issues of equity should not be viewed as a zero-sum game where improving Black student experiences means that White students are experiencing a loss. This idea also speaks to leading with courage for the purposes of social justice and inclusion. Disparities in academic and disciplinary data for African American students informed both of these CRSL initiatives (see Appendix F), so this must be reiterated and communicated with staff in order to address these concerns.

### **Theme 3: Embedding Cultural Responsiveness within Curricular Practices**

When it comes to curricular practices, including discussions school leaders have with other staff in the building, department chairs play a key role in leading initiatives as they meet with other department chairs, administrators, and also with their fellow department members. Through participant interviews and observations, I found that department chair roles and responsibilities largely included ordering supplies, mentoring colleagues, supporting cross curricular efforts, sharing information between their teachers and administration, running meetings, interpreting student data, leading professional development, and ensuring that their colleagues understand the curriculum and how it aligns to state standards. Much of this is similar to what others have found regarding the responsibilities of department chairs (DeAngelis, 2013; Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007). While I did not find evidence that CRSL had significantly altered curricular practices in every department, one of the primary ways by which school leaders worked to embed cultural responsiveness in the curriculum was through ongoing conversations with each other and their teachers. ESSP efforts informed school leaders' engagement in new conversations with their department members and they implemented a number of curricular changes, both big and small.

The most significant curricular change to improve Black student experiences was found in the math department, and participants shared in interviews and artifacts supported that ESSP efforts informed these changes (see Appendix F). After reviewing achievement data, school leaders determined that a disproportionate number of Black students were not being placed in eighth grade Algebra One, even in cases where they scored high enough for placement. Similar findings have been cited by other scholars (Chapman, 2014; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Welton, 2013). As a result of ESSP, school leaders at MMS made a systemic change to the math rubric and this action significantly altered the placement process which is a function of transformational leadership. Aaron, the building principal, shared:

We are using data solely as the decision making tool for what students should be recommended for gifted classes. We are taking some of the teacher input out of it. Not that it is not valid, but sometimes students just need a place to thrive and maybe he was a rascal in my class so he probably cannot handle it.

Teacher input, which can be subjective due to student behavior, was removed from making placement decisions. In his study of a suburban school district consisting of primarily White students and a growing number of Black students, Lewis-McCoy (2014) also found that teacher decisions played a role in classroom racial segregation (p. 160). As such, this change at MMS had the potential to address this opportunity gap. While some scholars caution that an overreliance on data can allow school leaders to ignore poor teaching and center discussions around what students cannot do (Anyon, 2005; Jun, 2011), this decision to focus solely on data was designed to increase Black student placement in an advanced math class (see Appendix F). A challenge then for school leaders was to balance teacher empowerment while doing what was best for students and, in this case, that was to ensure that Black students had the opportunity to

take Algebra One based on their performance and nothing else. This also illustrates a tension that can be found between CRSL and transformational leadership as transforming practices to become more culturally responsive meant less input from teachers. Crystal, a department chair, further explained the problems with the previous rubric:

Dealing with equity, that is one of our pieces. The nine percent of African American males that are in Algebra One by eighth grade year. That was one of our metrics from last year. Just the disparity there between population and also discipline, you know, so it all ties in together. The percent of discipline with African American males is so high versus like what the actual population is and then the same thing with achievement. So we are starting some things this year. We eliminated the rubric. We had a really subjective rubric for putting kids into math when they came here. So behavior was involved and parental support. So a lot of those kids that should have been there were not getting placed because of the subjective parts of that rubric. So we redid the rubric and it is completely based on scores and so that has helped a little bit there.

Crystal's comments echo those of the building principal that behavior and also parental support influenced student placement and that this practice was responsible for excluding some Black students from being placed in Algebra One even when their scores indicated that is where they belonged. In addition to this information being shared in interviews, ESSP artifacts also show that implicit bias, subjectivity, and prejudiced practices were factors in the Algebra One disparity (see Appendix F). The previous rubric used at MMS supports other findings that show teacher beliefs and racial attitudes can serve as institutional barriers that create structural inequities and within-school segregation (Chapman, 2014; Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Theoharis, 2010; Tyson, 2011;

Welton, 2013). Changing the rubric to be entirely data-driven was a direct result of the ESSP program which is evidence of how this initiative helped MMS to enact CRSL.

While revising the math placement rubric was the most significant change within any department, other school leaders showed evidence of promoting CRSL largely because of new discussions resulting from ESSP. While the ELA department was already in the process of diversifying classroom libraries, Mary stated that ESSP had continued to push the department to bring diverse literature into their classrooms so that students can read more about people like them. In social studies, Crystal shared that she now spent time presenting content on Black emperors because, with the growing Black student population, she wanted to present positive examples of African history so that students saw something other than slavery. While not heavily content related, even the science department was engaged in new discussions and making changes in light of the growing Black student population. Nicole, a department chair, shared:

During some of our department meetings we have discussed, “Is this worded correctly? Are we using language that they are familiar with? Are we using even names that show different ethnic backgrounds?” Because sometimes we have to create our own questions, but, you know, sometimes it is just a Tom or a Joe, while we need to be more cognizant of relating to them with names they are familiar with too.

While changing words and names may seem trivial to some, Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) found that the administrator in their study applauded her staff when she witnessed such culturally responsive practices in classrooms. This excerpt demonstrates that ESSP prompted a new sense of awareness and discussions among colleagues and that school leaders were initiating changes to advance CRSL. These curricular discussions and changes led to new practices, ones that Ladson-Billings (1995) described as color-conscious and more responsive to students’ needs.

Even as the ESSP presented new opportunities for school leaders to promote CRSL through curricular practices and discussions, a number of challenges remained. Two of the four core-subject department chairs reported that their content area made it difficult to diversify curriculum as they were responsible for teaching specific standards. Many pointed to ELA as a subject area that had more flexibility to bring in diverse content through articles and books. However, Gay (2002) argued there are opportunities to incorporate cultural diversity in all content areas. While required state curriculum may be outside of what MMS school leaders could control, two challenges that came up repeatedly were related to factors that they could potentially improve.

First, there were conflicting ideas on the level of influence that teacher leaders had with the teachers that they were responsible for leading. Some teacher leaders expressed feeling empowered to lead while others simply saw themselves as organizers and middle men. Stacy, a team leader, commented: “We get to make decisions for our whole team. I mean, not make them, but we have the conversations. All six of us meet and talk. I feel like we [team leaders] have a lot of power.” Stacy felt that teacher leaders convened conversations that resulted in decisions. She saw her role as a teacher leader as one that came with a lot of power. However, Rachael, another team leader, simply had this to say: “Not much [influence]. I do not know that that is a bad thing. It just is what it is.” These seemingly contradictory positions on team leader influence between Stacy and Rachael were found among department chairs as well. Beth, a department chair, explained:

I mean, I would like to think that I have influenced them. For us, we are implementing a new curriculum this year. So I have really tried to just be very open with my practices. I share my lesson plans with my entire department and invite them to come in and watch

me teach, and several of them have taken me up on that. So, I am hoping that practices like that help to influence them in the direction that we are going with the curriculum and making sure that everybody is kind of on the same page with that.

Beth felt more optimistic regarding her influence on her colleagues. It was possible that a new curriculum resulted in increased influence, as she positioned herself as a leader by sharing lesson plans and allowing her colleagues to observe her teach, and many took advantage of these opportunities.

However, similar to what I found with team leaders, not all department chairs felt that they had influence over those they led. Mary, a department chair, stated her position held little influence: “Well, I found that it does not influence a whole lot because there are times when I cannot come out and say what people should be doing. So, I try to do a lot by talking about my practices and teaching and hope that people will kind of catch on to that.” Mary expressed that she had not been empowered to tell her department members what they should do when it comes to teaching. In their case study, Muijs and Harris (2007) found this may be due to teacher leaders not feeling that their roles as leaders had been clearly defined (p. 112). Alternatively, Alger (2008) argued this may be due to the comfortability of teacher leaders giving too much input, “due to cultural norms of equality” (p. 6). While Mary felt it was not her place to tell her department members what to do, she hoped that sharing her practices with others was enough for them to adopt her methods. Hope may not be enough, however, as Wepner and Gómez (2017) argued that teachers alone may not have the capability of making changes designed to improve the performance of minority students and, in fact, they may resist changes. As such, in thinking about advancing CRSL efforts it is important for school leaders, including teacher leaders, to feel empowered to lead their departments and teams through change as the school seeks to improve

its response to minority students. If teacher leaders lack authority and empowerment in their leadership role, it may impact their effectiveness to implement change among their members.

Another challenge school leaders faced in promoting CRSL through curricular practices and discussions was that meetings sometimes lacked a clear purpose and were instead used to deal with housekeeping tasks and other matters not pertinent to core technologies like curriculum. However, in order to move towards deeper-level change, transformational leadership requires clear goals and vision. Michael, the eighth grade assistant principal, stated: “I think we could spend, we could use a more defined definition as to exactly what the purpose is of our department meetings.” Without a clear purpose, time was spent discussing topics that lacked real importance. Evelyn, a department chair, added: “If we all had more time to really focus on things so that we could bring up issues, talking about something trivial versus big picture things, so we could look at big picture things and really try to work and address the culture of the school and more serious situations.” With time also a challenge, it is even more important to spend leadership meetings discussing matters that significantly address student performance and needs. Several other school leaders concurred adding that much of the information on the agenda could be handled by email or outside of meetings. Similarly, Muijs and Harris (2007) found in their case study that the lack of time and vision served as barriers within the leadership structure (p. 128). Sebring and Bryk (2000) determined the most effective school leadership requires facilitative orientation, shared vision, institutional focus, and efficient management. Michael and Evelyn’s comments of what they should do speak to aspects of this type of leadership, but school leaders have not yet made the necessary changes to get there. If these challenges could be addressed, school leaders may be able to spend more time discussing how to advance CRSL efforts to improve Black student experiences.

#### **Theme 4: Developing Cultural Awareness & Change of Practices**

CRSL calls on school leaders to engage in professional development to better develop their cultural awareness, which includes learning more about their identity and beliefs, along with determining changes that need to be made within their school. At MMS, ESSP efforts allowed staff to engage in critical self-awareness through continuous professional development which is needed for deep transformations to occur (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Indeed, professional development was also utilized by culturally responsive leaders in case studies by Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) and Mayfield and Garrison-Wade (2015). As MMS school leaders became more culturally aware of their identity and beliefs, including how they viewed themselves and their African American students, they shared through interviews that this informed their decisions to alter some of their practices that had a negative impact on their Black students, and this was also reflected in some of their ESSP goals (see Appendix F).

The need for school leaders to engage in cultural awareness and learn more about unpacking their identity was particularly important at MMS as staff and student demographics were not reflective of each other. Crystal, a department chair, noted: “A lot of the teachers in this building, being predominantly Caucasian and predominantly female, just really cannot relate to a lot of the kids and what they are going through.” This school leader was highlighting that the 90-plus percent White teacher population did not mirror the almost 20 percent Black student population, and Wepner and Gómez (2017) find this is the case nationally. As such, some staff find it difficult to relate to the experiences that some of their students have. Christine, a department chair, shared an ESSP professional development session that illustrates this point:

One of the things we had to do was an activity where we had beads and we had to pick up a bead for everything that was a source of entitlement. And then we made a little



necklace out of it. We put it on a string and you can see if you look over there that I have mine up on my wall as a daily reminder. Every day I see it when I walk in that there are a lot of beads on there. I have been a very blessed person and most of our teachers had a lot of beads. If the kids were to do this activity, we would have some kids that would only have a few beads and that is a reminder that I am lucky and fortunate to have been raised the way I was, but they do not necessarily have those privileges. We need to try to fix that.

Christine's comments built upon Crystal's by detailing how school leaders promoted CRSL by helping staff to become more culturally aware and better understand their identity, the privileges that come along with it, and how this often differed from the identity of their students. Bieneman (2011) argued that effective professional development deconstructs and rebuilds cultural knowledge around ideas of power, privilege, equity, and access, and ESSP engaged school leaders in these areas. The last sentence, "We need to try to fix that," shows that school leaders were largely interested and willing to make changes. Indeed, the phrase "We need to..." implied a shared vision and seven MMS school leaders used similar phrases in their interviews. Deena, the seventh grade assistant principal, added another example that supported the notion that change was needed:

When you [staff] see several African American students, especially males, congregating in the hall talking and laughing and your perception is they must be up to something and they are being loud. What is going on or wanting to call our SRO or the administrators when all they are doing is engaging with each other because they [students] see someone that looks like them. The perception is that they are loud and that is disruptive and that cannot happen. So, changing the mindset to, "Wow, I get to see somebody that looks like

me. I just came out of a class where no one looked like me so it makes me happy.”

Changing the mindset, that shift, so that is still a challenge.

The excerpt above shows how Black students simply wanting to be around some of their friends triggered suspicions from some staff members which speaks to the racial bias that Bieneman (2011) argued educators may possess. Instead of staff understanding that, after being in class with primarily White students, the Black students wanted to spend time with friends they identified with culturally, some staff had the perception that something must be wrong and their instinct was to call others for help. These excerpts highlight the importance of staff becoming more culturally aware and recognizing their own biases so that they can better understand the needs of their Black students and also how they may need to change their way of thinking. These excerpts also support ideas in social justice and CRSL that aim to eliminate inequities. School leaders' participation in ESSP was, again, the strategy that allowed them to promote CRSL this time through professional development.

The ESSP also prompted school leaders to have new conversations, evaluate their practices, and begin to reexamine and change practices that may have negatively impacted Black students. This is important because Garces and Cogburn (2015) found that muted conversations around race allow staff to ignore bias and racism that students of color may face. While school leaders appeared ready to engage in these conversations and make changes, they noted that some staff were initially reluctant, demonstrating the challenges school leaders face in reaching all staff with their ESSP efforts. In their study, Mayfield and Garrison-Wade (2015) also found a small number of staff resisted culturally responsive professional development efforts insisting they were colorblind (p. 13). Evelyn, a department chair, argued that it was the staff that needed to change for the students and not the other way around: “We are the ones who need to change.

We need to be open to the kids and where they are coming from to bring out the best in them. So, it [ESSP] has had an impact but I think that is where it is up to us to make changes.” While Evelyn was eager to make the necessary changes, Rebecca, another department chair, expressed that these discussions were sometimes a challenge as they made some uncomfortable: “All of that I think makes people uncomfortable because you are forced to challenge what you have heard, believed, grown up with, lived with. And to be honest, what you have been comfortable with. We all choose to live in our comfort zone.” Aaron, the building principal, elaborated on this idea of comfortability:

Some of the staff I think were hesitant to do it [ESSP]. They have seen the successes that teachers that were further along have had either with individual students or with classes of students and that has, I do not want to say peer pressured, but I think sometimes that is a bit of a good thing. If your colleagues are having success, it may make you venture out and branch out and do things that maybe are outside of your comfort level.

The fact that some staff were initially hesitant to engage in this work shows the very need for it as Bieneman (2011) argued that in order for meaningful change to occur, school leaders must acknowledge deficit-level thinking and racial bias that may be present. While these excerpts highlight the challenges that school leaders faced in reaching staff who were hesitant to get out of their comfort zones, there was also the potential opportunity that as staff made changes and found success those who were hesitant might eventually get on board. Sebring and Bryk (2000) found that effective school leaders rely on both pressure and support in motivating others and Aaron’s comments speak to this idea. Further, Aaron’s comments highlighted the influence that teacher leaders may potentially have on their colleagues and this supports the work of Jun (2011) who argued about the importance of empowering teacher leaders due to their role within schools.

As school leaders became more culturally aware of their identity and how it differed from their Black students, this informed them that it was necessary to reexamine some of the current rules and policies that were in place. While teacher leaders had more flexibility to change rules in their own classrooms, the code of conduct contained school-wide policies that are more difficult to change. Still, ESSP efforts to promote CRSL prompted reflection and shaped the changing of some practices in both classrooms and the school in general. Such changes, revealed through interviews, included redefining classroom norms and reexamining when to issue detentions and office referrals. For example, Rachael, a team leader, explained that the ESSP training she received shaped the changes made in her classroom:

I feel more equipped to deal with students of different races because before, just like noise levels for example, to me I thought we need a certain noise level and everybody has to understand that. But now, I am realizing that there are different cultures and they have different expectations in the way different people are. So, I think I have loosened up on a lot of those types of things and I think it has been a huge growth opportunity for me.

This excerpt shows how ESSP informed this teacher leader to change what she considered to be acceptable noise levels in her classroom. She acknowledged that students of different backgrounds may interact differently and that this was an area where she was willing to give a little bit. Beth, a department chair, expressed a similar sentiment:

I am definitely more of a facilitator now. I like the kids to do a lot more work where they are talking to each other and collaborating. And that made me nervous because it is like, “Oh it is so noisy in here, they are going to judge me” and now I am just like, “You know what? Yes you are talking, it needs to be a little bit loud.” I mean, it is not going to be crazy loud, but it is going to be loud and that is okay.

In this case, the teacher leader was concerned about how other staff might perceive her if noise exceeded a certain level in her classroom, but what worked best for students now took precedence. In both of these instances, had noise-level rules not been revisited, students may have been disciplined but these teacher leaders were willing to adjust to a new normal related to classroom noise as long as it did not get out of control. While these instances show that some changes were completely within teacher leader control, some matters were more complex due to school-wide policies written into the code of conduct.

While teacher leaders and administrators worked together to make updates to the code of conduct annually, students were held accountable to the rules and policies in the code of conduct that they and their parents agreed to abide by. As school leaders promoted more CRSL, particularly through ESSP professional development, some reported in interviews that they encountered instances of tension between what they felt was best for students and what the rules stated. For example, Rachael, a team leader, explained:

We try to shape the school environment. What we have tried to do is what is best for the kids. Like what kind of reward parties are they going to like? How can we handle discipline so it is fair to everyone? Our equity training comes in there too when it comes to discipline and the way we need to make changes to the way we discipline.

This excerpt highlights that school leaders cared about the school environment and wanted to do what was best for kids, while also trying to keep things fair and identify changes that needed to be made. Chantel, a department chair, explained how one teacher approached her for guidance not quite knowing how to balance these two areas: “A teacher came up to me and a Black girl had a scarf on and she said, ‘Oh, she has a scarf on.’ And I said, ‘Okay, does that bother you?’ She said, ‘Well, it is against the school rules.’” The code of conduct permitted scarfs for

religious reasons, but since that was not the case here, the teacher was seemingly conflicted about whether to allow the behavior or to follow the code of conduct. While she may or may not have had a strong objection to the student wearing the scarf, the fact that she sought out this teacher leader and said, “Well, it is against the school rules,” shows that she may have felt an obligation to enforce school policies. Chantel shared a second example that shows how teachers, in trying to become more understanding in disciplinary matters with Black students due to ESSP efforts, have allowed behaviors that they would hold other students accountable for:

I had a conversation with two teachers about an African American student where they were, one of the teachers was in tears about it. It is because the girl is giving her a hard time and she is walking out of class. And the other teacher said, “Well, I have given her every benefit of the doubt and she just is not responding and now I am about to lay the law down.” And I said, “You have to be a warm demander. And being a warm demander means that you have expectations of your students right off the bat. That you believe that they can succeed if you support them in ways for success and then supporting them in ways to make sure that they do so. With this specific young lady, instead of feeling like you are supporting her by allowing her to exhibit behaviors that you do not let other students do in your class because you are trying to support her and show her that you care about her, you are setting her up for failure because you are eventually going to get tired of those behaviors and then you start to write her up, but all you have done is teach her the wrong things.”

In this example, the White teacher allowed the Black student to repeatedly walk out of class which was a behavior that should have resulted in an office referral. Both teachers felt that they had been supportive of this student but the teacher leader explained to them that they set the

student up for failure by not properly addressing the student's behavior. Thinking they were doing the right thing, these teachers essentially lowered behavioral expectations for this student. Lewis-McCoy (2014) termed this practice as having a *sliding standard* which involves relaxing rules and not correcting behaviors of some students, often along racial lines, in order to avoid problems (p. 124). Yet, as this example shows, the problems became worse. Collectively, these excerpts demonstrate how CRSL efforts challenged staff to become more understanding and not act so quickly to assign discipline; however, this can result in its own set of problems if expectations are being lowered. Indeed, in their case study discussed earlier, Mayfield and Garrison-Wade (2015) found that the school they studied displayed cultural responsiveness in all areas except for student management. As such, school leaders must continue to have conversations with staff regarding disciplinary matters. Aaron, the building principal, shared another change of practice as a result of ESSP with this point:

There have been changes with how we handle discipline. The seventh grade assistant principal has been having meetings before she assigns any kind of consequence. There have been discussions among the student and that teacher that submitted the referral to have some open dialogue and walk through things.

This excerpt shows how ESSP efforts have shaped practices around discipline. Instead of reading the referral and assigning a consequence, the assistant principal brought students and teachers together to discuss the problems that occurred. As school leaders continue CRSL efforts in developing their cultural awareness and reexamining aspects of their identity, beliefs, and school practices, problems may continue to arise as gray areas emerge. Increasing the communication between students and teachers, before assigning a consequence, may better allow school leaders to help staff navigate these changes.

## **Theme 5: Intentionality in Building Meaningful Student Relationships**

While school leaders are tasked with improving student performance, all 16 participants stressed the importance of being intentional in building meaningful student relationships which involves knowing students as both learners and individuals. Further, six out of 16 participants shared in interviews that they believed strong student-teacher relationships to be the most significant factor that impacts academic performance. Building strong relationships with students is cited in several other works (Khalifa et al., 2016; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015; Woodly, 2018). This shared belief among MMS school leaders was a notable finding in light of disparities in discipline for Black students at the site (see Appendix F). DeMatthews (2016) found in his study that disparities in discipline by race was often due to biased practices of staff (p. 7). Even so, forming meaningful relationships with students was a top goal of the MMS administrative team prior to ESSP efforts. Michael, the eighth grade assistant principal, stated:

Something that we have really tried to push with all the teachers and everybody is just that we are more concerned about building relationships. The three of us, the three administrators, feel that the most important thing is that we are building good relationships with our students. We do not tend to push test scores very much but that is our, the three of us, that is our philosophy that really the most important thing is building relationships with students. Yes, there are curricular things that you need to do and expectations are there, but if you cannot build the relationships with your students then your test scores are not going to improve.

The excerpt above shows that school leaders may view building relationships as somewhat of a prerequisite to improving student performance. This supports work by Woodly (2018) who



argued that, in addition to quality instruction, effective teaching recognizes the power of relationships. Michael was not saying that test scores do not matter, but that student performance would not improve if teachers were not building strong relationships with students. While this relationships-first philosophy preceded the school's CRSL efforts, ESSP pushed a number of school leaders to try new ways to bond with their African American students. Caleb, a department chair, explained how ESSP has added a new layer to the school's efforts to building relationships with students:

The biggest thing with Equity in our school is creating relationships. That is the gist of it, is that your relationship with the student is going to be what you get out of the students. So if you put in the time and effort to get to know your students and let them get to know you, then you are more likely to have students that want to succeed for themselves and for you too. So, that is the gist of what we are getting with the Equity, is just not saying, "I am only going to teach these kids" or "I want to teach these kids." You need to get there and know everyone and create relationships with everybody.

This excerpt shows that, when the relationship is in place, students want to succeed for themselves and for their teachers. This connects to Michael's comments by suggesting that a relationship was needed in order for students to want to improve, and Caleb added that ESSP efforts have highlighted the need to form relationships with all students. Lisa, a department chair, offered that building meaningful relationships with students provided an opportunity for school leaders to learn and grow: "Educating ourselves about differences in culture, especially with the Equity group, that is a huge opportunity for growth and examining how I look at my students." This excerpt affirms that the ESSP efforts encouraged school leaders to educate themselves when it came to students of different backgrounds and this was something that most MMS school

leaders appeared willing to do. In Lisa's case, the training that she received prompted her to examine how she looked at her students and the hope was that this would allow for more meaningful relationships. As such, this CRSL effort was seen as an opportunity to improve relationships with all students, and especially those from other backgrounds.

In discussing the role of ESSP, Rachael, a team leader, explained that she was now more likely to directly ask questions to students of different backgrounds as a way to learn and also to gauge students' comfortability on certain topics:

If I have a topic that I am unsure about, I might even ask, "How do you see this? Is this something that makes you uncomfortable to talk about? How should I talk about this?"

So, I just straight up talk to the kids about it. I just ask them how they think about it. I tell them, "Guys, I do not know, you need to teach me."

The excerpt above shows how Rachael was intentional in wanting to know how her minority students might perceive a topic, and she sought their advice to avoid making them uncomfortable. Not only did this provide Rachael's Black students with a voice, but it also showed them that she cared which is important to students. In their study of a culturally responsive administrator, Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) found that the assistant principal encouraged this type of collaborative classroom vision building between students and teachers (p. 196). When students know their teachers care, it is likely to lead to more positive student-teacher relationships (Crosnoe et al., 2004). Thus, by encouraging Rachael to engage in new dialogue with Black students, ESSP efforts shaped the ways in which she demonstrated to students that she cared which would hopefully lead to better relationships.

While school leaders made efforts to form meaningful relationships with Black students, this was also a challenge because there was fear of saying the wrong thing. Rachael, who was now asking Black students more questions, also shared this:

I am afraid of certain topics that come up. I might purposely avoid them just because I do not know what they are going to think of it and then take home and then have parents come back and, “This is what I heard you said.” So, for me personally, I feel like I am just, I have so much more to learn.

Together, these excerpts reveal a contradiction by highlighting how Rachael has begun asking more questions about topics she was unsure about, but that there were still topics she avoided because she feared what her students and their parents would think. While Rachael’s willingness to learn and engage in new conversations was promoting more equitable and reciprocal student-teacher relationships advocated by Ladson-Billings (1994), there could be a ceiling to this if certain discussions remain off the table. Still, her willingness to keep learning was a move in the right direction. Stacy, a team leader, confirmed this was a challenge for many others:

So many teachers, including myself, are afraid to say the wrong thing so we just do not have conversations about things sometimes. And I just feel like that has to change. And I understand why. I just feel with conversations about race it would go a longer way with a kid wanting to have dialogue and a conversation about something versus just saying, “We are not going to talk about that.” So, I feel like we have been challenged to think differently, talk differently to the kids. I feel like we have been challenged to do that.

This shows that the fear of saying the wrong thing meant that some staff did not say anything at all but this could inhibit their efforts to become more culturally responsive. Simply shutting down conversations involving race that students wanted to have was unlikely to result in more

meaningful relationships and school leaders used ESSP efforts to challenge staff to engage in this dialogue.

Participants shared that engaging in meaningful dialogue with Black students is important for building strong relationships. Christine, a department chair, explained how critical it was for her Black students to have strong relationships with their teachers: “I feel like the kids that are Black in my community, that attend school here, they want that relationship with the teacher. That means more to them than anything. And if you can have a relationship with that child, they will work for you.” This excerpt builds upon earlier comments made by Michael and Caleb by showing relationships-first was true for Black students as well. It also supports arguments by Woodly (2018) that minority students may work harder for teachers with whom they have a genuine relationship. As school leaders continued to educate themselves and gather insights from their Black students about how to approach certain topics, it increased their positive interactions with them and allowed the potential for better relationships to develop.

School leaders’ ESSP efforts added a new layer to previous efforts to build meaningful relationships with students by prompting teachers to be more intentional about their actions. Beth, a department chair, explained that the growing population of Black students and resulting ESSP efforts: “Force you as an educator to be better at what you are doing. More intentional about what you are doing and thinking about how certain things are going to be perceived. I think it helps you to be more reflective and then more intentional with what you are doing with students.” In order to build more meaningful relationships, school leaders have attempted to be more intentional in their interactions and conversations with Black students, and there appeared to be a new level of awareness in their practices. This included how they spoke with students and

the types of questions they asked when students exhibited poor behavior. Deena, the seventh grade assistant principal, shared:

I have had two meetings with two different teams regarding students that they are having problems with and most students were African American. The tone, the intentions were totally like, “How can we support you?” instead of, “This is everything you are doing wrong.” So I think those conversations with Equity have definitely opened the doors for, “How can we support you in changing behaviors?” as to just saying, “You are always coming to class, you are doing this wrong.” So those conversations have changed.

Teachers are really supportive of who the student is.

While interview data and artifacts revealed that Black students at MMS received a disproportionate number of office referrals (see Appendix F), this excerpt highlights how ESSP shaped the practices of team leaders in changing their tone and the overall intent of their meetings with students. Instead of the time being spent reprimanding students, team leaders transformed these conversations to learn about the ways in which they could better support students. While such a shift is unlikely to solve all behavior problems, Crosnoe et al. (2004) found that students with better student-teacher relationships have fewer problems in school. In his study of principals promoting social justice, Theoharis (2010) found that leaders changed discipline procedures to a “relationship-based, process-oriented model” which reduced suspension rates by 20 to 30 percent in one school (p. 346). Similarly, ESSP was promoting such a model at MMS though a limitation of this work was that, due to the newness of the ESSP program, its long-term impact on disparities in discipline was unknown by the conclusion of this study. However, it is within reason to believe that this change of approach at MMS could result in more meaningful relationships with Black students and fewer office referrals over time.

## **Theme 6: Considering Students' Home Lives and Parental Support**

CRSL focuses on responding to the needs of marginalized students—African American students in the case of MMS—but students often have overlapping identities that may impact their needs. In fact, nine out of 16 participants shared in interviews that they believed students' home lives and their level of parental support to be the most significant factor impacting academic performance. Specifically, this was discussed in terms of students from lower socioeconomic families who often struggle at school due to the perceived lack of parental supervision and support at home. While students' home lives and socioeconomic status were not presented exclusively in terms of race, participants often discussed socioeconomic status as they discussed Black students, showing school leaders often saw a connection between the two at this particular site. In response to this concern, school leaders have worked to address aspects of students' home lives to better support those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. While these supports fall outside of CRSL efforts which focus on race, many African American students from low socioeconomic backgrounds benefited from school leaders' efforts in this area.

To demonstrate how participants were making connections between socioeconomic status and race, I first illustrate how multiple school leaders discussed low socioeconomic status in concert with discussing Black students which revealed that students may have overlapping identities. Marie, a team leader, stated: "We have more African American students in our building and, economically, I feel like we are starting to be more lower middle class in this area." This excerpt shows how the school leader correlated African American students and low socioeconomic status. In discussing achievement gaps, Mary, a department chair, believed: "Along the lines of [low] socioeconomic, those students do not have the support at home and they have not been exposed to a lot of different situations. And I would say a lot of times with

race as well.” Mary began by speaking about the negative effects of students who came from low socioeconomic backgrounds and she concluded by adding race as another layer to this statement. Lewis-McCoy (2014) found that class and race are both important aspects of educational inequality. Notably absent from this excerpt, then, are issues of class and race that may contribute to the lesser amounts of support and exposure that these students receive such as a single parent having to work multiple jobs to make ends meet or institutional racism. Without such context, this excerpt could be perceived in a deficit manner which speaks to how suburban schools have traditionally served White, middle-class students with two parents at home (Wepner & Gómez, 2017). Christine, a department chair, shared:

Our district has changed quite a bit. I think that we were more of a White middle class district when I started here in 1992 and now we are definitely more of a multicultural district. We have students coming in from all different levels, a lot of foster kids. So, I think the district is trying to help us as a staff better adjust to meeting the needs of students who are coming in from a poverty level.

Here, Christine first discusses the district as White middle class followed by the shift to being a multicultural district and ending with a comment referencing a lower level of poverty. Based on school report card enrollment data, multicultural in this case was seemingly a euphemism for more African American students, so there appeared to be a correlation between socioeconomic status and race. The reference to “a lot of foster kids” also highlights the perception that the home life of some of these students was different from what staff have been used to. Chantel, a department chair who also runs the school’s new student orientation program surmised: “If I had to guess, more than 50 percent of the students that move into the district are low income and probably a third of them are students of color.” This excerpt highlights the overlap among

students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and students who were Black. While this was a rough estimate, school report card demographic data show both an increasing Black student population and an increase in students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. With these excerpts and the school report card data helping to establish a connection between race and socioeconomic status, it should be understood throughout this theme that the impacts of students' home lives at school is inclusive, though not exclusive, of a number of Black students at MMS.

School and home life may appear distinct to some, but nine participants shared what happens in students' home lives has a significant impact in their academics. For example, two students who are assigned homework may have different outcomes when it comes to completing their work due to parental presence and support in the evenings. Christine, a department chair, illustrates this example when she explained:

I think that the kids that come from a more impoverished environment are more disadvantaged and their parents are probably working harder to try to do what they can job-wise to make ends meet, to pay the rent, and have the things that they need to sustain a moderate lifestyle. And I think these kids are left home a lot and they are not as monitored. And they struggle because of that, because there is not a parent there in the home to say, "Hey, get your homework done," you know, "Make sure you are eating" and, "Get to bed early." Some of these kids go to bed at night and there is not a parent there. So, I think that those impact the students greatly.

The excerpt above highlights Christine's perceptions that parents may not be home because they were working hard to provide financial support for their families. As such, while her perception of parental absence was not rooted in deficit thinking as seen earlier, the reasons do not appear to be known with certainty indicating that more communication between school leaders and parents



may be needed. Indeed, ESSP artifacts highlight a lack of parent-teacher relationships (see Appendix F). What is evident from this excerpt is that parental absence could come at the expense of ensuring that the child was supervised when it came to completing homework, eating properly, and going to bed at a proper time. As such, a student in this scenario could come to school without completing these important tasks and find himself tired, hungry, and not understanding the lesson. Marie, a team leader, also found that parents might not be home in the evenings but framed it this way:

I think their home life and their parents and the way they are brought up and how they are parented is what affects them the most. If they go home and there is not a parent there and they are by themselves for the evening and a parent does not care about their education, about their grades or anything, then they are not going to care. And I see that the most. My kids that do not care for the most part do not care and do not do work because their parents do not care.

While this excerpt also highlights how the absence of parents can impact a student's work, it differs from Christine's thoughts by stating that some parents do not care. In the former example, parents were absent because they cared about the financial well-being of the family. In this example, parents' physical absence also meant their absence from caring. As discussed previously, parental absence in the middle grades may be due to parents feeling inferior to supporting their child academically and also because of the dynamics around their occupation (Kim & Hill, 2015; Lareau, 2000), so it is important that school leaders avoid making assumptions or forming deficit mindsets about parents. Whatever the reasons, these school leaders seemed to agree that parental absence had a negative impact on student learning. Hill and Taylor (2004) also found that parental involvement has a positive impact on students' academics,

homework, and attendance. When school leaders were asked about their attempts to engage with parents, the majority of participants identified conferences, emails, and phone calls as the primary methods of engagement. This differs from the culturally responsive approaches identified in other case studies which showed school leaders engaged parents by encouraging them to conduct classroom observations, assist with professional development, and volunteer as hall monitors (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015). Since students' home lives, especially of those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, were cited as having a significant impact on these students' academic performance, school leaders at MMS should find new ways to better engage with these families. This is particularly important when considering racial identity as disparities in discipline for Black students at MMS were attributed, in part, to a lack of strong teacher-parent relationships (see Appendix F).

While I did not find evidence to support that the school's CRSL efforts have changed how it engaged with parents and families, school leaders at MMS have promoted transformational leadership in creating a new program that takes place during the school day for students to complete homework that they did not complete at home. Christine, a department chair, explained how the program works:

We have Catch-up Café in our school which students who are not doing their work, instead of going to lunch, they have lunch while they work to get missing assignments completed. And I think that a lot of kids are getting home and they are not having supervision because parents are working two jobs and they are required to be little adults and get things done and maybe the homework is not as big of a priority. Maybe they are watching a younger sibling, helping to prepare food, or do the things they need to do.

And some of them are just not using their time wisely. So, the Catch-up Café, some kids view it as a punishment, but it really is not a punishment.

The excerpt above shows that school leaders created this program, not as a punishment, but to allow students to make-up work that they did not complete possibly due to dynamics at home. When Christine stated, “Parents are working two jobs,” this phrase suggests that this program tends to benefit students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who may not have parental supervision in the evenings. While Catch-up Café also served students who simply did not want to do homework, it supported those that might be busy caring for their siblings and did not have the time, thus minimizing the negative impact on students’ grades due to their home lives.

In terms of supporting students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, school leaders also implemented a food pantry program for students who may not have food to eat while at home. Aaron, the building principal, explained the importance of meeting students’ basic needs:

We have had a focus of trying to support the whole child. We started some pantries. We started some different things to really focus on the needs to make sure those students’ basic needs are met so that, when they come here, they can continue to learn and be fed and go home and be fed and kind of take care of what is out of their control. You know, there are a lot of things they cannot control and that is one of the larger ones. They cannot control how much money their parents make or what kind of food is on the table at home. So, I would say on a day to day basis that kind of seems to be, for me, the biggest roadblock, to make sure the students are taken care of and have the ability to learn.

The excerpt above shows that to better serve students, school leaders have implemented the food pantry program to meet students’ basic needs. This program reflects ideas of transformational leadership and was designed to better support students from low socioeconomic backgrounds in

their home lives so that they were in the proper mindset to learn at school. Still, there were areas that school leaders are unable to address as Rebecca, a department chair, added:

I believe their basic needs at that lowest level of Maslow's hierarchy. My students are tired. They are hungry all the time. My students sometimes come from chaotic homes. And then the next thing that impacts them is a support system or a lack thereof. A lot of them are coming from single family homes or being raised by grandparents or foster care type situations. And while it looks like they are supported, it is not the kind of support that is all encompassing.

Through the Catch-up Café and food pantry program, MMS school leaders found ways to better support students that were impacted by their home lives, particularly those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, but this excerpt shows that significant challenges remained. While finding new ways to connect with parents and families may help, this excerpt highlights that there were family dynamics and aspects of students' home lives that were out of reach for school leaders to address or control. While Theme 6 fell outside of CRSL efforts specifically, it promoted ideas of transformational leadership, of which CRSL is an aspect. Further, many Black students benefited from these programs due to their overlapping racial and socioeconomic identities.

## **Summary**

This chapter explored the ways in which school leaders at MMS promoted CRSL efforts to improve Black student experiences and also the opportunities and challenges that school leaders faced in these efforts. In promoting CRSL, school leaders' actions shaped positive changes and promoted several characteristics of transformational leadership. Through conducting a thematic analysis, I identified six primary themes: (1) Centrality of Student Data & Decision-

Making, (2) Strategic Academic Support Programs & Interventions, (3) Embedding Cultural Responsiveness within Curricular Practices, (4) Developing Cultural Awareness & Change of Practices, (5) Intentionality in Building Meaningful Student Relationships, and (6) Considering Students' Home Lives and Parental Support. School leaders' participation in ESSP was the driving force behind its strategy to promote CRSL efforts and provided them with opportunities to improve the experiences of African American students by providing additional programs and services to better meet their needs and eliminating practices that were harmful. In advancing these CRSL efforts, MMS school leaders also encountered several challenges: finding time to analyze student data, addressing issues of teacher leader empowerment, defining the purpose of school leadership meetings, hesitancy by some staff to implement change, fear of misspeaking on race-based issues, and addressing and connecting to students' complex home lives including engaging parents and the community in meaningful ways. In spite of these challenges, ESSP efforts allowed school leaders to promote CRSL to improve Black student experiences and better address their needs in several areas. However, school leaders should find ways to address these challenges in their CRSL efforts in order to improve Black student experiences even greater.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, I determined that school leaders found success in several areas by utilizing the Equity for Student Success Program (ESSP) as their strategy to enact Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) in efforts to improve Black student experiences. School leaders utilizing professional development to challenge problematic school structures in order to close disparities is a practice others have observed (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015; Theoharis, 2010). While school leaders were previously engaged in work to improve the performance of all students, including Black students, ESSP added a new layer to preexisting efforts and served as the starting point for new practices designed specifically to improve the experiences of Black students. This was an important shift as colorblind and colormute policies often fail to address racial inequalities making schools less responsive to diverse populations (Turner, 2015; Welton et al., 2013). Importantly, this study confirms and explains how suburban school leaders at MMS promoted CRSL in their efforts to improve Black student experiences (RQ1) and it also confirms and explains the opportunities and challenges they encountered in these efforts (RQ2).

In making important changes to promote CRSL, which also involved promoting Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), school leaders used school data to initiate change often through transformational leadership actions. I begin this chapter by discussing how the findings of this study support the literature as well as areas in which they do not align. This discussion is organized around the four CRSL strands examined in the literature review which allowed me to highlight how these findings are congruent—or not—to aspects of CRSL and also how the various findings relate to each other. To aid this discussion, Table 4 highlights how this study's

findings are situated within the CRSL literature, specifically the four strands of the CRSL framework. Indeed, this study’s findings show that MMS school leaders’ ESSP efforts allowed them to promote three of the four CRSL strands in significant ways (see Table 4). Significantly, this validates the importance of this study and shows that exploring CRSL efforts among suburban school leaders is necessary in order to fill gaps of knowledge and expand the literature base outside of principal actions in urban schools. The discussion section highlights how school leaders utilized ESSP to enact CRSL to achieve their goal of improving Black student experiences. Following this discussion is the conclusion, including implications of this study and recommendations for future research.

Table 4

*CRSL Efforts and Thematic Relevancy*

	<b>Theme 1</b>	<b>Theme 2</b>	<b>Theme 3</b>	<b>Theme 4</b>	<b>Theme 5</b>	<b>Theme 6</b>
<b>CRSL Strand 1</b>	X			X		
<b>CRSL Strand 2</b>	X	X	X	X		
<b>CRSL Strand 3</b>	X	X		X	X	
<b>CRSL Strand 4</b>						X

**Discussion**

**CRSL Strand 1: Critical Self-Awareness.** To become more critically self-aware and conscious, CRSL calls for school leaders to engage in identity development, increase their cultural knowledge particularly as it relates to minority student populations, and listen to the voices of parents and the community. As school leaders become more aware of their own positions and beliefs, they may be able to challenge and improve practices that marginalize

students of color (Khalifa et al., 2016). To aid in this development, it is important that school leaders use school data and equity audits to identify gaps and also that they engage in race-based conversations. Doing so helps leaders to be courageous and advance ideas in social justice and inclusion. This study's findings reveal that school leaders' participation and engagement through ESSP efforts have promoted aspects of this CRSL strand in several ways, thus addressing RQ1.

Monthly participation in ESSP professional development allowed school leaders to learn about and engage in conversations around identity, race, and equity. In their case studies, both Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) and Mayfield and Garrison-Wade (2015) found professional development was an important tool in promoting culturally responsive practices in schools. At MMS, professional development allowed school leaders to better understand their own identity and the ways in which it was similar and different to that of their students. Welton et al. (2013) and Lewis-McCoy (2014) found that school leaders minimally discuss race and rarely in ways that lead to systemic changes. In this study, however, I found that professional development through ESSP allowed for ongoing conversations around race (an aspect of Theme 4) and that school leaders' use of school data (Theme 1) provided them with increased knowledge of disproportionate achievement and discipline data along lines of race; subsequently, this awareness did in fact result in systemic change which is a function of transformational leadership. For example, numerous scholars find that deficit-level thinking results in barriers for Black students' placement in advanced classes, even when they meet qualifying scores (Chapman, 2014; Ford and Grantham, 2003; Lewis-McCoy, 2014). The same was true for some Black students at MMS when it came to their placement in eighth grade Algebra One. However, as a result of ESSP professional development and efforts to narrow disparities, school leaders revised the rubric to be strictly data-based in order to reduce subjectivity and teacher bias. This



was because they found cases of eligible Black students not being placed in Algebra One due to classroom behavior and perceived parental support, which Bieneman (2011) found promotes deficit-mindsets and overshadowed students' abilities. Notably, if school leaders engage in practices that disproportionately impact students of color they may open themselves to litigation for violating the Civil Rights Act and Fourteenth Amendment (Biegel, 1995; Wade, 1980). Thus, changing the math placement rubric was an important action and demonstrates how Theme One: Centrality of Student Data & Decision-Making and Theme Four: Developing Cultural Awareness & Change of Practices both played roles in promoting this CRSL strand. ESSP informed school leaders' awareness of student data, created conversations around factors contributing to achievement gaps, and shaped specific goals to improve Black student performance in math (see Appendix F).

CRSL Strand 1 also suggests that school leaders engage in critical self-awareness and consciousness by utilizing parent and community voice to measure their efforts. Anyon (2005) argued that when school leaders engage with parents and the community and show that they value their voices, this can positively impact student achievement and result in improved parental engagement. DeMatthews (2016) argued that principals must lead their teachers in, "building authentic family and community partnerships by working with parents" to open dialogue, identify needs, review data, and support families (p. 10). In Theme Six: Considering Students' Home Lives and Parental Support, I found that the majority of MMS school leaders believed that students' home lives and their level of parental support were significant factors in students' academic performance. However, there was a lack of strong teacher-parent relationships at MMS (see Appendix F), and I did not find that leaders significantly modified their practices in ways that encouraged feedback and input from parents and community members. Mayfield and

Garrison-Wade (2015) found in their study, discussed previously, that to encourage parent voice the school had observation days where parents visited classrooms and discussed their findings with teachers, but this was not something that occurred at MMS. While ESSP efforts prompted identity development and a review of some school practices relating to Black student experiences, it has not, at this time, extended to school leaders' measuring their efforts through parent and community feedback. As such, the parent and community voice aspect of this CRSL strand has not yet been addressed.

CRSL Strand 1: Critical Self-Awareness was promoted by school leaders as they pursued ESSP opportunities to engage in identity development and change a systemic barrier for Black students' placement in advanced math. Additionally, due to ESSP efforts, school leaders engaged in new conversations with each other and the teachers they led, which informed numerous changes both big and small as detailed in the previous chapter. This addresses the first part of RQ2 regarding school leaders' opportunities in promoting CRSL, however, some challenges remained. First, ESSP efforts have not yet prompted significant changes as to how school leaders engage with parents and community members to hear their voice and input. Current methods included the fairly standard practices of calling, emailing, and meeting with parents for conferences, and community engagement was limited. Establishing meaningful two-way communication is critical to building relationships with these groups and school leaders may receive more acceptance of actions when they include parent and community voices in their decisions (Moore et al., 2016). As such, MMS should explore new ways to gather feedback from these groups. A second challenge is that, while new conversations occurred as a result of ESSP, several school leaders noted that there were fears for some around misspeaking or offending students and parents of color when it came to certain topics so they avoided them entirely.

However, color-mute conversations do not often result in meaningful change (Welton et al., 2013). Therefore, while school leaders have made strides in improving Black student experiences in their CRSL efforts related to this strand, important work remains.

**CRSL Strand 2: Culturally Responsive Curricula and Teacher Preparation.** To become more culturally responsive, school leaders should utilize professional development to expand teacher capacity and use student data in continuous school improvement (CSI) cycles to help shape these efforts. This also involves making curricular decisions and changes around content being taught as well as advancing differentiation which recognizes that students have varying needs. My findings highlight that school leaders' participation and engagement through ESSP efforts promoted this CRSL strand in multiple ways which addresses RQ1.

As school leaders became more culturally aware and received professional development in issues of equity, race, and identity, they began having new conversations with their teachers as it related to curricular matters. Ultimately, this shaped the practices of school leaders in promoting Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) with their teachers in several ways. In subjects such as history, White students are often privileged because curricular content is situated around more European events and topics are based on the victors' point of view (Banks et al., 2001). However, when school leaders become more color-conscious, curricular changes can enhance student learning by better meeting minority students' needs due to more inclusive content (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995). In this study, I found that the social studies department chair began teaching about Black emperors because, with the growing number of Black students, she wanted them to see their history represented in ways outside of slavery. She has also encouraged her department members to do the same. In English Language Arts (ELA), the department chair spoke of implementing a more diverse curriculum so that

students could find themselves better represented in the literature. In science, the department chair shared that ESSP professional development informed the use of more diverse names being used on homework assignments and tests so that students could better relate to the questions and examples. In math, ESSP efforts shaped a significant change to the math placement rubric with the goal of improving the number of Black students taking eighth grade Algebra One. As such, Theme 1: Centrality of Student Data & Decision-Making, Theme 3: Embedding Cultural Responsiveness within Curricular Practices, and Theme 4: Developing Cultural Awareness & Change of Practices were significant in promoting this CRSL strand. School data and CSI cycles highlighted what was not working for students and the professional development pushed school leaders to examine their identities and practices to become more inclusive. Together, this led to school leaders making curricula changes designed to improve Black student experiences. Based upon the works of Ladson-Billings (1995), Banks et al. (2001), and Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011), MMS school leaders have moved in the right direction as evidenced by their ESSP efforts.

School leaders' use of math data focused more attention on Black students in two significant ways, both of which promoted CRSL and transformational leadership. Black students are sometimes excluded from programs due to educators' deficit-level thinking and they also receive less attention from some teachers who provide more assistance to White students (DiMaggio, 1982; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Jaeger 2011; Welton, 2013). Due to ESSP efforts to improve Black student performance in math, school leaders tasked each team of teachers to work especially close with four Black students who fell slightly short of passing the state test. As such, ESSP informed the practice of Black students receiving increased attention and ongoing support from their teachers throughout the school year. In light of this finding, Theme 1: Centrality of

Student Data & Decision-Making was an effective measure to ensure that these students received the support that they needed as school leaders constantly made data-based instructional decisions in steps throughout the CSI cycle.

Relatedly, these students were also offered the opportunity to participate in a mentoring program with Black students at the high school who were successful in math. In their study, Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) also found that a mentoring program was introduced to better support the experiences of minority students specifically. While MMS did not have any African American math teachers, the hope was that their Black students would have the opportunity to learn from someone who looked like them and see that they, too, could be successful. The creation of the mentoring program, a result of ESSP, demonstrates how Theme 1: Centrality of Student Data & Decision-Making works in concert with Theme 2: Strategic Academic Support Programs & Interventions because school leaders knew which Black students to target in their support efforts of differentiation and the new mentoring program. This also relates to CRSL strand three which advocates for a more inclusive environment.

CRSL Strand 2: Culturally Responsive Curricula and Teacher Preparation was promoted by school leaders as they took advantage of ESSP opportunities to diversify curricular content, engage in new conversations, and utilize differentiated approaches in efforts to improve Black student experiences. This addresses the first part of RQ2 regarding the opportunities that school leaders encountered as a result of their ESSP efforts in relation to this strand, though challenges remained which addresses the latter. The most significant challenge, one that is not largely cited in CRSL literature but was found in this study, is that some teacher leaders do not feel empowered to tell their teachers how and what to teach. While Alger (2008) suggested this may be a result of the cultural norms around equality, Muijs and Harris (2007) found that this

occurred when the role of teacher leaders was not clearly defined in the school. At MMS, teacher leaders had differing views on their level of influence with their department and team members and largely relied on modeling culturally responsive practices. This is a problem because, without being empowered in their role, teacher leaders' ability to engage in transformational leadership behaviors and actions can be negatively impacted (Alger, 2008). The primary reason this is not cited in current CRSL literature is that scholars have largely defined school leaders at the building level (i.e. principals and assistant principals). However, Khalifa et al. (2016) acknowledged the important role that teacher leaders may play in CRSL efforts which is why they were included as participants in this study. By including teacher leaders in this study, it shed light on this concern highlighting a challenge for school leaders in promoting CRSL efforts.

Relatedly, this presents a challenge for transformational leadership because principals need teacher leaders to help transform the school environment. Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) found that the culturally responsive assistant principal in their study widened her leadership base by delegating responsibilities to others. While this might sound more like distributed rather than transformational leadership, the administrator likely believed these individuals had some level of authority and influence to see the tasks through. In other words, they were empowered in their roles to enact the changes in which she entrusted them. As such, it is important that teacher leaders are empowered in their roles because they work closely with their teachers and often help administration in making building decisions (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Alger (2008) recommended that principals should increase their knowledge of teacher leader experiences through increased communication in order to address the obstacles that their teacher leaders face which limit their ability to employ transformational leadership behaviors.

A second challenge to CRSL Strand 2 was that some school leaders found it difficult to diversify curricula content in their respective areas on a daily basis. For example, half of the core subject department chairs stated it was easier to diversify materials in ELA and social studies than it was for those in science and math. Even so, some curricular practices in the latter subject areas were changed in order to be more culturally responsive to Black students. Indeed, Gay (2002) argued it is possible to promote more diverse content in all subject areas. School leaders' participation in ESSP professional development was the primary strategy that promoted this CRSL strand.

**CRSL Strand 3: Culturally Responsive and Inclusive School Environments.** This CRSL strand encourages school leaders to develop strong student-teacher relationships in order to promote a more inclusive environment for underrepresented students. Further, school leaders should examine instructional and behavioral practices to ensure that they are inclusive for students. This includes challenging school actions and practices that are harmful to minority students. In order to measure their effectiveness in these areas, school leaders are encouraged to listen to the voices of students and also use school data to identify disparities (Khalifa et al., 2016). My findings, which address RQ1, highlight how school leaders' ESSP efforts have promoted this CRSL strand as they have worked to build more meaningful relationships with Black students.

School leaders interested in promoting a culturally responsive and inclusive environment recognize that strong student-teacher relationships occur when they are equitable and reciprocal (Ladson-Billings, 1994). As such, school leaders must find ways to not only provide feedback to students, but also for students to provide feedback to them. Due to participation in ESSP, school leaders analyzed behavioral data and found that Black students received a disproportionate

amount of discipline. School leaders attributed this disparity to teacher bias and inconsistency, lack of awareness regarding expectations, student-teacher communication, and the lack of strong teacher-parent relationships (see Appendix F). Subsequently, school leaders set a goal to decrease the number of office referrals for Black students so that they were proportional to the population. School leaders largely worked to meet this goal by improving student-teacher relationships through the use of focus groups and taking time to really listen to their Black students to demonstrate that they care. Theme 1: Centrality of Student Data & Decision-Making is what prompted school leaders to see the disparities and take action which helped to inform Theme 2: Strategic Academic Support Programs & Interventions and Theme 5: Intentionality in Building Meaningful Student Relationships.

In order to listen to student voices to learn more about how Black students perceived their school environment, school leaders utilized focus groups to hear from these students directly. In their study, Mayfield and Garrison-Wade (2015) also found that the school utilized student racial groups, though they had a leadership focus. School leaders must recognize any practices that could be harmful to a specific group of students (Smith, 1988), so speaking with Black students who received a disproportionate amount of discipline was an opportunity for school leaders to learn from students about the ways in which the environment was not working for them. While it was unknown at the end of this study exactly how school leaders used this feedback as the focus groups were still in progress, this culturally responsive action may also promote transformational leadership if school leaders make significant changes to the school environment based on what they learn. This finding shows how ESSP participation prompted school leaders to review and analyze data (Theme 1: Centrality of Student Data & Decision-Making) and ultimately form focus groups to increase their responsiveness and improve the experiences of Black students



(Theme 2: Strategic Academic Support Programs & Interventions). In doing so, school leaders hope to build better relationships with these students as well.

While all 16 participants expressed the importance of student-teacher relationships, Theme 5: Intentionality in Building Meaningful Student Relationships revealed new ways that school leaders made connections with Black students. Students' beliefs that their teachers care about them has consequences in the classroom and in their learning (Crosnoe et al., 2004; Nieto, 1999), and school leaders conversed and engaged with Black students in new ways to demonstrate that they cared. Instead of simply assigning discipline for behavioral issues, school leaders changed the way in which they spoke with students and the types of questions that they asked in order to better support them. Specifically, there was a shift from focusing on what students did wrong to what school leaders could do to help better support students. School leaders also shared that they asked Black students their thoughts and feelings on certain topics to make sure they were comfortable and also to increase their own cultural knowledge. Related culturally responsive practices were cited by Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) who called this collaborative classroom vision building. Further, school leaders adapted to increased classroom noise levels recognizing that learning does not have to take place in silence.

These findings also relate to Theme 4: Developing Cultural Awareness & Change of Practices because they show that, in order to build more meaningful relationships with Black students, school leaders must be willing to make changes as well. As highlighted previously, when school leaders engaged in identity development and ultimately found that some Black students were not being placed in eighth grade Algebra One even when eligible, the rubric was changed to exclude teacher input in order to avoid any bias and subjectivity. This change of practice relates to this CRSL strand because school leaders are tasked to make the school

environment more inclusive so increasing the number of Black students taking eighth grade Algebra One can potentially help to achieve this goal. In fact, this may work to reduce within-school segregation by addressing the underrepresentation of Black students in advanced courses (Chapman, 2014; Tyson, 2011).

CRSL Strand 3: Culturally Responsive and Inclusive School Environments was promoted by school leaders utilizing ESSP as an opportunity to make data-based goals, conduct focus groups, build better relationships with students, and change some of their practices in order to improve Black student experiences. Similar to previously discussed strands, school leaders' ESSP efforts served as their strategy to promote this CRSL strand. Even as ESSP efforts provided school leaders with several opportunities to make positive changes as highlighted above, the challenges they faced addresses the second part of RQ2. Some school leaders expressed that in discussing race-related topics with Black students, they feared saying something that could be perceived as offensive. Also, in an attempt to lower the discipline disparity for Black students, one school leader reported that staff let Black students get away with certain behaviors which led to increased problems. To address these challenges, school leaders should follow through with the strategies in their ESSP efforts to close disparities in discipline. These include developing teachers in culturally responsive communication, building relationships with students and parents, creating shared norms with students, and revisiting the code of conduct as needed (see Appendix F). One school leader's concerns highlighted another potential challenge in that if the focus shifts too much towards improving Black student experiences, the needs of White students could be overlooked. To address this concern, school leaders should emphasize that student data and CSI cycles drive their decisions and efforts, and that Black students received additional support because of disparities that revealed what was

working for the White-majority was not necessarily working for them. By definition, educational equity often means supporting students differently based on their needs (Jordan et al., 2010).

**CRSL Strand 4: Engaging Students and Parents in Community Contexts.** The final CRSL strand encourages school leaders to find meaningful ways to connect and engage students, parents, and communities in school efforts to improve student learning. It also cautions school leaders from framing deficit mindsets of these groups. In their study, Mayfield and Garrison-Wade (2015) found that this may include holding observational days for parents, recruiting an active and diverse PTA, and having parents and grandparents volunteer as hall monitors. Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) found in their study that parents were invited to observe classrooms and also have a voice in curricula decisions. Further, this strand encourages school leaders to demonstrate caring through advocacy in community issues particularly in areas where there may be school and community overlap. Regarding RQ1, unlike the three previous strands, MMS school leaders' ESSP efforts did not appear to significantly promote this CRSL strand though other efforts promoted aspects in this area.

The findings of this study show that while school leaders have made significant changes in some of their practices by better engaging Black students, this has not encouraged significant changes to parent and community engagement efforts. Participants largely cited open houses, email and phone communication, and conferences as the primary means of parental engagement. While MMS school leaders discussed parental (dis)engagement most often in terms of their level of care or socioeconomic status, they did not cite parents' feelings of inferiority regarding their ability to help academically (Kim & Hill, 2015), or the dynamics surrounding parents' occupations and its influence on parental beliefs about if their engagement is necessary or an interference (Lareau, 2000). Importantly, research suggests it is the latter reasons that may better

explain parent engagement levels at MMS. For school leaders interested in building stronger relationships with parents and increasing their engagement, it is important that they learn the reasons behind parental engagement levels and then find ways to overcome identified barriers. In his study, Theoharis (2010) cited how one principal began holding ethnic parent meetings to better address specific needs that varied by background though some school stakeholders disagreed with this approach (p. 358). Alternatively, Mayfield and Garrison-Wade (2015) found that building an active and diverse PTA may be an effective way to better understand and address parent needs.

Students' family and community experiences impact who they are as learners so it is important for school leaders to engage with these areas (Anyon, 2005, Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Theme 6: Considering Students' Home Lives and Parental Support revealed participants' beliefs that parental support and low socioeconomic status both impact student performance. While parental support is an aspect of this CRSL strand, CRSL places more emphasis on race than socioeconomic status and I also found this to be true of school leaders' ESSP efforts. However, to address students' socioeconomic needs, school leaders implemented a food pantry program that provided meals over the weekends and they also started homework programs to support students in completing assignments as some may not have parents able to help them with work in the evenings. Students' socioeconomic status is a predictor of their performance and addressing these conditions often requires school-community collaboration (Nyhan & Alkadry, 1999). At MMS, school leaders engaged with a community organization for the food pantry program and with a local church for an afterschool homework club. This was a strategy that other schools used in order to better support and connect marginalized students and families to services that they needed (Theoharis, 2010, p. 360). While

these supports were not race-exclusive, participants noted that a number of Black students at MMS also came from families with low socioeconomic backgrounds so some of these students benefited from these programs. This finding suggests that a more expanded view of CRSL, one that includes socioeconomic status, could provide additional support to students of color and perhaps more engagement with families and the community because efforts could be aimed at more than one aspect of students' identities. This could also expand school leaders' ESSP efforts which this study has found to be an effective strategy in creating transformational changes at MMS.

CRSL Strand 4: Engaging Students and Parents in Community Contexts is important to promote but remained a challenge for school leaders at MMS. Regarding RQ2, recent school-community efforts provided school leaders with opportunities to address students' home lives and the parental support they received through food pantry and homework help programs made possible by partnerships with a local organization and church. However, school leaders should find additional ways to engage with parents and the community as this is important to student learning. While there have been some community engagement efforts, MMS has yet to open itself as a true community space for students, parents, families, community members, businesses, and organizations. Further, I did not find evidence that school leaders have engaged in advocacy for community issues in significant ways and Khalifa et al. (2016) argued this is an important aspect of this CRSL strand. A key challenge then for school leaders in this area is finding the time to form school-home-community partnerships as their primary focus has been implementing changes that most impacted students within the scope of the MMS school day and building.

## Conclusion

Based on this study's findings, several conclusions may be drawn. First, school leaders utilized ESSP as their strategy to enact three strands of CRSL in order to improve Black student experiences. In doing so, they often exhibited behaviors of transformational leadership. Prior to participation in this program, I found no initiatives or interventions designed specifically to improve the experiences of Black students; instead, Black students' needs were addressed in general school improvement efforts designed to support all students. However, as themes one through five demonstrate, participation in ESSP informed practices in data-based goals, new programs and interventions, changes to curricular and school practices, professional development in cultural awareness, and building more meaningful relationships with students, all of which were designed to improve the performance and experiences of Black students. As such, ESSP was the sole strategy that school leaders utilized to promote CRSL. This is indicative that formal participation in a program such as ESSP may be an effective way for school leaders to enact CRSL and achieve their goals of improving experiences for marginalized students. This is important for school leaders at other sites interested in improving minority student experiences but unsure where to start in their efforts. As highlighted previously, school leaders have a legal obligation in supporting the education of minority students. In fact, if school leaders' practices are found to disproportionately impact students of color, they may be in violation of Titles VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 along with the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment (Biegel, 1995; Wade, 1980). Thus, utilizing ESSP to promote CRSL may be an effective action for school leaders to take, both ethically and legally. Considering that MMS was only in its second year of ESSP, a considerable amount of transformation occurred in a short

amount of time. While these changes provided school leaders with an opportunity to promote three strands of CRSL, promoting the fourth strand remained a challenge.

A second major outcome of this study is that promoting CRSL through ESSP or a similar program may not mean a complete overhaul of existing student improvement practices; in fact, ESSP built upon school leaders' existing practices in several areas. For example, school leaders at MMS have long used data and CSI cycles to make instructional decisions regarding intervention. However, as a result of ESSP, school leaders became more aware of disparities in achievement levels particularly among Black students taking eighth grade Algebra One. This led to each team working closely with four Black students, who fell short of passing the state test, for ongoing intervention over the course of the school year. Using student data and assigning interventions was not a new practice at MMS, but ESSP added an additional layer to this practice that ensured Black students were targeted specifically in order to narrow this gap. Importantly, ESSP may serve as a strategy for school leaders to promote CRSL and enhance existing practices to improve Black student experiences, helping them to stay in compliance with their legal responsibilities in supporting students of color as it relates to the Civil Rights Act and Fourteenth Amendment. By studying CRSL in a suburban context, this study contributes to the literature by showing how suburban school leaders in White-majority schools promoted efforts to improve Black student experiences.

In a second example, MMS has offered a number of support groups for students including those experiencing grief or the divorce of their parents. However, due to ESSP efforts to close achievement gaps in math, MMS created a mentoring program which paired Black middle school students with successful Black high schoolers in order to improve Black student experiences. This new mentoring program created for Black students was similar to preexisting

support programs in the sense that it was designed to address a student need and included peers to do so. Both of these examples show that school leaders' participation in a culturally responsive initiative such as ESSP can deepen and expand existing practices while also promoting transformational leadership. While there were some aspects of ESSP that were entirely new, these examples show how school leaders can embed CRSL efforts into some of their other activities and practices. This is important because promoting CRSL may seem like a completely separate initiative, but school leaders can find ways to connect the dots in order to show how CRSL efforts can support other building initiatives and goals.

A third outcome from this study is that students have overlapping identities but school leaders' current ESSP efforts are race-based. Participation in ESSP highlighted disparities in the data for Black students in both achievement and discipline. As such, ESSP goals were related to Black students in these areas which made sense. However, school leaders shared that the number of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds had increased at MMS and this included many Black students as well. Since the school's ESSP efforts are race-based, this means that leaders have addressed one aspect of Black students' needs when it comes to race but, for some, have not addressed their needs in terms of socioeconomic background. While theme six highlights the efforts that school leaders have implemented to respond to the needs of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, these actions fell outside of ESSP goals and efforts.

A fourth major outcome from this study highlights the importance of school leaders better defining the teacher leader role and the purpose of leadership teams. While some teacher leaders felt that they had influence over the teachers they led, others felt that they were not empowered to direct their teachers so, instead, they attempted to model culturally responsive behaviors and practices. Other research has produced similar findings (Alger, 2008, Muijs &



Harris, 2007). Since teacher leaders have more frequent interactions with their teachers than administrators, it is important for them to be empowered in their leadership roles to make transformational changes in their departments and teams. As such, administrators and teacher leaders should redefine the role of teacher leaders and, in doing so, find ways to better empower them in their leadership responsibilities. This requires that principals increase their communication with teacher leaders to learn about the challenges they face in their efforts to function as transformational leaders (Alger, 2008, p. 6). If teacher leaders have more authority, they may have the opportunity to better promote CRSL efforts. For example, the social studies department chair shared that in order to be more culturally responsive she now teaches about Black emperors. However, she lacked the authority to ensure that her department members do the same which could serve as a challenge to CRSL efforts. To be clear, I am not advocating for the elimination of teacher autonomy, but school leaders should find ways to expand teacher leader authority in order to advance their CRSL efforts.

Relatedly, school leaders should better define the purpose of leadership teams and the topics of discussion at meetings. Most participants shared that their meetings frequently became bogged down with housekeeping issues, scheduling concerns, and other topics that could be handled over email. This reduced the amount of time they spent discussing ideas and progress towards reaching common goals along with culturally responsive and best practices in curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment which is important to transformational leadership (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Muijs and Harris (2007) also found problems when school leaders do not have a shared vision (p. 128). With time also a challenge, school leaders should redefine the purpose of leadership teams and meetings so that discussions become more of an opportunity for them to advance CRSL efforts in order to improve Black student experiences. This study's

fourth major outcome was made possible by the research design and decision to expand school leaders to include not only administrators but also teacher leaders. Importantly, this contributes to CRSL literature as it relates to ideas in transformational leadership which acknowledges that principals must collaborate and empower others in their efforts to transform and improve the school environment. This study also provides additional insights into factors that may impact teacher leaders in functioning as transformational leaders.

### **Implications**

Results of this study show the need for scholars to reconceptualize aspects of CRSL to be more inclusive of ideas which would broaden the framework. First, CRSL literature primarily discusses culturally responsive ways to address the needs of marginalized students in terms of racial identity. However, this study found that students' home lives and situations, particularly those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, highlighted a number of needs that school leaders had to address. Indeed, as presented in the previous chapter, nine out of 16 participants shared in interviews that they believed students' home lives and their level of parental support was the most significant factor impacting academic performance prompting them to take action. For example, school leaders' ESSP efforts to promote CRSL were race-based, yet they started initiatives outside of ESSP to assist students with homework and provide students with food due to the circumstances in students' home lives. An expanded view of CRSL, to focus on both race and also socioeconomic status, may allow school leaders to more effectively serve students as their efforts could fall under the same initiatives rather than under several different ones. With school leaders already overwhelmed by the number of responsibilities and growing demands they must meet, consolidating efforts into a smaller number of initiatives may promote a clearer vision and improve their efficiency. Exploring the intersection of race and disability may also

improve the experiences of Black students who are disproportionately represented in special education (Blanchett, 2006). Further, Losen (2002) discusses the intersections and effects of student disabilities in terms of race, socioeconomic status, and gender, demonstrating how these identities are complex and intertwined. As such, researchers should explore the consequences, both positive and negative, of expanding CRSL to examine intersections of student identity in terms of race, socioeconomic background, (dis)ability level, gender, and other characteristics. Adapting a more holistic approach to student identity may allow school leaders to become more culturally responsive in addressing all of their students' needs.

A second implication of this study is that CRSL should be more inclusive in terms of who is considered a school leader. In their CRSL work, Khalifa et al. (2016) defined school leaders at the building level which includes principals and assistant principals yet they acknowledge the important role of teacher leaders. By expanding the definition of school leaders to include teacher leaders such as team leaders and department chairs, this study provided additional insights into leadership roles and practices outside of school administrators. This is important because teacher leaders have more frequent interaction with not only principals, but also with students and other teachers. If a crucial role of school leaders is to ensure that teachers are culturally responsive (Khalifa et al., 2016), it makes sense for teacher leaders to be acknowledged as school leaders since teacher leaders engage in more conversations with teachers regarding curricular and school practices. Further, teacher leaders often facilitate professional development efforts among their team and department members. In light of this implication, scholars should expand CRSL literature to incorporate the role of teacher leaders which could provide new insights as to how their leadership efforts fit within the CRSL framework and transformational leadership. Doing so could allow school leaders to better enact

CRSL in their buildings which could also promote more of the “SL” in CRSL. This could also contribute to research exploring the role that teacher leaders have as transformational leaders.

In expanding the definition of school leaders to include teacher leaders, this implication could also allow existing CRSL and CRP frameworks to be explored through a new concept that could be termed Culturally Responsive Leadership Teams (CRLT). While the second strand of CRSL in particular captures many aspects of CRP, this study found that CRSL efforts could be strengthened if teacher leaders were better empowered to lead other teachers in their respective teams, departments, or units. While CRP is more so focused on teacher actions, CRSL has the ability to influence teacher actions through leadership practices. This is where the need for CRLT emerges as it could provide an integrated approach to studying CRP and CRSL models. CRLT could expand CRSL literature by further investigating the role of principals and teacher leaders while also adding a leadership aspect to the CRP work of Ladson-Billings (1995), Gay (2002), and Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011). Specifically, CRLT could explore how school leaders in various roles influence their teachers in promoting CRSL strands and CRP principles in ways that result in changes designed to improve the performance of students from underrepresented backgrounds. This could also contribute to the literature by providing a new approach to studying CRSL and CRP at a time when this is increasingly important due to the growing student diversity in suburban schools.

A final implication of this study shows the need for policymakers to reevaluate how state report cards are calculated. A central goal of CRSL is to be responsive to the needs of minority students in order to improve their learning environment and academic performance. As the findings of this study show, school leaders made significant changes through their ESSP efforts in order to improve Black student performance and also their overall experience at MMS. School

leaders spend both time and resources to implement ESSP, yet their efforts are not rewarded or even recognized under the state's current school report card system. Instead of simply measuring student performance through test scores, policymakers should explore ways to measure school leaders' efforts to improve their practices as they strive to better respond to student needs. As theme six highlighted, there are many factors in students' home lives that fall outside of school leaders' control, yet MMS school leaders made changes to address what they could both in and out of school. For this reason, policymakers should revise the way in which school report card grades are calculated to include a measure of school leaders' efforts to become more culturally responsive. While the hope is that school leaders' efforts to promote CRSL results in improved student performance, the responsiveness they are showing and the positive changes that they are making should be assessed as this has now become not only a responsibility but also a priority.

### **Future Research**

This study explored the ways in which suburban school leaders at MMS enacted CRSL efforts in order to improve Black student experiences. While a great deal was learned around school leaders' ESSP efforts to promote CRSL, the following are recommendations to expand research in this area. First, future research should explore other schools participating in the ESSP in order to learn how their efforts are similar and different to those at MMS. As this single site case study provided rich detailed data—useful when exploring a new program—it is unknown how, if at all, ESSP has promoted CRSL efforts at other sites. Second, MMS is comprised of primarily White and Black students and, while this allowed me to explore the many efforts underway to improve Black student experiences, future research could explore efforts at sites with different demographics. For example, exploring CRSL efforts at a school with mainly White and Hispanic students could reveal how student needs may vary across minority groups

along with the response of school leaders. Relatedly, future research could explore how White-majority suburban schools enact CRSL efforts when serving multiple student groups of color (i.e. sizeable Black, Hispanic, and Asian student populations). While this study explored CRSL efforts to improve Black student experiences along with the opportunities and challenges that school leaders encountered, this might look differently if efforts were aimed at multiple minority groups as the number of needs to address would likely be higher. Finally, future research could explore practical ways that school leaders can engage with students, parents, communities, businesses, and organizations in order to promote CRSL. With so many demands placed on school leaders' time, it would be particularly beneficial for practitioners to learn how other schools are successful in addressing CRSL Strand 4. All of these recommendations could prove useful for school leaders nationally because, while suburban public schools are becoming more diverse, this varies significantly by city, region, and state.

### **Final thoughts**

I conclude this dissertation with the words of Chantel, a participant in this study. I am thankful to her, the other participants, and all educators who engage in culturally responsive efforts to better meet the needs of marginalized students. Chantel's words highlight the importance of this work, and they inspired the first part of my dissertation's title. I hope they provide as much inspiration for school leaders and researchers as they did for me:

This is a real thing. These parents and students are moving in and they are here and they care about their kids and they need to know how to help them be successful. You know the movie *When They See Us*? It was a miniseries by Ava DuVernay. The title is about how when they see, they do not see us. So, if you do not see me, really see me, how can you meet me where I am? And that is how these kids feel. They do not even feel seen ...

This is purposeful work and it is heartfelt and it is difficult. And so, I appreciate the fact that you are here inquiring about our practices so that teachers can see the work that we are doing and understand that it is valuable because sometimes it takes an outside presence to shine a light on the need for something. So, I am thankful that you are doing the work you are doing.

## References

- Adejumo, C. (2002). Considering multicultural art education. *Art Education*, 55(2), 33-39.  
Retrieved from [www.jstor.org/stable/3193988](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3193988)
- Alger, G. (2008). Transformational leadership practices of teacher leaders. *Academic Leadership: The Online Journal*, 6(2). Retrieved from  
<https://scholars.fhsu.edu/alj/vol6/iss2/19/>
- Amrein-Beardsley, A., Pivovarova, M., & Geiger, T. (2016). Value-added models: What the experts say. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 98(2), 35-40. Retrieved from  
<http://www.jstor.org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/stable/24893466>
- Anderson, D. (2008). Transformational teacher leadership: Decentring the search for transformational leadership. *International Journal of Management in Education*, 2(2), 109-123.
- Anyon, J. (2005). *Radical possibilities: Public policy, urban education, and a new social movement*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Banks, J.A., Cookson, P., Gay, G., Hawley, W.D., Irvine, J.J., Nieto, S., Schofield, J.W., & Stephan, W.G. (2001). Diversity within unity: Essential principles for teaching and learning in a multicultural society. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 196-203.
- Bankston, C., & Caldas, S. (2000). White enrollment in nonpublic schools, public school racial composition, and student performance. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 41(4), 539-550.  
Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4121117>
- Berry, C. (2001). Land use regulation and residential segregation: Does zoning matter? *American Law and Economics Review*, 3(2), 251-274. Retrieved from  
<http://www.jstor.org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/stable/42705390>



- Biegel, S. (1995). School choice policy and title VI: Maximizing equal access for k-12 students in a substantially deregulated education environment. *Hastings Law Journal*, 46(5), 1533-1584. Retrieved from [https://repository.uchastings.edu/hastings\\_law\\_journal/vol46/iss5/4](https://repository.uchastings.edu/hastings_law_journal/vol46/iss5/4)
- Bieneman, P. (2011). Transformative leadership: The exercise of agency in educational leadership. *Counterpoints*, 409, 221-237. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/stable/42981307>
- Billingham, C. M., and Hunt, M. O. (2016). School racial composition and parental choice: New evidence on the preferences of white parents in the united states. *Sociology of Education*, 89, 99-117.
- Blanchett, W. (2006). Disproportionate representation of african american students in special education: Acknowledging the role of white privilege and racism. *Educational Researcher*, 35(6), 24-28. Retrieved May 16, 2020, from [www.jstor.org/stable/3876750](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3876750)
- Bowman, R. (2007). How can students be motivated: A misplaced question? *The Clearing House*, 81(2), 81-86. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30189961>
- Braun, C., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3, p. 96.
- Bromley, D. B. (1986). *The case-study method in psychology and related disciplines*. Chichester, UK: Wiley.
- Brown-Jeffy, S., & Cooper, J. (2011). Toward a conceptual framework of culturally relevant pedagogy: An overview of the conceptual and theoretical literature. *Teacher education quarterly*, 38 (1), pp. 65-84).
- Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

- Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 349 U.S. 294 (1955).
- Bruegmann, R. (2005). *Sprawl: A compact history*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Cambron-McCabe, N. H, McCarthy, M. M, & Thomas, S. B. (2004). *Public school law: teachers' and students' rights*. 5th ed. Boston: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon.
- Carson, C. (2004). Two cheers for brown v. board of education. *The Journal of American History*, 91(1), 26-31. doi:10.2307/3659610
- Carspecken, P.F. (1996). *Critical ethnography in educational research*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Chapman, T. (2014). Is integration a dream deferred? Students of color in majority white suburban schools. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 83(3), 311-326.  
doi:10.7709/jnegroeducation.83.3.0311
- Claro, M., Nussbaum, M., López, X., & Contardo, V. (2017). Differences in views of school principals and teachers regarding technology integration. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 20(3), 42-53. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/stable/26196118>
- Cokley, K., McClain, S., Jones, M., & Johnson, S. (2011). A preliminary investigation of academic disidentification, racial identity, and academic achievement among african american adolescents. *The High School Journal*, 95(2), 54-68. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41343015>
- Coleman, J.S., Campbell, E.Q., Hobson, C.J., McPartland, J., Mood, A.M., Weinfield, F.D., York, R.L. (1966). Equality of educational opportunity. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

- Common Core State Standards Initiative (n.d.). Retrieved December 02, 2017, from <http://www.corestandards.org/>
- Crosnoe, R., Johnson, M., & Elder, G. (2004). Intergenerational bonding in school: The behavioral and contextual correlates of student-teacher relationships. *Sociology of Education*, 77(1), 60-81. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3649403>
- Danielsen, B., Fairbanks, J., & Zhao, J. (2015). School choice programs: The impacts on housing values. *Journal of Real Estate Literature*, 23(2), 207-232. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/stable/24884298>
- Darling-Hammond (2015). Can value added add value to teacher evaluation? *Educational Researcher*, 44(2), 132-137. Retrieved from <https://doiorg.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/10.3102/0013189X15575346>
- DeAngelis, K. (2013). The characteristics of high school department chairs: A national perspective. *The High School Journal*, 97(2), 107-122. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/stable/43281021>
- DeMatthews, D. (2016). Effective leadership is not enough: Critical approaches to closing the racial discipline gap. *A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 89, 7-13.
- Diamond, J. (2006). Still separate and unequal: Examining race, opportunity, and school achievement in "integrated" suburbs. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 75(3), 495-505. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40026817>
- Diem, S. (2015). Seeking diversity: The challenges of implementing a race-neutral student assignment plan in an urban school district. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 28(7), 842-867.

- DiMaggio, P. (1982). Cultural capital and school success: The impact of status culture participation on the grades of U.S. high school students. *American Sociological Review* 47: 189-201.
- Doppen, F. H., & Yeager, E. A. (1998). National versus state curriculum standards for history in the United States: where will the debate lead us?. *Curriculum Journal*, 9(2), 165.
- Doyle, D. (1991). America 2000. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 73(3), 184-191. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/stable/20404594>
- Duea, J. (1995). The impact upon the social studies curriculum and the classroom teacher. *The History Teacher*, 28(3), 407-412. doi:10.2307/494686
- Eckes, S. (2004). The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of brown: Is there any reason to celebrate? *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 37, 219-226. doi: 10.1080/10665680490491038
- Edmonds, R. (1979). Effective schools for the urban poor. *Educational Leadership*, 37, 15-24.
- Edmonds, R., & Moore, E. (1973). IQ, social class, and educational policy. *Change*, 5(8), 12-64. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/stable/40161861>
- Elgart, M. (2017). Can schools meet the promise of continuous improvement? *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 99(4), 54-59. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26388294>
- Evans, A. (2007). School leaders and their sensemaking about race and demographic change. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 43, 159-188.
- Feldman, M., & Pentland, B. (2003). Reconceptualizing organizational routines as a source of flexibility and change. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 48(1), 94-118. doi:10.2307/3556620
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2011). Case study. In Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.), *The sage handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed., pp. 301-316). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Ford, D., & Grantham, T. (2003). Providing access for culturally diverse gifted students: From deficit to dynamic thinking. *Theory Into Practice*, 42(3), 217-225. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/stable/1477423>
- Francis, R. (1996). Connecting the curriculum through the national mathematics and science standards. *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, 7(1), 75-81. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43156056>
- Galam, R. G. (2015). Gender, reflexivity, and positionality in male research in one's own community with filipino seafarers' wives. *Qualitative Social Research*, 16(3), Art. 13, <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/2330>
- Gamson, D. A., McDermott, K. A., & Reed, D. S. (2015). The elementary and secondary education act at fifty: Aspirations, effects, and limitations. *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 1(3), 1-29.
- Garces, L., & Cogburn, C. (2015). Beyond declines in student body diversity: How campus-level administrators understand a prohibition on race-conscious postsecondary admissions policies. *American Educational Research Journal*, 52(5), 828–860.
- Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(2), 106-116. Retrieved from <http://jte.sagepub.com>
- Geiger, A. (2017). Many minority students go to schools where at least half of their peers are their race or ethnicity. Retrieved August 4, 2018, from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/10/25/many-minority-students-go-to-schools-where-at-least-half-of-their-peers-are-their-race-or-ethnicity/>

- Gordon, N., & Reber, S. (2015). The quest for a targeted and effective title I ESEA: Challenges in designing and implementing fiscal compliance rules. *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, *1*(3), 129-147. doi:10.7758/rsf.2015.1.3.07
- Groves, R., Fowler, F., Couper, M., Lepkowski, J., Singer, E., & Tourangeau, R. (2009). *Survey methodology* (2nd ed.). Hoboken: Wiley.
- Hargreaves, A., & Fink, D. (2006). *Sustainable leadership*. Hoboken: Wiley.
- Harris, H. (2013). A national survey of school counselors' perceptions of multiracial students. *Professional School Counseling*, *17*(1), 1-19. Retrieved from [www.jstor.org/stable/profschocoun.17.1.1](http://www.jstor.org/stable/profschocoun.17.1.1)
- Harris, W., Maxwell, W., Nightingale, A., DeGarmo, C., & Greenwood, J. (1894). The committee of ten. *The Journal of Education*, *39*(10) 960, 150-150. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/stable/44039674>
- Harrison-Jones, L. (2007). No child left behind and implications for black students. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *76*(3), 346-356. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/stable/40034577>
- Hatchett, S., & Schuman, H. (1975). White respondents and race-of-interviewer effects. *Public opinion quarterly*, *39* (4), pp. 523-528.
- Hewitt, T. (2008). Speculations on "a nation at risk": Illusions and realities. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, *89*(8), 575-579. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/stable/20442570>
- Highsmith, A., & Erickson, A. (2015). Segregation as splitting, segregation as joining: Schools, housing, and the many modes of jim crow. *American Journal of Education*, *121*(4), 563-595. doi:10.1086/681942

- Hill, N., & Taylor, L. (2004). Parental school involvement and children's academic achievement: Pragmatics and issues. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 13(4), 161-164. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20182940>
- Holme, J. J., Diem, S., & Welton, A. (2013). Suburban school districts and demographic change: The technical, normative, and political dimensions of response. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 50(1), 34-66. doi:10.1177/0013161x13484038.
- House, E. (1978). Evaluation as scientific management in U. S. school reform. *Comparative Education Review*, 22(3), 388-401. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/stable/1187283>
- Hunter, R. (2004). The administration of court-ordered school desegregation in urban school districts: The law and experience. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 73(3), 218-229. doi:10.2307/4129607
- Jackson, K. (1985). *Crabgrass frontier*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Jacobsen, R., Saultz, A., & Snyder, J. (2013). Grading school report cards. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 95(2), 64-67. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23617144>
- Jaeger, M.M. (2011). Does cultural capital really affect academic achievement? New evidence from combined sibling and panel data." *Sociology of Education*, 84, 281-298.
- Jennings, J. (2015). ESEA at 50. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 96(7), 41-46. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/stable/24375849>
- Jordan, W., Brown, B., & Gutiérrez, K. (2010). Defining equity: multiple perspectives to analyzing the performance of diverse learners. *Review of Research in Education*, 34, 142-178. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40588176>

- Jun, I. (2011). Transformative leadership in a diverse setting. *Counterpoints*, 409, 238-253.  
Retrieved from [www.jstor.org/stable/42981308](http://www.jstor.org/stable/42981308)
- Kaplan, L., & Owings, W. (2013). The unaddressed costs of changing student demographics. *Journal of Education Finance*, 39(1), 15-46. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23597602>
- Khalifa, M., Gooden, M., & Davis, J. (2016). Culturally responsive school leadership: A synthesis of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 86, 1272-1311.
- Kim, S.W. & Hill, N.E. (2015). Including fathers in the picture: A meta-analysis of parental involvement and students' academic achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 107(4), 919-934.
- Kimble, J. (2007). Insuring inequality: The role of the federal housing administration in the urban ghettoization of african americans. *Law & Social Inquiry*, 32(2), 399-434.  
Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/stable/20108708>
- Krysan, M., & Couper, M. P. (2003). Race in the live and the virtual interview: Racial deference, social desirability, and activation effects in attitude surveys. *Social psychology quarterly*, 66, 364-383.
- LaCour, S., York, A., Welner, K., Valladares, M., & Kelley, L. (2017). Learning from schools that close opportunity gaps. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 99(1), 8-14. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26388304>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teaching for african-american students*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.



- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465-491. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/stable/1163320>
- Larco, N. (2010). Suburbia shifted: Overlooked trends and opportunities in suburban multifamily housing. *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, 27(1), 69-87. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/stable/43030893>
- Lareau, A. (2000). *Home advantage: Social class and parental intervention in elementary education*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Lareau (2011). *Unequal childhoods: Class, race, and family life*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (1990). Transformational leadership: How principals can help reform school cultures. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 1, 249-280.
- Lewis-McCoy, R. (2014). *Inequality in the promised land: Race, resources, and suburban schooling*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Lipman, P. (1993). The influence of restructuring on teachers' beliefs about and practices with african american students. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison.
- Losen, D. J. (2002). New research on special education and minority students with implications for federal education policy and enforcement, In D.M. Piche, W. L. Taylor, & R. A. Reed (Eds.), *Rights at risk: Equality in an age of terrorism* (pp. 263-284). Washington, DC: Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights.

- Madhlangobe, L., & Gordon, S. P. (2012). Culturally responsive leadership in a Diverse School: A Case Study of a High School Leader. *NASSP Bulletin*, 96(3), 177–202. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636512450909>
- Marshall, K. (2016). Rethinking differentiation — Using teachers' time most effectively. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 98(1), 8-13. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24893300>
- Massey, D. (2015). The legacy of the 1968 fair housing act. *Sociological Forum*, 30(1), 571-588. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43654407>
- Mayfield, V.M., & Garrison-Wade, D. (2015). Culturally responsive practices as whole school reform. *Journal of Instructional Pedagogies*, 16, 1-17. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1069396.pdf>
- McGlynn, K., & Kozlowski, J. (2016). Empowering students through collaboration. *Science Scope*, 40(4), 64-67. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24894442>
- Moore, E.H., Bagin, D.H. & Gallagher, D.R. (2016). *The school and community relations*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Muijs, D., & Harris, A. (2007). Teacher leadership in (In)action: Three case studies of contrasting schools. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 35(1), 111–134. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143207071387>
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2020, March). *The nation's report card*. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard>
- Nieto, S. (1999). *The light in their eyes: Creating multicultural learning communities*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

- Nyhan, R., & Alkadry, M. (1999). The impact of school resources on student achievement test scores. *Journal of Education Finance*, 25(2), 211-227. Retrieved from [www.jstor.org/stable/40704095](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40704095)
- O'Day, J., & Smith, M. (2016). Quality and equality in american education: Systemic problems, systemic solutions,” in *The Dynamics of Opportunity in America*, ed. I. Kirsch and H. Braun, 299–360.
- Orfield, G. (1995). Housing and the justification of school segregation. *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, 143(5), 1397-1406. doi:10.2307/3312481
- Peshkin, A. (1988). In search of subjectivity—One’s own. *Educational Researcher*, 17(7), 17-21.
- Pounder, J. S. (2006). Transformational classroom leadership: The fourth wave of teacher leadership? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 34(4), 533–545. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143206068216>
- Qu, S., & Dumay, J.(2011). The qualitative research interview. *Qualitative research in accounting and management*, 8(3), 238-264.<https://doi.org/10.1108/11766091111162070>
- Rothwell, J. (2011). Racial enclaves and density zoning: The institutionalized segregation of racial minorities in the united states. *American Law and Economics Review*, 13(1), 290-358. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/stable/42705595>
- Rottier, J. (2000). Teaming in the middle school: Improve it or lose it. *The Clearing House*, 73(4), 214-216. Retrieved from [www.jstor.org/stable/30189548](http://www.jstor.org/stable/30189548)
- Saldaña, J., & Omasta, M. (2018). *Qualitative research: Analyzing life*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Saporito, S., & Sohoni, D. (2006). Coloring outside the lines: Racial segregation in public schools and their attendance boundaries. *Sociology of Education*, 79(2), 81-105. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25054306>

- Scherff, L., & Spector, K. (2011). *Culturally relevant pedagogy: Clashes and confrontations*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.
- Sebring, P., & Bryk, A. (2000). School leadership and the bottom line in Chicago. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 81(6), 440-443. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/stable/20439690>
- Smith, L. (1988). Social justice and school administration: An agenda for our future. *The Journal of Educational Thought (JET)*, 22(3), 228-233. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/stable/23769003>
- Strayhorn, T., & Johnson, R. (2014). Why are all the white students sitting together in college? Impact of brown v. board of education on cross-racial interactions among blacks and whites. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 83(3), 385-399. doi:10.7709/jnegroeducation.83.3.0385
- Teaford, J. (2008). *The American suburb: The basics*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Theoharis, G. (2010). Disrupting injustice: Principals narrate the strategies they use to improve their schools and advance social justice. *Teachers College Record*, 112(1), 331-373.
- Trifun, N. (2009). Residential segregation after the fair housing act. *Human Rights*, 36(4), 14-19. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27880563>
- Turner, E. (2015). Districts' responses to demographic change: Making sense of race, class, and immigration in political and organizational context. *American Educational Research Journal*, 52(1), 4-39. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/stable/24546720>
- Tyson, K. (2011). *Integration interrupted. Tracking, black students, & acting white after brown*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

- Vanneman, A., Hamilton, L., Anderson, J. B., & Rahman, T. (2009). Achievement gaps: How black and white students in public schools perform in mathematics and reading on the national assessment of educational progress. Statistical Analysis Report. NCES 2009-455. *National Center for Education Statistics*.
- Wade, D. (1980). Racial discrimination in IQ testing – Larry P. v. Riles. *DePaul Law Review*, 29(4), 1193-1214. Retrieved from <https://via.library.depaul.edu/law-review/vol29/iss4/12>
- Wang, T., Hill, N. & Hofkens, T. (2014). Parental involvement and african american and european american adolescents’ academic, behavioral and emotional development in secondary school. *Child Development*, 18(6), 2151-2168.
- Welton, A. (2013). Even more racially isolated than before: Problematizing the vision for “diversity” in a racially mixed high school. *Teachers College Record*, 115(11), 1-42.
- Welton, A., Diem, S., & Holme, J. J. (2013). Color conscious, cultural blindness: Suburban school districts and demographic change. *Education and Urban Society*, 47(6), 695–722. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124513510734>
- Wepner, S., & Gómez, D. (2017). *Challenges facing suburban schools: Promising responses to changing student populations*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Wohlstetter, P., Datnow, A., & Park, V. (2008). Creating a system for data-driven decision-making: Applying the principal-agent framework. *School Effectiveness & School Improvement*, 19(3), 239-259.
- Woodly, S. (2018). *MC means move the class: How to spark engagement and motivation in urban and culturally diverse classrooms*. Atlanta, GA: Ideal Education Consulting.

- Yin, R. (1981) The case study crisis: Some answers. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 26, 58–65. Google Scholar.
- Yin, R. (2016). *Qualitative research from start to finish* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- York-Barr, J., & Duke, K. (2004). What do we know about teacher leadership? Findings from two decades of scholarship. *Review of Educational Research*, 74(3), 255-316. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3516026>
- Zepeda, S., & Kruskamp, B. (2007). High school department chairs — Perspectives on instructional supervision. *The High School Journal*, 90(4), 44-54. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40364192>
- Zygmunt-Fillwalk, E., Malaby, M., & Clausen, J. (2010). The imperative of contextual cognizance: Preservice teachers and community engagement in the schools and communities project. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 37(2), 53-67. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23479589>

# Appendices

## Appendix A



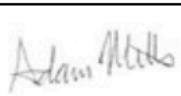
**INDIANA UNIVERSITY**  
OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH  
Office of Research Compliance

### NOTICE OF EXEMPTION - NEW PROTOCOL NOTICE OF EXEMPTION GRANTED

<b>DATE:</b>	October 14, 2019
<b>TO:</b>	Dionne Danns, Principal Investigator EDUCATION  Garrett Carter EDUCATION
<b>FROM:</b>	Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) Office of Research Compliance – Indiana University
<b>RE:</b>	Protocol #: 1910337761 Protocol Type: Exempt Protocol Title: Reaching All: Exploring Culturally Responsive Leadership and Pedagogy in a Changing Middle School Funding Source: None

In accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b) and/or IU HRPP Policy, the above-referenced protocol is granted exemption. Exemption of this submission is based on your agreement to abide by the policies and procedures of the Indiana University Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) and does not replace any other approvals that may be required. Relevant HRPP policies and procedures governing Human Subject Research can be found at: <https://research.iu.edu/compliance/human-subjects/guidance/index.html>.

#### Submission and Review Information:

<b>Type of Submission:</b>	Initial Protocol Application
<b>Level of Review:</b>	Exempt
<b>Exempt Category(ies), if applicable:</b>	Category 2: Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior.
<b>Date of Exemption Granted:</b>	October 14, 2019
<b>Authorized HSO Signature:</b>	 Adam Mills

#### Regulatory Determinations:

--

**Documents Approved with this Submission (for Amendments and Renewals, documents appearing in bold were either added or replaced with the submission):**

Attachment Type - Document Version #
Other - Letter of support from principal.
Other - Support from superintendent
Data Collection Instrument - Interview protocol
Recruitment Materials - Email recruitment
Study Information Sheet - Information sheet regarding the study.

*NOTE: If you submitted and/or are required to provide subjects with an informed consent document, please ensure you are using the most recent version of the document to consent subjects.*

**The following key personnel are approved to participate in the above titled research activities:**

Investigator Name	Role	Training
Dionne Danns	Principal Investigator	Yes
Garrett Carter	Co-PI Student/Fellow/Resident	Yes

**Organizations:**

Organization
Indiana University (UA)

You should retain a copy of this letter and all associated approved study documents for your records. Please refer to the assigned study number and exact study title in future correspondence with our office. Additional information is available on our website at <https://research.iu.edu/compliance/human-subjects/guidance/index.html>.

If you have any questions or require further information, please contact the HSO via email at [irb@iu.edu](mailto:irb@iu.edu) or via phone at (317)274-8289.



## Appendix B

IRB STUDY #1910337761

### Informed Consent

#### INDIANA UNIVERSITY STUDY INFORMATION SHEET FOR

##### Reaching All: Exploring Culturally Responsive Leadership and Pedagogy in a Changing Middle School

You are invited to participate in a research study regarding your perceptions and responses to changing student needs. You were selected as a possible subject for this study because you hold a staff leadership position in your building. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

The study is being conducted by Garrett Carter who is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Indiana University.

##### STUDY PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to explore how school leaders understand and respond to changing student needs. Specifically, this study examines staff perceptions and actions and the impact that these have on student performance.

##### PROCEDURES FOR THE STUDY:

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in two 45 minute in-person interviews that will ask you about your perceptions regarding the school and student needs. Questions presented on the interview will relate to your observations and experience as a school leader. The researcher will ask your permission to record the interview. The purpose of this recording is to ensure that the researcher is able to collect an accurate record of the conversation. During the interview, you will not be required to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable or about which you do not feel prepared to answer.

##### RISKS AND BENEFITS

The risks of participating in this research are minimal. Risks may include a feeling of stress or anxiety about participating in an interview about your professional practice. If you are anxious about participating in the interview, please tell the researcher immediately so that he may address any concerns you have.

The possible benefits of participating in this research are limited, but some participants may find it beneficial to reflect on their professional practice. Moreover, the results of the study may provide you and your colleagues with insights about best practices in addressing changing student needs. These insights may be helpful to you in your work.

##### CONFIDENTIALITY

Efforts will be made to keep your personal information confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Your identity will be held in confidence in reports in which the study may be published. Once your interview has been completed, only members of the research team will have access to the audio files. These files will be stored electronically on a secure, password protected server hosted at Indiana University.

Organizations that may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis include groups such as the study investigator and his/her research associates, the Indiana University Institutional Review Board or its designees, the study sponsor, and (as allowed by law) state or federal agencies.

**PAYMENT**

You will not receive payment for taking part in this study.

**CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS**

For questions about the study, contact the researcher, Garrett Carter, by email: [garrcart@iu.edu](mailto:garrcart@iu.edu).

For questions about your rights as a research participant or to discuss problems, complaints or concerns about a research study, or to obtain information, or offer input, contact the IU Human Subjects Office at or (812) 856-4242 or (800) 696-2949.

**VOLUNTARY NATURE OF STUDY**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or may leave the study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relations with Indiana University.

**SUBJECT'S CONSENT**

In consideration of all of the above, I give my consent to participate in this research study.

I will be given a copy of this informed consent document to keep for my records. I agree to take part in this study.

**Subject's Printed Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Subject's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Person Obtaining Consent:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

### Structured Interview Protocol for School Leaders CRSL Strands for Teacher Leaders

Hello [Insert Participant's Name]:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study.

As part of my dissertation research, I am interested in exploring school leader response to changing student needs. Ultimately, I want to learn how school leaders strive to improve student performance and experiences.

The questions that I am about to ask you are presented in a specific sequence and there are no right or wrong answers. I will ask each question to you as I will other participants in this study. The purpose of this protocol is to ensure that similar questions are asked across all participants. At the conclusion of this interview, I will provide you with the opportunity to add any additional comments that you feel may be pertinent to what has been stated today.

Just to remind you, your name, school, and state affiliation will not be attached to any of the comments you provide. This is to ensure anonymity to you as a research participant.

Before beginning this interview, do you have any questions about the purpose of this study or your rights as a research participant? [Wait] I will now begin recording this session.

*State pseudonym and date*

## Interview 1

**Topic Domain:** Critical Self-Awareness

**Lead-off Question 1:** First, what are your roles and responsibilities as a school leader?

[Covert Categories: leadership role, identity development, cultural heritage and knowledge, professional development]

### **Follow-up Questions:**

1. How much, if at all, does your position as a school leader allow you to influence the practices of teachers in your building?
2. What factors prompt or motivate you to reflect on your own instructional practices as a school leader?
3. What role do you see professional development playing in supporting you to be responsive to the needs of students?
4. Thinking about socioeconomic status, race, gender, religion, and other characteristics, which would you say you are most aware of on a daily basis and why?
5. In what ways, if any, does your background shape your interactions with students, parents, and staff?

**Lead-off Question 2:** Next, in thinking about your students, what factors do you believe most impact their academic performance?

[Covert Categories: multiple perspectives, school leader thoughts and attitudes, school data, beliefs and practice, reflexivity, parents and home life]

### **Follow-up Questions:**

1. If you were to compare a typical student who has been in this district since kindergarten to a typical student who is new to your school, what would you say are the similarities? The differences?
2. Within your department or school, what achievement gaps, if any, have you observed along lines of race or socioeconomic status?
  - What factors do you attribute these gaps to?
3. In what ways do you communicate your academic expectations to students?

**Lead-off Question 3:** If someone was thinking about becoming a teacher in this school, what would be important for them to know?

[Covert Categories: affirmation of diversity, school leader thoughts and attitudes, beliefs and practice, identity]

**Follow-up Questions:**

1. In what ways, if any, do you believe that teachers in this building affirm student diversity in the classroom?
2. Thinking about SES, race, gender, religion, and other characteristics, which would you say is most significant to how your students view themselves and why?
3. In thinking about the growing diversity within this school, in what ways, if any, has this been viewed as a challenge by school staff?
4. In thinking about the growing diversity within this school, in what ways, if any, has this been viewed as a strength or growth opportunity by school staff?

**Topic Domain:** CRSL and School Environment

**Lead-off Question 1:** What role do department chairs/team leaders have in shaping the school environment?

[Covert Categories: leadership, inclusivity, affirmation, strategies, school-wide interventions, teacher capacity, professional development]

**Follow-up Questions:**

1. What impact, if any, do you believe building leadership meetings have on your school's efforts to improve student performance?
2. What improvements, if any, have resulted from building leadership meetings?
3. How do building leadership meetings shape your approach to department/team meetings?
4. How responsive do you feel that building leadership team meetings are to issues that arise as a result of changing student needs?
5. How do you believe that building leadership team meetings could be changed in order to improve student performance?

## **Interview 2**

**Topic Domain:** Critical Self-Awareness

**Lead-off Question 1:** Tell me about the ways in which you encourage your students to share information about their culture and personal experiences.

[Covert Categories: identity development, cultural heritage, school data, equity audits]

### **Follow-up Questions:**

1. How do you know if you are meeting your students' needs?
2. In what ways, if any, does your dept./team use data to support underperforming students?

**Topic Domain:** Culturally Responsive Curricula and Teacher Preparation

**Lead-off Question 1:** I understand that you have been receiving professional development surrounding issues of equity. Please tell me your major takeaways so far.

[Covert Categories: professional development, school leader thoughts and attitudes, teacher capacity, curricula, student data, instructional practices, reflexivity]

### **Follow-up Questions:**

1. You just shared some of your takeaways regarding PD on equity. What changes, if any, have occurred at your dept./team level as a result of this training? (If none, have there been conversations?)
2. Think about a lesson you taught this week. What was your process or approach when planning that lesson?
3. Please think about a topic that you taught where your students did not seem to relate to the content. Describe one strategy or method that you used to make the topic more relatable for your students.
4. Please think about the most recent time when your team/dept meeting has looked at data. Walk me through a typical meeting. I am interested in all details, so please speak freely.
5. Please tell me about the teaching practices you most commonly used your first year. Next, tell me about your current teaching practices. What is similar and what is different?

**Topic Domain:** Culturally Responsive and Inclusive School Environment

**Lead-off Question 1:** In what ways, if any, does your school address students' social and emotional needs?

[Covert Categories: student-teacher relationships, curricula, inclusivity, affirmation, strategies, school-wide interventions, student voice, inclusive instructional and behavioral practices]

**Follow-up Questions:**

1. Please describe any supports that your building may have in place designed to help improve the achievement of minority students and/or students from low-income backgrounds.
2. What curricular materials do you use most often in your classroom?
3. In what ways, if any, has your dept or school modified curriculum to become more inclusive for all students?
4. Describe one strategy or practice that your team/dept uses and explain how it is responsive to your students' needs.
5. In your role as a dept chair/team leader, how, if at all, do you discourage deficit views of students among your colleagues?
6. Describe the actions that you take to demonstrate to students that you care about them.
7. Is there anything different that you do in order to connect with students that come from backgrounds other than your own?

**Topic Domain:** Engaging Students and Parents in Community Context

**Lead-off Question 1:** Can you describe a specific assignment, project, or initiative that your team/dept has implemented to connect student learning with students' home lives?

[Covert Categories: school-home connections, school-community overlap, and advocacy parent and community engagement and learning]

**Follow-up Questions:**

1. In what ways, if any, does your team/dept/school engage with the local community?
2. I am aware that your school conducts parent teacher conferences. What other strategies or practices does your team/dept utilize to engage parents and families?

**Final:** Within the next two years, what would you like to see your team/dept do to better address student needs?

**Structured Interview Protocol for School Leaders**  
**CRSL Strands for School Administrators**

Hello [Insert Participant's Name]:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study.

As part of my dissertation research, I am interested in exploring school leader response to changing student needs. Ultimately, I want to learn how school leaders strive to improve student performance and experiences.

The questions that I am about to ask you are presented in a specific sequence and there are no right or wrong answers. I will ask each question to you as I will other participants in this study. The purpose of this protocol is to ensure that similar questions are asked across all participants. At the conclusion of this interview, I will provide you with the opportunity to add any additional comments that you feel may be pertinent to what has been stated today.

Just to remind you, your name, school, and state affiliation will not be attached to any of the comments you provide. This is to ensure anonymity to you as a research participant.

Before beginning this interview, do you have any questions about the purpose of this study or your rights as a research participant? [Wait] I will now begin recording this session.

*State pseudonym and date*



## **Interview 1**

**Topic Domain:** Critical Self-Awareness

**Lead-off Question 1:** First, what are your roles and responsibilities as a school leader?

[Covert Categories: leadership role, identity development, cultural heritage and knowledge, professional development]

### **Follow-up Questions:**

1. How much, if at all, does your position as a leader allow you to influence the practices of teachers in your building?
2. What factors prompt or motivate you to reflect on your own instructional practices as a school leader?
3. What role do you see professional development playing in supporting you to be responsive to the needs of students?
4. Thinking about socioeconomic status, race, gender, religion, and other characteristics, which would you say you are most aware of on a daily basis and why?
5. In what ways, if any, does your background shape your interactions with students, parents, and staff?

**Lead-off Question 2:** Next, in thinking about students in your building, what factors do you believe most impact their academic performance?

[Covert Categories: multiple perspectives, school leader thoughts and attitudes, school data, beliefs and practice, reflexivity, parents and home life]

### **Follow-up Questions:**

1. If you were to compare a typical student who has been in this district since kindergarten to a typical student who is new to your school, what would you say are the similarities? The differences?
2. Within your department or school, what achievement gaps, if any, have you observed along lines of race or socioeconomic status?
  - a. What factors do you attribute these gaps to?
3. In what ways would you like your teachers to communicate academic expectations to students?

**Lead-off Question 3:** If someone was thinking about becoming a teacher in this school, what would be important for them to know?

[Covert Categories: affirmation of diversity, school leader thoughts and attitudes, beliefs and practice, identity]

**Follow-up Questions:**

1. In what ways, if any, do you believe that teachers in this building affirm student diversity in the classroom?
2. Thinking about SES, race, gender, religion, and other characteristics, which would you say is most significant to how your students view themselves and why?
3. In thinking about the growing diversity within this school, in what ways, if any, has this been viewed as a challenge by school staff?
4. In thinking about the growing diversity within this school, in what ways, if any, has this been viewed as a strength or growth opportunity by school staff?

**Topic Domain:** CRSL and School Environment

**Lead-off Question 1:** What role do department chairs have in shaping the school environment?

[Covert Categories: leadership, inclusivity, affirmation, strategies, school-wide interventions, teacher capacity, professional development]

**Follow-up Questions:**

1. What role do team leaders have in shaping the school environment?
2. What impact, if any, do you believe building leadership meetings have on your school's efforts to improve student performance?
3. What improvements, if any, have resulted from building leadership meetings?
4. How do building leadership meetings shape the meetings department chairs have with their teachers?
5. How do building leadership meetings shape the meetings team leaders have with their teachers?
6. How responsive do you feel that building leadership team meetings are to issues that arise as a result of changing student needs?
7. How do you believe that building leadership team meetings could be changed in order to improve student performance?

## Interview 2

**Topic Domain:** Critical Self-Awareness

**Lead-off Question 1:** Tell me about the ways in which your staff encourages students to share information about their culture and personal experiences.

[Covert Categories: identity development, cultural heritage, school data, equity audits]

**Follow-up Questions:**

1. How do you know if your teachers are meeting their students' needs?
2. In what ways, if any, does your school use data to support underperforming students?

**Topic Domain:** Culturally Responsive Curricula and Teacher Preparation

**Lead-off Question 1:** I understand that you have been receiving professional development surrounding issues of equity. Please tell me your major takeaways so far.

[Covert Categories: professional development, school leader thoughts and attitudes, teacher capacity, curricula, student data, instructional practices, reflexivity]

**Follow-up Questions:**

1. You just shared some of your takeaways regarding PD on equity. What changes, if any, have occurred within this building as a result of this training? (If none, have there been conversations?)
2. Think about pre-observation conferences that you have had recently. What process or approach do your teachers take when planning lessons?
3. Describe one strategy or method that you have observed teachers use to make a lesson more relatable for students.
4. Please think about the most recent time when you and your teacher leaders had a meeting and looked at data. Walk me through that meeting. I am interested in all details, so please speak freely.
5. Please tell me about the teaching practices you most commonly observed during your first year as an administrator. Next, tell me about the teaching practices that you most commonly observe now. What is similar and what is different?

**Topic Domain:** Culturally Responsive and Inclusive School Environment

**Lead-off Question 1:** In what ways, if any, does your school address students' social and emotional needs?

[Covert Categories: student-teacher relationships, curricula, inclusivity, affirmation, strategies, school-wide interventions, student voice, inclusive instructional and behavioral practices]

**Follow-up Questions:**

1. Please describe any supports that your building may have in place designed to help improve the achievement of minority students and/or students from low-income backgrounds.
2. What curricular materials you most often see teachers using in classrooms?
3. In what ways, if any, has your school modified curriculum to become more inclusive for all students?
4. Describe one strategy or practice that your team/dept uses and explain how it is responsive to your students' needs.
5. In your role as an administrator, how, if at all, do you discourage deficit views of students among your colleagues?
6. Describe the actions that you take to demonstrate to students that you care about them.
7. Is there anything different that you do in order to connect with students that come from backgrounds other than your own?

**Topic Domain:** Engaging Students and Parents in Community Context

**Lead-off Question 1:** Can you describe a specific assignment, project, or initiative that your school has implemented to connect student learning with students' home lives?

[Covert Categories: school-home connections, school-community overlap and advocacy, parent and community engagement and learning]

**Follow-up Questions:**

1. In what ways, if any, does your school engage with the local community?
2. I am aware that your school conducts parent teacher conferences. What other strategies or practices does your school utilize to engage parents and families?

**Final:** Within the next two years, what would you like to see your school do to better address student needs?

## Appendix D

### Observation Protocol

Date:                      Time:

Topic Domains	Covert Categories	Field Notes	Question #s
<b>Critical Self-Awareness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identity development</li> <li>• Cultural knowledge</li> <li>• Multiple perspectives</li> <li>• Affirmation of diversity</li> <li>• School leader thoughts and attitudes</li> <li>• Student data</li> <li>• Beliefs and practice reflexivity</li> </ul>		
<b>Culturally Responsive Curricula and Teacher Preparation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional development</li> <li>• School leader thoughts and attitudes</li> <li>• Teacher capacity</li> <li>• Curricula</li> <li>• Student data</li> <li>• Reflexivity</li> </ul>		
<b>Culturally Responsive and Inclusive School Environments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student-teacher relationships</li> <li>• Curricula</li> <li>• Inclusivity</li> <li>• Affirmation</li> <li>• Strategies</li> <li>• School-wide interventions</li> </ul>		
<b>Engaging Students and Parents in Community Contexts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School-home connections</li> <li>• School-community overlap</li> <li>• Home-school-community collaboration</li> <li>• Parent and community engagement</li> </ul>		

## Appendix E

### Documentation Protocol

Topic Domains	Covert Categories	Documents	Question #s
<b>Critical Self-Awareness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identity development</li> <li>• Cultural knowledge</li> <li>• Multiple perspectives</li> <li>• Affirmation of diversity</li> <li>• School leader thoughts and attitudes</li> <li>• Student data</li> <li>• Beliefs and practice reflexivity</li> </ul>		
<b>Culturally Responsive Curricula and Teacher Preparation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional development</li> <li>• School leader thoughts and attitudes</li> <li>• Teacher capacity</li> <li>• Curricula</li> <li>• Student data</li> <li>• Reflexivity</li> </ul>		
<b>Culturally Responsive and Inclusive School Environments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student-teacher relationships</li> <li>• Curricula</li> <li>• Inclusivity</li> <li>• Affirmation</li> <li>• Strategies</li> <li>• School-wide interventions</li> </ul>		
<b>Engaging Students and Parents in Community Contexts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School-home connections</li> <li>• School-community overlap</li> <li>• Home-school-community collaboration</li> <li>• Parent and community engagement</li> </ul>		

## Appendix F

### ESSP Artifacts

## Equity for Student Success Standards

- I. **Foundations for Engaging in Equity**
  - A. **Understand Systems of Oppression, Discrimination, and Privilege:** Exhibit clear understanding that discrimination in any form is counter productive to moving students toward achievement. Designations that can cause discrimination between students, staff, or communities are inclusive of, but not limited to, gender, race, class, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, ability, country of origin, immigrant status, national citizenship, religious diversity, psychological illness, cultural variations or other differences.
  - B. **Understand High Expectations and Support for Students to Meet High Standards:** Understanding that there must be ongoing community and school-wide conversations about goals and standards for students and about what constitutes “quality” as students work toward meeting those goals and standards. At the same time, there must be conversations about how to ensure that all schools are able to provide the necessary opportunities, resources, and support to enable their students to demonstrate such quality as they work toward meeting high standards.
  - C. **Articulate a Clear Vision of Equity for All Students:** Understanding and conveyance that equity in education includes a focus on leadership, learning and teaching, and connections to the community in order to ensure the learning of ALL students. Facilitate and support conversations that ensure all schools are able to provide the necessary opportunities, resources, and support to enable their students to demonstrate individualized, equitable growth.

## II. Skills for Engaging in Equity

- A. Develop the Ability to Work Across Differences to Build Consensus by Understanding Your Own Identity and Biases:** Employ the personal skills and habits of mind to understand your personal triggers and biases and take the developmental steps in your own leadership and identity development journey to serve as a positive change agent in equity.
  
- B. Create Diagnostic and Analytic Capacity Around Equity:** The professional skills to be able to read and interpret the current and past dynamics (especially regarding student data) of a school and help the organization identify the next developmental steps toward being a school with a clear vision of equity. Additionally support/ensure collection, analysis and use data in teacher practices, school policies, curriculum, and programming to inform and maintain strategies specifically designed to improve the performance of traditionally underserved populations of students of color. In order to ensure that interpretive methods of data analysis are also utilized, schools must routinely implement strategies to solicit and incorporate the voices of underserved students, their parents, and their teachers in the determination and evaluation of student progress.
  
- C. Develop and Implement Professional Skills that Challenge Existing Paradigms for Adult Learners** using an explicit understanding of adult learning; the instructional core; culturally relevant teaching; and skills in holding difficult conversations and creating a climate for learning about deep issues.
  
- D. Implement Inclusive Practices of Teaching and Learning:** Commit to the development of curriculum and instructional practices within schools and classrooms that are sensitive to, and inclusive of, the individual strengths, backgrounds, and needs of underserved students of color. Equally important is the need to engage teachers in ongoing, inquiry-based professional development that builds their capacity to accelerate learning and services for underserved students. The primary focus of teaching and learning should be on helping students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
  
- E. Commit to Transformative Equity Practices:** Work to consistently identify inequities and eliminate systems of oppression from all the aspects of the organization. Actively develop systems to identify and prioritize the needs of marginalized within the organization.



**III. Mindset for Engaging in Equity**

- A. Zeal to Act Against Odds to Move Towards Hope:** Demonstrate the courage and willingness to act on all of the above, to work with all necessary stakeholders to be transformative change agents, to continue to learn, be resilient and to develop network, support structures and safe emotional spaces that sustain oneself in this work.

*Adapted from the Harvard Graduate School of Education School Leadership Program Equality Values and the Castro Valley Unified School District Equity Multi-Year Action Plan*

### **METRIC #1**

Decrease the disparity between the percent of white students and students of color who are recommended for Algebra 1

**Root Cause Analysis #1:** The process is not standardized for referring students for Algebra 1

**Strategy:** Rewrite the rubric used for the algebra 1 referral process

#### **Tactics**

- Remove all subjective values on rubric
- Rubric should contain only tested and factual information
- Show teachers how implicit rubric influences process of referring students for Algebra 1

**FEEDBACK:** Which teachers would need this demonstration? How would you do it?

**Root Cause Analysis #2:** Subjective, implicit bias, prejudiced practices

**Strategy:** Provide opportunities of professional development for teachers that will enlighten them on the need for changed process

#### **Tactics:**

- Continue our Equity professional development sessions that built relationships that reveal the disparity in our society
- Have more regular professional development sessions

**FEEDBACK:** Are these mandatory? Who attends? Begin to consider what monitoring systems can measure the effectiveness of this professional development.

**Root Cause Analysis #3:** Lack of support to bring kids up to level to take advanced classes and be successful once identified for Algebra 1

**Strategy:** Provide relatable cohorts and support groups for students that have been identified or that have the potential to be identified for Algebra 1

#### **Tactics**

- High school students and mentors to come tutor at elementary schools and the Middle School
- Watch Dogs becoming more involved

**FEEDBACK:** With respect to math? Soft skills (organization, motivation, etc)?

- Seek community and business partners to come in and work with students
- Tier 1 instruction

**FEEDBACK:** What would this look like?

- Differentiation training

**FEEDBACK:** What would this look like?

**Root Cause Analysis #4:** Parents and students are unaware of the college track

**FEEDBACK:** Why do you think that parents and students are unaware?

**Strategy:** Information regarding the college track should be repeated in multiple formats for parents and students to make them aware

**FEEDBACK:** How will the information be received? What makes the RCA a communication issue versus a capacity issue?

**Tactics**

- Send home college track information through multiple media including colon newsletters, calendars, one call now as well as incentives for students possibly take a paper home and get it signed for extra credit

**Root Cause Analysis #5:** Lack of communication within the district

**Strategy:** All stakeholders from top to bottom be made aware of the issue and the need for change

**Tactics:** District-wide stakeholder meetings including Administration from the top down

**FEEDBACK:** Do you all have this capacity?

## **METRIC #2**

Decrease the number of referrals for students of color in order for it to be more comparable to the population

**Root Cause Analysis #1:** Process allows biased decision making and referrals

**Strategy:** Incorporate measurable behaviors into the code of conduct

**FEEDBACK:** Do you all have this capacity at the school level?

**Tactics:**

- Define the categories

**FEEDBACK:** Who does this, a small team or the entire staff?

- Train the staff on the code of conduct

**Root Cause Analysis #2:** Teachers having consistent standards with certain students in certain situations

**Strategy:** Teach/train de-escalation techniques to staff to improve building positive relationships with all students

**Tactics:**

- Provide PD for cultural awareness of behaviors, de-escalation strategies

**FEEDBACK:** Is this an existing structure or have to be a newly created one?

- Create classroom norms with all stakeholders involved in the process

**Root Cause Analysis #3:** Lack of time for relationship building and communication between students and teachers

**Strategy:** Create more deliberate time for communication

**FEEDBACK:** between whom? What or where does the relationship building occur?

**Tactics:**

- 15 minutes for kid issues at the beginning of team time

**FEEDBACK:** Is this between students and teachers? If not, how is it insured to be grounded in relationship building?

- Prior to discipline or referrals, Administration, teachers and students meet

**Root Cause Analysis #4:** Students being unaware of classroom expectations and norms and engage in power struggles

**Strategy:** Teachers and students create classroom norms together

**FEEDBACK:** Would this be a mandate?

**Tactics:**

- A visual system of behaviors and infraction/consequences

- Teachers stay consistent and hold each student equally accountable

**FEEDBACK:** What does accountability look like from an equitable perspective?

- Identify students who seem to have a difficult time buying into the norms and build a better relationship with them

**FEEDBACK:** Who identifies them? How do you define “difficult time buying into the norms”?

- Hold students accountable from the beginning on behaviors that are in expectations and norms

**Root Cause Analysis #5:** Parents lack of relationships with teachers therefore are unaware of their child’s school behaviors

**FEEDBACK:** Whose responsibility is it to build such relationships?

**Strategy:** Build better relationships between parents and teachers so there are open and trusting lines of communication

**Tactics:**

- Teachers contact parents regularly through a variety of means such as phone calls, emails, nice notes home before negative behaviors are exhibited

- Teachers call and discuss behaviors upon initial infraction to brainstorm ways that teachers and parents can work together to solve the problem before it escalates

**FEEDBACK:** What would be necessary for teachers to have the skills to do this across cultural lines?

## Appendix G

### Code Mapping and Cycles of Data Analysis

(Note: Begin reading the third page of this document and read from bottom to top.)

**Final Themes** (Themes 1-6 were used in addressing both RQ1 and RQ2)

<b>Theme 1: Centrality of Student Data &amp; Decision-Making:</b> 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10	<b>Theme 4: Developing Cultural Awareness &amp; Change of Practices</b> 1, 3, 7, 8, 10
<b>Theme 2: Strategic Academic Support Programs &amp; Interventions:</b> 1, 4, 6, 7, 10	<b>Theme 5: Intentionality of Building Meaningful Student Relationships</b> 4, 7, 8, 10
<b>Theme 3: Embedding Cultural Responsiveness within Curricular Practices</b> 2, 3, 6, 7, 10	<b>Theme 6: Considering Students' Home Lives and Parental Support</b> 5, 7, 9, 10

**Third Cycle Codes** (Candidate themes)

<b>1. Collection and Use of Student Data:</b> SP, ETPD, CP, SDI, FPC	<b>6. Support Programs &amp; Interventions:</b> SP, HL, ETPD, CP, AASF, WS, SDI
<b>2. Curriculum Discussions &amp; Practices:</b> ETPD, CP, LR, AASF, SDI	<b>7. Equity Training &amp; Professional Development:</b> SP, MRS, ETPD, CP, LR, AASF, PCE, FPC, WI, SDI
<b>3. Leadership Behaviors, Influence, and Responsibilities:</b> C, LR, SP, CP, SDI, WI	<b>8. Meaningful Relationships with Students:</b> SP, HL, MRS, C, SE, ETPD, CP, AASF, PCE, WS
<b>4. Knowledge and Support of Whole Student:</b> SP, HL, MRS, SE, ETPD, C, AASF, PCE, WS, SDI	<b>9. Impacts of Home Life at School:</b> HL, C, SE, CP, EF, PCE, WS, WI
<b>5. Parent &amp; Community Engagement:</b> HL, MRS, C, ETPD, EF, PCE, WI	<b>10. Practices with focus on African American Students:</b> SP, MRS, ETPD, AASF, SDI, WI

**Second Cycle Coding (Categories)**

<p><b>Support Programs (SP):</b> 2, 4, 6, 7, 12, 48, 51, 53, 55, 57, 59, 67, 68, 72, 77, 81, 84, 85, 86, 90, 92, 97, 98, 103, 106, 121, 122, 123</p>	<p><b>Home Life (HL):</b> 6, 28, 53, 55, 57, 65, 85, 91, 101, 106, 123</p>	<p><b>Meaningful Relationships with Students (MRS):</b> 3, 7, 11, 14, 15, 22, 26, 28, 37, 41, 43, 47, 49, 51, 62, 70, 71, 85, 86, 87, 90, 99, 101, 102, 104, 105, 107, 108, 117, 119, 122, 123</p>
<p><b>Challenges (C):</b> 5, 6, 9, 10, 14, 17, 18, 19, 21, 23, 30, 31, 34, 36, 38, 42, 46, 49, 52, 55, 56, 61, 63, 64, 65, 72, 75, 78, 83, 88, 90, 93, 94, 95, 97, 104, 110, 116, 118</p>	<p><b>Social Emotional (SE):</b> 6, 7, 15, 22, 43, 50, 55, 56, 62, 67, 70, 71, 81, 84, 86, 90, 97, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 121, 122, 123</p>	<p><b>Equity Training/Professional Development (ETPD):</b> 1, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 29, 30, 31, 34, 36, 37, 38, 39, 41, 42, 44, 45, 47, 51, 52, 55, 62, 63, 65, 73, 74, 75, 76, 78, 82, 85, 86, 88, 89, 91, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 100, 101, 103, 108, 111, 112, 115, 116, 118, 119</p>
<p><b>Curriculum Practices (CP):</b> 10, 12, 14, 16, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 35, 36, 45, 46, 47, 50, 54, 58, 59, 63, 82, 98, 99, 100, 103, 104, 105, 111, 112, 114, 115</p>	<p><b>Leadership Related (LR):</b> 9, 14, 16, 17, 19, 21, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 40, 45, 52, 58, 59, 60, 61, 64, 66, 69, 72, 75, 82, 85, 88, 89, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 100, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 115, 122</p>	<p><b>External Factors (EF):</b> 6, 13, 20, 22, 26, 28, 42, 46, 47, 48, 49, 53, 55, 56, 57, 65, 72, 78, 79, 80, 90, 91, 97, 101, 116, 123</p>
<p><b>African American Student Focus (AASF):</b> 1, 3, 5, 8, 10, 14, 26, 29, 31, 34, 36, 37, 38, 39, 41, 44, 49, 51, 62, 65, 68, 71, 83, 86, 91, 95, 97, 98, 101</p>	<p><b>Parents &amp; Community Engagement (PCE):</b> 20, 44, 48, 53, 55, 56, 62, 75, 79, 80, 103, 113, 120, 123</p>	<p><b>Factors Prompting Change (FPC):</b> 4, 10, 11, 14, 21, 24, 29, 30, 31, 36, 37, 38, 44, 45, 50, 54, 55, 56, 59, 63, 67, 73, 74, 76, 82, 83, 85, 86, 90, 91, 95, 96, 97, 98, 100, 103, 107, 109, 111, 115, 122, 123</p>
<p><b>Whole Student (WS):</b> 3, 6, 7, 11, 22, 24, 26, 28, 29, 30, 37, 43, 46, 47, 50, 53, 54, 55, 56, 62, 65, 67, 79, 80, 81, 83, 84, 85, 86, 90, 91, 97, 101, 102, 105, 106, 121, 123</p>	<p><b>Student Data &amp; Interventions (SDI):</b> 8, 10, 14, 16, 24, 29, 30, 31, 35, 36, 40, 44, 45, 50, 51, 54, 58, 59, 63, 75, 82, 94, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 106, 107, 111, 112, 113, 115</p>	<p><b>Ways to Improve (WI):</b> 20, 21, 28, 29, 30, 32, 37, 41, 55, 58, 64, 69, 79, 80, 90, 93, 98, 123,</p>

### First Cycle Coding (Initial codes)

1. *African American students	2. APEX	3. Asking students questions	4. Aspirations group
5. Avoiding conversations	6. Baggage	7. *Belonging	8. Black students in math
9. Bridge the gap	10. Bubble students	11. *Building relationships	12. CCL room
13. Challenge	14. *Change of practice	15. Checking in with students	16. Classroom strategies
17. Code of conduct	18. Comfort zone	19. Communication	20. *Community engagement
21. Connecting the dots	22. Connecting to students	23. Consistency	24. *Conversations with colleagues
25. Cross department	26. *Cultural awareness	27. *Curriculum	28. Curriculum relevancy
29. *Data discussions	30. *Decision-making	31. *Deficit thinking	32. Defining purpose
33. Department and team differences	34. Diff. background than students	35. *Differentiation	36. *Disproportionate data
37. Diversifying curric.	38. Diversity	39. Diversity as strength	40. Documentation
41. *Educator background	42. Effects of segregation	43. *Encouragement	44. Equity training
45. Evaluations	46. Existing student knowledge	47. Expectations	48. Extracurricular activities
49. Fair chance	50. FastBridge	51. Focus groups	52. Following through
53. Food pantry	54. Grades	55. Home life	56. *Home support
57. Homework club	58. Instructional support	59. Intervention	60. Keeping things organized
61. Leadership qualities	62. Learning from students	63. *Learning gaps	64. *Level of influence
65. Low SES	66. *Meetings	67. Mental health	68. Mentoring program
69. Minor tasks	70. *Morale	71. *Motivation	72. Need more resources
73. New conversations	74. New way of thinking	75. Not enough time	76. Openness
77. Opportunities for students	78. Overwhelmed	79. *Parent communication	80. *Parent interactions
81. PBIS	82. *Prof. development	83. *Race	84. RAM
85. Reason behind behavior	86. *Relationships	87. Respect	88. Revisiting
89. Right path	90. Social emotional	91. Socioeconomic	92. Southwest Community
93. *Staff assumptions	94. *Staff knowledge	95. Staff resistance	96. *Staff understanding
97. *Student behavior	98. *Student data	99. *Student engagement	100. Student growth
101. *Student identity	102. Student sharing	103. *Student support	104. *Student voice
105. Students more important than test scores	106. Support program	107. Surveys	108. *Teacher interactions with students
109. Teacher leader empowerment	110. Teacher leader frustration	111. *Teacher reflection	112. *Teacher support
113. Teamwork	114. Technology	115. Test scores	116. Too many initiatives
117. Treat everyone the same	118. Uncomfortable conversations	119. Warm demander	120. Way to improve
121. WEB	122. What's best for kids	123. Whole student	

\*A priori code

## Garrett M. Carter

### LICENSURE/CERTIFICATION

Principal License, 5-12

Middle Childhood Teaching License, ELA and Social Studies, 4-9

### EDUCATION

**Indiana University**, Bloomington, IN

Ph.D., Dept. of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies.; GPA 3.9

June 2020

**University of Cincinnati**, Cincinnati, OH

Master of Education, Dept. of Curriculum & Instruction concentration; GPA 4.0

August 2009

**University of Cincinnati**, Cincinnati, OH

Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice, Business minor; Cum laude

December 2006

### TEACHING AND LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

**Indiana University**, Bloomington, IN

August 2015-May 2020

*Associate Instructor, EDUC-X156 College and Lifelong Learning*

- Created engaging lessons to promote critical thinking and college student success improving student retention by 10% compared to students not taking this course
- Evaluated performance of peer coaches on a quarterly basis resulting in improved coaching practices
- Presented professional development sessions for peer coaches based on student feedback and evaluation data to improve coach effectiveness

**Indiana University**, Bloomington, IN

August 2018-February 2020

*Evaluation Scorer, edTPA*

- Evaluated preservice teacher lessons to assess performance and suggest best practices
- Utilized rubric to evaluate preservice teachers in planning, instruction, and assessment
- Determined summative performance rating of emerging, proficient, or advanced

**Indiana University**, Bloomington, IN

Summers 2017-2019

*Coordinator, Balfour Pre-College Academy*

- Managed all aspects of academy operations working with housing, dining, finance, legal, and other departments to ensure grant and institutional compliance

**McKinley Middle School\***, Midwest, USA

August 2009-August 2015

*Teacher, 7th and 8th Grade Language Arts*

- Created effective, standards-based lessons to promote student learning, which resulted in tremendous student growth, including a 100% passage rate on state tests (2014)
- Initiated a diversity task force to address discipline gaps which contributed to a 10% reduction in office referrals the following school year (2013)
- Led multiple staff professional development sessions on formative instructional practices and differentiated instruction leading to department-wide adoption of best practices



**University of Cincinnati**, Cincinnati, OH

August 2007-August 2009

*Assistant Residence Coordinator*

- Advised the residence hall government and oversaw programming and budgets for student engagement events
- Managed hiring, scheduling, and training operations for desk staff
- Assisted residents and parents to support student success efforts
- Supervised and mentored resident advisors to promote personal growth and university compliance

#### **AFFILIATIONS & ACTIVITIES**

- Member, Black Graduate Student Association August 2015-May 2020
- Graduate Student Emissary, Indiana University August 2016-May 2019
- Building Leadership Team, McKinley Middle School\* August 2012-May 2015
- District Representative, Race to the Top Team August 2010-May 2015
- Building Representative, McKinley Education Association\* August 2010-August 2014
- Member, McKinley Strategic Planning Team\* August 2013-August 2015

#### **COMMUNITY SERVICE**

- Reading and career workshops for elementary students August 2014-Present
- Volunteer, Mt. Enon Church Scholarship Committee April 2013-June 2017

#### **ACCOLADES & HONORS**

- Outstanding Associate Instructor Award, Indiana University April 2020
- Nominee, Indiana University Building Bridges Award April 2019
- Nominee, McKinley Middle School Educator of the Year \* May 2009, May 2013
- Letter of recognition from superintendent for student test scores August 2012
- Invitation to present to Board of Education November 2011

#### **CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS**

- *Learning the Whole Story: Employing Peer Leaders to Support At-Risk Students*, IUPUI, National Mentoring Symposium, November 2018.
- *Feedback and Collaboration in a Peer Coaching Class*, Indiana Association for Developmental Education Conference, March 2018.

*\*McKinley is a pseudonym as used in my dissertation in order to protect site and participant anonymity.*