AASA JOURNAL OF SCHOLARSHIP & PRACTICE

AASA
THE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS ASSOCIATION
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Research and Evidence-Based Practice Advancing the Profession of Education Administration

Winter Volume 16 No. 4

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Sponsorship and Appreciation

Equity-focused Leadership: From Acknowledgment to Self-Awareness

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Editor
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Of the many roles school superintendents play, equity-focused leadership is one that will impact their students, the communities in which they live, and the societies into which they will eventually enter and contribute, perhaps for generations.

Superintendents have the control of or the opportunity to create powerful levers to exert forces for ensuring equitable opportunities for students within their systems. It is a matter of knowing how and when to use them, especially given equity's elusive definition. After that, it is a matter of being prepared to deal with resistance.

Safir (2017) in *The Listening Leader* suggests, "To build equitable schools and systems, we must first acknowledge the socio-political context in which they sit—overlapping policies, practices and institutions that uphold inequity" (p. 58-59). Acknowledgment, while a first step, is hardly a solution.

Indeed, Safir suggests practical approaches for this challenging work: developing a shared language to define equity issues in our schools; tuning into structural racism within our own systems, no matter the intent; understanding cultural differences; and guiding stakeholders to understand their unconscious bias, along with a set of strategies to interrupt it (p.76).

The work of acknowledging inequities and identifying how they continue to permeate our school systems (the structures, pedagogies, curriculum, and processes) cannot occur without an agreement of a definition of equity—the achievement of fair and just, yet often uneven, distributions. Stone (2012) warns that "distributive justice is often determined not so much by the specifics of any issue as by a more general worldview.

Worldviews include unspoken assumptions about individualism and community, freedom and moral obligations, and the nature of democracy" (p. 57). Race is part of this discussion.

In schools and society, **racism—institutional and individual—has been an obstacle to achieving real and just equity.** It has been a dominant and insidious theme in the American story—through sanctioned policies and laws to decisions and practices that continue to permeate throughout the K-12 system.

Equity-focused leaders often encounter and struggle with opposition from those seeking to maintain the existing power structure that benefits self-interest.

Paradoxically, these conflicts may present opportunities for skilled leaders to find

ways to bring groups together through *interest convergence,* which "… is perhaps best seen as one strategy in the arsenal, and a beginning rather than an end. Interest convergence can get change moving—but we need to be vigilant if those changes are to remain" (Pollack & Zirkel, 2013, p.300).   However, unless the work starts with the leader's self-awareness about the racism-equity equation, nothing will change.

Safir advises leaders to acknowledge the socio-political context while accepting how one's own bias filters the work—again, on both institutional and individual levels.

In her book, *White Fragility*, DiAngelo (2018) encourages leaders of institutions to better understand racism and its history in order to better meet their responsibility to combat it: "Race will influence whether or not we survive our birth, where we are most likely to live, which schools we will attend, who our friends and partners will be, what careers we will have, how much money we will earn, how healthy we will be, and even how long we can expect to live" (p.5).

She offers no solution to racism nor does she attempt to define equity; instead, she dismantles assumptions about racism, who "owns" responsibility for it and the struggles for those not victimized by it in accepting it as a problem, thus reinforcing its perpetuation, even with the best of intentions.

Yet, DiAngelo reminds the equity leader that "racism—like sexism and other forms of oppression—occurs when a racial group's prejudice is backed by legal authority and institutional control. This authority and control transforms individual prejudices into a far-reaching system that no longer depends on the good intentions of individual actors; it becomes the default of the society and is

reproduced automatically" (p.21).

Acknowledging and understanding how this happens within our own systems are the first steps, yet how well we recognize and accept our own racism either interferes with or assists one's efforts to begin the work.

Equity and racism are and have always been inextricably linked. The latter has been resistant to eradication, and similar to equity, this is partly due to a failure of agreement on its definition.

In his 2019 work, *How to be an Anti-Racist*, National Book Award winner, Ibram X. Kendi, offers a compelling paradigm for how we might define our racism, declaring, "One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an antiracist. There is no in-between safe space of "not racist. The claim of "not racist" neutrality is a mask for racism" (p.9).

If there is no neutral ground on the matter of racism and if a superintendent has agreed to lead with an equity-focus, the path forward is through actions that interrupt institutional racism. Working with a group of superintendents who are engaged in this work, I have heard such questions as, "Do we have the knowledge and skills to lead such work? How willing are we to accept the professional risk?"

Such work may bring a strong counter-reaction in communities less committed to acknowledging racism or even less resolved to eliminate inequities created by it.

Indeed, bringing knowledge and awareness to the community, the leadership, the faculty, and the stakeholders is but a first, yet necessary, step. Progress may come from a commitment to define terms, review, and revise any policies that have enabled unjust inequities

and perpetuated institutional racism, identify convergent interests, and lead such work with facts and empirical research.

The Winter 2020 volume of the *AASA Journal of Scholarship & Practice* attempts to make a contribution to this ambitious undertaking. It includes articles by scholar-practitioners who have been researching policy and practice related to the conjoined twins of inequity and racism. The content should provide leaders with a combination of research, recommendations, and tools to assist with reflection, organizational assessment, and perhaps the limitations on the "equitable distribution of goods."

Rasmussen, Gustafson, and Raskin set the table for the readers by presenting a framework for examining and assessing existing practices and offering alternatives to disrupt any practice that fails to yield more racially conscious principals.

Sun and Miller follow by studying the relationship between principals of color and the extent to which teachers of color are recruited.

Baule proposes how an effective approach via PBIS can mitigate, yet not resolve, the damaging effects of the disproportionality of student suspensions by race and ethnicity. The issue concludes with research by Johnson, Witter, and Kaufman about the ways in which African American superintendents cope with job-related stressors.

Noguera (2008) reminded us ten years ago of our responsibilities, along with our limitations, for doing such work: "The stereotypical images we hold toward groups are powerful in influencing what people see and expect of students. Unless educators consciously try to undermine and work against these kinds of stereotypes, they often act on them unconsciously. Our assumptions related to race are so deeply entrenched that it is virtually impossible for us not to hold them unless we take conscious and deliberate action." For the equity-focused leader, the work continues.

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START with Race: Designing Racially Conscious Principals

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Abstract

Racism is about institutional power to maintain racial hierarchy (Solorzano, Allen, & Carroll, 2002). School systems are hierarchies that were originally designed to educate white males. The majority of school districts and buildings are led by white people. The focus of this paper exposes the normalization of inherent racism and institutional power structures in existing principal preparation programs and one University's efforts to disrupt these practices by purposefully including racial equity in all aspects of its programming. Building upon the work of Furman (2012) and the work of Gooden and Dantely (2012), this article will present a theoretical framework for examining and assessing existing practices and then offer alternatives to disrupt any practice that fails to yield more racially conscious principals.

Key Words

race, principal preparation, equity, achievement gap, social justice

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Introduction

Racism is about institutional power to maintain racial hierarchy (Solorzano, Allen, & Carroll, 2002). School systems are hierarchies that were originally designed to educate white males.

The student demographics have broadened in terms of gender and then race, yet the way in which leadership has been trained has not kept pace with the diversity now seen in schools.

By 2025, enrollment in public elementary and secondary schools is projected to increase 18 percent for students who are Hispanic; 21 percent for students who are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 23 percent for students who are of two or more races (Hussar & Bailey, 2017).

The majority of school districts and school buildings are led by white people. Most principal preparation programs have not traditionally included issues of racial equity as an integral part of their curriculum and pedagogy. As a result, these aspiring principals are licensed without being required to examine their personal learning and beliefs about the intersectionality of race and education.

Historically, racial disparities in student achievement have been viewed as a deficit in students and families of color. Rather, the authors claim that many of the racially predictable disparities could be viewed as a deficit in the current systemic leadership model of schools.

The focus of this paper exposes the normalization of inherent racism and institutional power structures in existing principal preparation programs and one university's efforts to disrupt these practices by purposefully including racial equity in all aspects of its programming. This article presents a theoretical framework for examining and assessing existing practices and then offers alternatives to disrupt any practice that fails to yield more racially conscious principals.

The Urgency

Race and student achievement

White children have consistently outperformed Black and Brown children on standardized academic tests since 1975. This reflects a 44-year trend, making the data predictable as well as consistent. Specifically in the last five years, in both math and reading, the data reveal a steady and unchanged racial discrepancy between the achievement levels of White and Black students, where White students show results that are between 26% to 30% higher than Black students (National Assessment for Educational Progress, 2017).

Leadership and student achievement

The need for racially and ethically-conscious principal leadership remains fundamental to improving student achievement in the nation's schools. The research is clear and consistent that school principals are second only to teachers in impacting student achievement (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010).

The importance of racial equity and social justice leadership also exists in the literature. In fact, the literature described principal leadership with a focus on racial equity as a commitment to social justice, which "ensures equitable and optimal learning conditions for all children" (Merchant & Garza, 2015, p. 56) and included elements of diversity, race, gender, culture, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, power, and

became more evident. This change started with genuine reflection and long, difficult, and frustrating discussions about current department practices, personal biases, and how they perpetuated the status quo. These reflective conversations acted as a mirror to reflect the following truths about students, faculty, programs, degrees, and work:

- Neither space nor time had been created to engage in personal work around racial equity.

- Faculty members' vocabulary, pedagogy, and course content did not reflect culturally responsive practices.

- The faculty was exclusively White, which did not allow members to gain the multiple perspectives needed to ensure that the pedagogy, curriculum, entrance requirements, and grading practices provided access and success for all learners.

- The department lacked an authentic relationship with people of color. Students enrolled in the department's classes and programs were predominately White and did not reflect the current demographics of students in Minnesota's K-12 schools.

- Department practices and policies resulted in students of color being rejected from programs based on undergraduate GPAs which were often representative of undergraduate programs designed on the tenets of White culture, which poorly served Black and Brown students.

- As a department, the research agendas did not reflect the study of race and marginalized populations.

- Faculty members were not talking about race and did not demonstrate the ability to engage in authentic conversations with race at the center.

As an exclusively White faculty, the department had the privilege of being able to step into and out of the racial equity work as feelings and circumstances dictated. The department's shift in focus from teaching technical, traditional leadership skills and practices, to equipping students with adaptive racially conscious leadership development began in 2012 and continues today.

This is a never-ending journey, especially for White faculty. Redefining the department's mission provided direction for this new work.

The words
In 2012 the department's mission statement read as follows:

The mission of the Department of Educational Leadership is to prepare and renew professionals for engaged leadership in a broad spectrum of educational settings. The department is committed to providing relevant, personalized, learner-centered programs for attaining Master of Science, Specialist, and Doctorate graduate degrees.

In reviewing the mission statement it was evident that the words did not reflect the type of leaders the department was now committed to developing.   Crafting a new

mission statement, which was both technical and adaptive work, provided a place to ground and align the future work of the department.

The current mission now reads:

The Department of Educational Leadership is dedicated to the study of the intersectionality between race, cultural responsiveness and social justice. We prepare racially/ethically conscious leaders who are resolute in serving ALL learners in a broad spectrum of educational settings. The department is committed to developing educators with strong skills in racial equity leadership, instructional leadership, and experiential learning. We seek to advance the capacity of leaders who will eliminate predictable racial disparities through project-based learning and learner-centered programming in a Master of Science, Specialist, and Doctorate graduate degree program.

This shift in mission provided a shared focus that guided the faculty's work. Realizing that the mission shift was, in effect, social justice work, the department realized that it was obliged to provide embedded race equity value to each course, lesson, and assignment.

The purpose was to convey the urgency of addressing racial equity head-on as a method by which to prepare aspiring school principals. Understanding that if the issue of racially predictable outcomes, in both achievement and discipline in schools were to ever change, it would require preparation of racially conscious and courageous principals.

As a result, classrooms, online forums, and assignments were used as spaces and opportunities to foster deep reflection, to promote racial awareness, and to actively engage in the work of social justice. Social justice, in this case, is defined as interrupting racially predictable outcomes for students. The bedrock of the work was to educate aspiring principals to recognize inequitable beliefs, policies, and practices in classrooms and then equip them to take an active role in dismantling them. Former U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan is quoted as saying:

> *"I believe that education is the civil rights issue of our generation. And if you care about promoting opportunity and reducing inequality, the classroom is the place to start. Great teaching is about so much more than education; it is a daily fight for social justice."*
> *~ Arne Duncan*
> *October 9, 2009*

Duncan's quote embodies the department's commitment to education as a civil right stance. As we engaged in the work of naming and bringing to a halt persistent practices, policies, and curriculum which marginalized Black and Brown students, the newly focused mission became a springboard for the development of a framework. To fully realize its mission for justice and equity in schools, we examined all aspects of its work and compared them with those of existing frameworks, most notably those with a focus on social justice and race.

The foundation

Department of Educational Leadership researchers have criticized principal preparatory programs for failing to adequately address issues of diversity and race (Dantley, 2002; Lopez, 2003; Tillman, 2004).

Beyond the progress in recruitment efforts to hire more diverse faculty members,

Carpenter and Diem (2013) stated that the lack of intentional efforts on the part of educational leadership departments to incorporate a discourse surrounding issues of equity and diversity throughout their preparation programs' curricula stems from two main factors: (a) faculty members' limited understanding of the ways in which to prepare educational leaders to work within diverse communities (as cited in Herrity & Glasman, 1999; Rusch, 2004), and (b) faculty members' general lack of interest or commitment (as cited in Delpit, 1995; Parker & Hood, 1995, Riehl, 2009; Rusch, 2004).

Garces and Gordon da Cruz (2017) outlined the principles of a Strategic Racial Equity Framework. These three principles include the following:

- Attend to the dynamic relationship among race, power, and identities;

- Actively name and address hidden contributors to inequity; and

- Generate power among marginalized communities toward transformative policies.

These broad principles were further codified and useful as the department sought to undergird its application of a specifically racially equitable framework upon which to anchor its leadership preparation program.

While Garces and Gordon da Cruz's (2017) principles were in agreement with the overall direction of the desired work, the department saw that its mission and the strengths of its programs were best represented by the more detailed Furman's Social Justice Framework (2012) and Gooden and Dantley's (2012) Race-Centered Framework.

Furman's Social Justice Framework
Praxis is defined as a customary action, practice, or acceptable conduct in the exercise or practice of an art, science, or skill. Furman (2012) created a five-part framework of social justice leadership praxis to address both the reflective and active components recommended for a social justice leadership program including specific methods for training in each area.

The framework consists of the following components:

Personal
Deep, critical, and honest self-reflection in which aspiring school leaders explore their values, assumptions, and biases in regard to race, class, language, sexual orientation, religion, and disability.

Interpersonal
Proactive formation of trusting relationships with colleagues, parents, and students in their schools and across cultural groups.

Communal
Engaged in work to build community across cultural groups through inclusive, democratic practices.

Systemic
Assess, critique, and work to transform the system at the school and district levels in the interest of social justice and learning for all children.

Ecological
Act with the knowledge that school-related social justice issues are situated within broader socio-political, economic, and environmental contexts and are interdependent with broader issues of oppression and sustainability.

Furman's (2012) recommendations for developing aspiring principals' capacities for action at the systemic level include requiring students to create "activist action plans" (p. 211) for their schools that incorporate opportunities to engage staff in courageous conversations about race. Taking this social justice framework further to truly isolate race and promote equity to a framework, required faculty members to strategically refine the application.

Gooden & Dantley Framework

Gooden and Dantley (2012) state that a leadership preparation framework centered on race must consist of the following five essential ingredients.

1. A prophetic voice

Hawley and James (2010) found that the common program structure of most principal preparation programs relegated issues of race and diversity to a special topic or a single, stand-alone course. Lopez (2003) called attention to this type of minimization of equity training, claiming that educational leadership programs commonly emphasize the traditional and more "technical" core offerings, such as school finance or school law.

Lopez stated issues of race and diversity are too often simply the "theoretical footnote within the larger discourse of educational leadership" (p. 70). While professors can certainly address issues of race and diversity within their "technical" classes, the master narrative that is inherent in current educational leadership curriculum suggests that a true representation of equity is unlikely. Dantley (2002) observed that the content of educational leadership courses has been historically shaped by narratives of control, standardization, and empiricism, thus limiting the critical exploration of race and diversity.

Gooden and Dantley (2012) define a prophetic voice as "... challenging because it requires stark changes in sedimented rituals, practices, and institutional behaviors" (p. 241).

One of the most obvious ways in which the department claims its prophetic voice happens through purposely embedding the examination of issues of race and racism in all coursework. The topic of race intentionally and explicitly is the underlying focus of all curriculum. This fact lives directly in all course syllabi. Although race and class often intersect, the courses do not conflate issues of race with socio-economics. Rather, this practice is used to isolate race and scrutinize existing educational policies and practices for disparities and possible solutions.

2. Self-reflection serving as the motivation for transformative action

Much has been written on the importance and benefits of personal and professional reflection. Reflection itself, however, must not be a culminating activity.

Galea (2012) warns of the dangers of reflection in that it often loses its power and becomes the final product instead of the motivation for action. Rather, critical reflection demands examination and reform that addresses long-standing and often unquestioned educational policies and practices that result in predictable racial outcomes for students. Students are taken through several reflective processes that encourage the questions "So What?" and "Now What?" actively seeking pathways for change, improvement, and racial parity.

3. Grounding in a critical theoretical construction

Each session or lesson begins with a "Grounding" exercise in which students engage

in conversation around a topic after viewing a video clip, reading an article, or responding to a prompt that portrays a racial issue in society or in current events. The purpose of this embedded practice is to illustrate that critical theory, which denudes issues of social justice, power, and race to establish that they are ever-present, ver-pressing, and deeply ingrained in the fabric of American society; and to build students' capacity to not only see the effects of systemic racism, but to also offer praxis—the application of knowledge or skills—to interrupt it (Friere, 1993).

4. A pragmatic edge that supports praxis
During these grounding exercises and subsequent assignments, students are given the opportunity to wrestle with racial issues, consider their historical origins, and make connections between the "technical" curriculum of the course, and the application of this knowledge to view existing issues through the lens of race. Class discussions and assignments also afford students the opportunity to contemplate and inculcate their new knowledge and proffer strategies and tactics to mitigate racial inequities in education.

5. The inclusion of race language
Pollock (2010) acknowledges that although working through purposeful and direct

conversations about race can often be difficult for all those involved, this discomfort must not prevent educational programs from enacting a curriculum that will prepare leaders to participate in meaningful and ongoing discussions about race. Rusch (2004) also found faculty members "afraid" of talking about issues of race and racism, as they fear that the conversation "may get out of hand, hurting rather than helping" (p. 31).

Furthermore, the power structure of the field of educational administration can also serve as a barrier to engaging in a discourse about complex issues, as "those in privileged positions—no matter how well intended—are not likely to willingly make changes that result in the loss of privilege" (p. 32).

START with Race Framework
Recognizing that there was a need to advance racial consciousness, racial literacy, and racial equity through intentional and purposeful practices within the PreK-21 principal licensure program, the research by Furman (2012) and Gooden and Dantely (2012) became the prerequisite for the approach. It became obviously necessary to start first with faculty and examine practices. This led to creating a strategic framework: START with Race. (See Figure 1.)

Self (think, study, and reflect on our personal journey with regard to race)

Talk (purposeful conversation and discussion about race and its impact on leadership)

Apply (intentional, racially conscious approaches and practices)

Research (learning, discovery, and seeing the world through a racial equity lens)

Time (a sense of urgency to change racially predictable outcomes for students)

Figure 1. START with Race Framework

Utilizing the framework, START with Race, drove the courageous charge for improvement, cultural transformation, and changes in behavior from a "faculty first" methodology.

Self
Gooden and Dantley (2012) suggested that self-reflection serves as motivation for transformative action. Furman (2012) categorized the nature of leadership for social justice into nine themes.

One of those themes involved leaders engaging in critical self-reflection. Galea (2012) warned of the dangers of reflection in that it often loses its power and becomes the final product instead of the motivation for action.

However, according to the research regarding Theory to Action, Krull and Raskin (2013) found that knowing self was the initial step in resulting in high student achievement for all (Figure 2).

CONFIDENCE → COURAGE →RESULTS
HIGH STUDENT SUCCESS FOR ALL

Knowing Self	Knowing my purpose – my "Why" – my beliefs	Knowing research proven best practices
Strategically implementing best practices with fidelity	The data shows increased student achievement	Now I'm gaining confidence in my leadership
Which allows me to lead courageously	I'm resilient in my leadership	Resulting in high student achievement for all

Racial Equity

Raskin & Krull 2013

Figure 2. Theory to action

Self, in the START with Race Framework, engaged us in critical self-reflection which promoted intentional openings to think, study, and manage individuals' journeys about race. The department, specifically at the bi-monthly department meetings, employed Glenn Singleton's (2014) *Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools* as a template.

This tool, and especially the Four Agreements: (a) stay engaged (b) experience discomfort, (c) speak your truth, and (d) expect and accept non-closure, has helped to engage and enable faculty to have racial equity conversations and has provided an avenue for personal reflection.

Talk
Being proactive in developing interpersonal relationships (Furman, 2012) and embedding the practice of "Groundings" (Gooden and Dantley, 2012) provided a basis for the faculty to lead and participate in purposeful conversations, discussions, and relating to others. Groundings have been used to start the bi-monthly department meetings.

The faculty have anchored their groundings through a common book read. The books, over the years, have been chosen by individual faculty members and are brought forward to the department for consideration.

Once a book is chosen, each faculty member volunteers to lead a racially grounded exercise based on a topic covered in the reading. These exercises are traditionally done as the first portion of the department meeting to ground the meeting's subsequent agenda items in racial awareness. The groundings have provided mini-sessions of professional development for the faculty. However, two larger outcomes of the groundings have been

the increased level of trust and vulnerability shared surrounding racial consciousness, racial literacy, and racial equity.

Apply
Gooden and Dantley (2012) suggested that an intentional and explicit focus on isolating race should be evident throughout all curriculum. Knowing that by intentionally addressing broader issues through a socially just pedagogy (Furman, 2012), the department faculty focused on the delivery of deliberate program design as the tactical initiative to isolate and encourage conversations about race. The areas of program design included a common syllabi template and the development of rigorous curriculum and course content in which race was the roadmap.

Research
Furman (2012) found that acting on the knowledge that school-related social justice issues are situated within broader socio-political, economic, and environmental contexts and by allowing faculty to wrestle with racial issues, consider their historical origins, and make connections between the "technical" curriculum (Gooden & Dantley, 2012) emphasized the learning, discovery and a view of the world through the lens of race for the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership.

Faculty utilized qualitative and quantitative data as the avenues to create a uniform focus for capturing student voice through surveys, focus groups, and one-on-one conversations. These opportunities have given the faculty that "true" student perspective. Also, meetings were conducted with practitioners (i.e., licensed administrators) in the field that allowed faculty to stay in touch with the reality of the day-to-day work of a school administrator. The department faculty have also dedicated individual and

collaborative research regarding race and have presented and participated at conferences on local, regional, and national levels.

Time

The concept of time, within the START with Race Framework, has been defined as present, future, and sense of urgency. In the present day, the department faculty has understood the difficulties and levels of discomfort in conversations about race. Yet, the faculty has continued to utilize a practice that holds them accountable for their own future learnings towards becoming racially/ethically conscious leaders in a preparation program.

The results of this work are highlighted within individual faculty Professional Development and Evaluation Plans (PDEP) and Professional Development Reports (PDR). The faculty PDEPs and PDRs have become "activist action plans" (Furman, 2012) that have centered on work around the development of racially conscious and racially literate faculty which has transferred into racial equity work with students and their coursework toward administrative licensure.

Results of the Work

The new mission statement placed the focus on students and emphasized that the faculty's responsibility was to advance the skills and capacity of the students we serve in order for them to become racially conscious leaders. So, what has this looked like in terms of approach, strategy, and practice for a principal preparation program? Here are some examples:

- Position postings and interviews (i.e., explicit about preferred qualifications and interviews have included a demonstration of racially conscious leadership);

- Instead of one course dedicated to multicultural issues in education, all students now experience racially conscious curriculum and instruction throughout almost all of their specialist courses;

- Personal beliefs around race are defined by students;

- Culturally relevant instructional practices are used in almost all courses;

- Focus on learning versus focus on teaching (i.e., assessments not based on time or first attempts but rather learning);

- Entrance requirements changed for all degree programs (still in alignment with university requirements); and

- Data reviewed through the lens of race by the department.

These approaches, strategies, and practices have resulted in an increase in program diversity from 6.51% in 2011 to 21.69% in 2017 as well as an increase in students of color degree awards from 2.56% in 2013 to 19.20% in 2017. The department has increased program enrollment from 68 students in 2011 to 102 students in 2016. In 2016, the department awarded 65 administrative licenses which were a 34% increase from 2011.

There was an increase in program degree awards as well. During the 2012 - 2013 school year, the department awarded 39 degrees. The department awarded 66 degrees in 2016 - 2017. Regarding employment, 93.5% of program graduates are employed full-time in the profession (CDC, 2015).

The Future

The department is no longer comprised of an all-White faculty. Since 2012, the department has actively recruited leaders of color. Because of this increase to 40% faculty of color, we embrace not only diversity of race but also the diversity of thought and experience. Addressing the predictable discipline and achievement gaps for students of color and understanding the complex systemic racial issues continues to be the challenge and commitment.

Historically, racial disparities in student achievement have been viewed as a deficit in students and families of color. The department's work is now devoted to developing racially conscious, courageous principals equipped to recognize that it is not students of color but rather the systems, practices, and beliefs of the adults that determine the educational outcome for Black and Brown students.

Author Biographies

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Associations Between Principals of Color and Recruiting Teachers of Color In New Jersey Schools

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Abstract

To achieve equity, there is a need to recognize that both White educators and educators of color can add values and perspectives to the conversation (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Despite of a large number of studies on social justice, there is a scarcity of studies on how principals of color enact social justice leadership and what are the possible associations between principals of color and the recruitment of the teachers of color in order to promote social justice. Using the mixed research method—sequential exploratory design, this study suggests that school districts consider hiring more administrators of color to create a culture within their school district where students of color feel more of a sense of belonging and empowerment.

Key Words

principals of color, teachers of color, students of color, inclusiveness; social justice, equity and equality, sequential exploratory research method

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Introduction

Increases in the population of students of color have posed great challenges for American schools and in particular those that are encountering language barriers, cultural differences, high dropout rates, constant suspensions, unwanted pregnancy, low academic performance, etc. Meanwhile, many teachers of color enter the profession with an orientation towards justice and equity (Kohli &Pizarro, 2016), who have personal experiences with culturally disconnected curricula, under-resourced school conditions, and high percentage of disadvantaged students (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012).

Having been aware of educational injustice and racism, those teachers still choose teaching as their careers because they intend to improve the academic achievement of all students, including students of color (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012), to support the educational transformation of their local community (Dingus, 2008), and to serve as racial justice advocates. While statistics show that students of color comprised of almost 50% of the population in public schools, yet there was only 18% of teachers of color and 22% of administrators of colors in American public schools (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016).

To achieve equity, there is a need to recognize that both White educators and educators of color can add values and perspectives to the conversation (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Despite of a large number of studies on social justice, there is a scarcity on how principals of color enact social justice leadership and what are the possible associations between principals of color and the recruitment of teachers of color in the name of promoting social justice. Two research questions are central to this study:

1) What do school principals of color do to promote social justice in school?

2) Are there any associations between principals of color and the recruitment of the teachers of color in New Jersey schools?

Literature Review

In the research literature, people of color have been loosely used to refer to various ethnic and race groups, such as those who are Black, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska natives, or any other ethnic groups who are not White. In this study, we definite "people of color" as being non-white, non-European descents.

Principals of color, diversity, inclusion in schools

Historically, principals of color have been members of the underprivileged in the United States. Research indicates that those groups of principals have approached educational leadership through their own experiences and have rendered the leadership practice qualitatively different from their mainstream peers (Aleman, 2009; McGee Banks, 2001, 2007; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012; Tillman, 2007).

Marginalized educational experiences are very likely for principals of color to promote multiculturalism, social justice and equity (Santamaria, 2013). As a result, they tend to challenge assumptions about how schools function, strategize, and operationalize teaching and learning (Thomas & Ely, 1996).

Much research has identified the importance of school leadership and management as essential forces to achieve diversity (For example, Furman, 2012; Khalifa,

Gooden, & Davis, 2016; Ryan, 2006; Santamaria, 2013). Khalifa et al. (2016), reviewing 436 journal articles, books and chapters, suggested school leaders actively promote responsive school culture that emphasizes diversity and inclusiveness of teachers and students. In doing so, they think that teachers and students of color feel included and appreciated.

Due to their backgrounds and minority status, principals of color are aware of pressed social justice issues in schools, in local communities and in national context. They have possessed comprehensive views on and knowledge of socially injustice issues, and are willing to strive toward diversity, to bridge divides, to close gaps, and to speak up on behalf of teachers and students (For example, Cooper, 2009; Dimmock & Walker, 2000; Fuller, 2012; Khalifa et al., 2016).

Teachers of color and social justice
Using the theories of ontologies (way of being), epistemologies (way of knowing), and axiologies (ethics) as its framework, Kohli and Pizarro (2016) argue that teachers of color "seek and need relational ways of being in their work that honors their own families and communities through the success of their students" (p.75).

In their studies, teachers of colors felt they had deep ties and connections with their communities and they were responsible to challenge the status quo and promote social justice through their teaching and instructions in classrooms. They were passionate to transform schools for students of color and presented "a relational commitment" in their teaching.

Historically, public school teachers in the United States have been dominated by European Americans with 83% White, along with 80% White school principals (U.S. Department of Education, 2015), which shows that the demographics of teachers and principals haven't matched that of their students. It is problematic and inevitably unable to meet the needs and demands of diverse student population. Much research has shown that ethnically diverse teaching forces have greater potentials to bring more critical, sociopolitical consciousness to classrooms (Borrero, Flores, & Cruz, 2016; Boutte & Jackson, 2013; Jackson, 2011; Rios & Montecinos, 1999).

For example, teachers of color have experienced racism, social injustice, and ethnic oppression sometime in their lives and may better understand students of color. They are capable of providing alternative perspectives on curricula, pedagogy, and schooling and are likely to challenge the system that has oppressed marginalized communities (Borrero, et al., 2016; Carrasco, Vera, & Cazden, 1981; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Kohli, 2012; Meier, Stewart, & England, 1989; Nieto, 2002; Sleeter, 1993).

In addition, teachers of color can serve as role models for students of color, which could encourage students to follow their footsteps and motivate students to make efforts toward academic and career success (Borrero, et al., 2016; Dee, 2005; Villegas, Strom, & Lucas, 2012).

It is understandable that the demographic matching alone doesn't guarantee a better schooling and ultimate success for students. It is what teachers of color bring into the profession, what they present in classrooms, and how they approach justice and equity.

Though research has emphasized their important roles (For example, Borrero, et al., 2016; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016; Kohli, 2012),

teachers of color have continued to be under-represented in schools, districts and teacher preparation programs (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016; Sleeter, Vonne, & Kumashiro, 2014; Sleeter, 2001). Even worse, research shows that teachers of color leave the profession 24% higher than their White counterparts per year (Ingersoll & May, 2011; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016). Thus, it is necessary to recruit and retain more teachers of color in schools, in particular those with high percentages of students of color.

Methodology
This research used the sequential exploratory design, which "involves a first phase of qualitative data collection and analysis, followed by a second phase of quantitative data collection and analysis that builds on the results of the first qualitative phase" (Creswell, 2009, p. 211).

It included both in-depth interviews and statistical analyses that were separately conducted but connected.

Research design
The sequential exploratory design is a mixed research method that "used quantitative data and results to assist in the interpretation of qualitative findings … to initially explore a phenomenon" (Creswell, 2009, p. 211). Such a design avails researchers to fully understand the complexity of the scenarios, issues, and problems that are intended to be investigated in this study.

Qualitative
Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were used to obtain specific and story-telling data to establish a basic level of potential emergent themes and to extract a phenomenon of interest and bring the unexpected to emerge (Lockmiller & Lester, 2017).

The interview questions were adopted from the International School Leadership Development Network (SLDN) sponsored by the British Educational Leadership, Management, and Administration Society (BELMAS) and the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), which was to gauge principals' perceptions of social justice, and what they have done to promote it in their schools.

The researchers used networking for convenience sampling (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1996), and recruited 10 principals of color who agreed to be interviewed. Six out of ten principals of elementary schools were finalized and Table 1 provided their backgrounds and demographics information.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Principals in Interviews

Principals (pseudonyms)	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Years of being P	School location	School level (grades)	Student population
Decker	M	In 40's	African American	3	Urban	PreK-8	336
Rhodes	M	In 40's	Hispanic	9	Urban	1st-3rd	361
September	M	In late 50's	African American	26	Urban	Pre-8	690
Shape	M	In 30's	African	2	Urban	PreK-8	680
Nicholson	M	In late 40's	Hispanic	12	Urban	PreK-8	457
Phelps	F	In 30's	Hispanic	3	Urban	4th-6th	450

Quantitative

The quantitative data were retrieved from the New Jersey Department of Education (DOE), which was available to the public. The DOE provided the data of all districts in the state, including student enrollment, student dropouts, certificated and non-certificated personnel, graduation rates, teacher evaluation, school performance, assessment and special education. The state required that all school districts report the data of the individuals who were employed and be then disaggregated by the categories of race/ethnicity and gender.

This study used the 2016-2017 data of the administrators of color, full-time teachers of color, and students in New Jersey public school districts, including (1) school administrators of color (ADMIN); (2) teachers of color (TEACH); (3) economically disadvantaged students (ECON); (4) students with a 504 plan

(FIVE); and (5) students with the limited English proficiency (LEP).

Analytic Approach

According to the sequential exploratory research design (Creswell, 2009), qualitative results are analyzed prior to the quantity data collected and analyzed.

In the event that some unexpected themes arose in the qualitative results, the quantity analysis can be useful to "generalize qualitative findings to different samples" (Creswell, 2009, p. 211).

Qualitative

Following such a protocol, interviews were conducted lasting approximately 60 minutes, each of which was digitally recorded. From verbatim transcriptions, the data were then coded. In the coding process, researchers employed domain, taxonomic, and componential analysis methodology to discover identical patterns, common themes, and controversial issues (Spradley, 1980). Table 2 shows examples of the analysis process. The interviews of this study allowed researchers to identify themes and provide the answers to the research questions.

Table 2

Process of Coding

Codes	Conceptual categories	Theme
I am a role model, and made impression on them	Modeling	What do Principals of Color do
I model as often, as much, as possible		
I am a servant leader, and will do it first		
I model it for teachers		
I trust you, and need you to trust me	trust & relationship building	
I believe relationship		
You plant seeds, and are then back away…they are going to spark		
I go to churches myself	reach out to local community	
I want them to know what my vision and goals are for this school		
getting the words out to the community		

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Quantitative

To validate and generalize the findings from the interviews, researchers employed the multiple regression analysis, which is a statistical technique generally used to predict the value of a dependent variable based on the values of two or more independent variables (UCLA IDRE, 2018). While teachers of color (TEACH) was the dependent variable in this study, school administrators of color (ADMIN) was the independent variable, controlled by variables of economically disadvantaged students (ECON), students with a 504 plan (FIVE), and students with the limited English proficiency (LEP). The multi-regression test used in this study was to predict the dependent variable (TEACH) that may be associated with independent variables of ADMIN, controlled by ECON, FIVE, and LEP.

Findings
Qualitative analysis

Six principals of color who participated in the study worked in urban public schools in New Jersey. The six schools where they worked were small to mid-size elementary schools ranging from Pre-K to Grade 8th with the student population below 700. All six principals had been in their positions for more than two years, with three were Hispanic and three African American. Their ages ranged from the early 30's to the late 50's—two principals were in their 30's, three in the 40's, and one in his 50's (see Table 1).

Building trust is a key to the success of an organization, which is especially true in schools, where there should be trust between administrators and teachers, between administrators and students, between teachers and students, between teachers, and between students. Four out of six interviewed principals emphasized its importance for trust building. Such a trust relationship can be achieved through their interactions with teachers and students, as the interpersonal trust and respect

are fundamental for social justice leadership. They believed when principals committed to the success of teachers and students, trust is being developed.

In particular, principals in this study described how they built the trust with teachers to create a culture of inclusiveness in their schools. Knowing that they are part of it empowers teachers to believe they can eventually make a difference in school.

This was an approach that Principal Decker took on how one teacher became trusting of him in his school:

> *... for example, a teacher did something last week and I was like, why didn't you tell me first before doing it. But I knew why. She didn't trust me. She trusted someone else, but they didn't give her what she wanted. And I told her "you should have told me," and she said, "That's what everyone told me that I should have listened to you." Now she knows she should trust me.* (Principal Decker)

It's apparent that it took some time for this teacher to realize that she should have trusted Principal Decker. If leaders don't make efforts to develop relationships with their teachers, teachers may not buy-in their school visions and missions. Relationship building between school leaders and teachers was one recurring theme during interviews.

When asking how she managed to pertain to getting teachers involved, Principal Phelps stated:

> *What happens here is that there are growing teachers who are taking opportunities and taking*

on leadership roles, which would not happen in the past. We have one teacher who led the African American reading last year when she wasn't sure if it's OK. I re-assured her it's even better and go for it. That's exactly what you have to do if you have teachers who are passionate. As a leader, you see a spark after you've planted the seed. Let them go and they're going to make it happen.
(Principal Phelps)

What Principal Phelps did demonstrates her trust in teachers by empowerment. She gained teachers' trust and made them feel comfortable to contact her without hesitation whenever needed. Clearly, she had developed strong relationships with the teachers in her schools.

Modeling was another major approach that the interviewed principals had taken, and four out of six principals thought it effective in promoting social justice. Modeling reflects how to translate what people say to what they believe. It is even more powerful when people see what their leaders do and how they do it. For schools to promote a socially just environment, school principals' knowledge, skills, and dispositions are indicators to teachers and students as to what kinds of values their principals and schools endorse.

Principal Rhodes said this, when he dealt with a student who was about to be sent back home by his teacher.

So, for me, to model it for teachers, and to get them to understand it's not about sending that kid home. It's about having

that conversation, and it's about working with that student to be more resilient. It is about building that relationship with students. And I hope they [teachers] can handle it differently next time. It is also about building relationships with families, so that they [teachers] are comfortable having those conversations with parents.
(Principal Rhodes)

Along with developing relationships with teachers and students in schools, participating principals also initiated building relationships with local communities to promote social justice as a whole. Schools in the United States are in general funded by local communities, and the local taxpayers should know what the school is doing, how their children are doing in school, and how they can get involved. Principal Shape stated several times in the interview that "we need to get out into the community."

With the increasing immigrant population from Burma and Vietnam in his district, Principal Shape took initiatives to connect with local churches and activists. Here is how he approached his local communities and why he needed to do it:

I want them to know who I am and what my vision and goals are for this school. Periodically, I'll go out to the churches myself. As a matter of fact, every year our district sets up a schedule and we all go out, which is around in January or February. All administrators get together and go to a local church that's down

*the road. It's a big church we go
there and we visit it every year,
just let them know who we are
and what we're trying to do.*
(Principal Shape)

As the school and community relationship is revealed in practice, the local culture in each community seems to influence expectations of school leadership; at the same time, principals can use leadership practices to challenge prevailing norms in their communities to some degree. Principals in this study realized that getting the word out about their schools was equally important to the relationship building, which was a critical step that may help change the culture of local community.

Quantitative analyses

With the data retrieved from the New Jersey Department of Education, 653 out of 686 school districts that met the criteria were used for this study, including 2,500 schools, 116,412 full-time teachers, and almost 1.4 million students from public and charter schools. To investigate whether there is a relationship between administrators of color (ADMIN) and the percentage of teachers of color (TEACH) in a school district, a regression test was conducted for qualified districts ($N = 653$), controlled by variables of ECON, FIVE, and LEP (see Table 3).

The results show that the relationship at the .001 ($p< .001$) level is statistically significant, indicating while there are more administrators of color in leadership positions in a school district, there are more teachers of color in the same district. When controlled by the percentage of economically disadvantaged students and students with a 504 plan, the results are still statistically significant, though indicating a relatively low prediction of such associations.

Table 3

Relationship Between Administrators of & Teachers of Color in NJ

TEACH	REG-1	REG-2	REG-3	REG-4	REG-5	REG-6
			(N = 653)			
ADMIN	(.469) .000***	(.379) .000***	(.379) .000***	(.379) .000***	(.375) .000***	(.376) .000***
ECON		(.161) .000***	(.162) .000***	(.162) .000***	(.163) .000***	(.163) .000***
WHT			(.001) .920	(.000) .944	(-.006) .621	(-.002) .874
IEP				(.015) .642	(.019) .558	(.021) .514
FIVE					(.306) .005**	(.305) .005**
LEP						(.071) .258
Constant	4.307	0.37	0.295	0.063	-0.449	-0.965

*Coefficients in parenthesis; p Values underneath
** p<.05* p<.01** p<.001***

To investigate further whether there is a relationship between administrators of color (ADMIN) and teachers of color (TEACH) in a school district with 60% or higher of economic disadvantaged students (ECON), the regression was conducted in the selected districts (N = 121) (see Table 4).

The results show that the relationship at the .001 (p< .001) level is statistically significant, indicating while there are more administrators of color in leadership positions in a school district with 60% or higher of the ECON students, there are more teachers of color in the same district.

The regression results also show a statistical significance at the .05 level between teachers of color and ECON students, indicating that, while there are more economically disadvantaged students in a school, there are more teachers of color hired in the same district.

Table 4

Relationship Between Administrators of & Teachers of Color in NJ

(N = 121; ≥ 60% Economically Disadvantaged Students)

TEACH	REG-1	REG-2	REG-3	REG-4	REG-5	REG-6
ADMIN	(.412) .000***	(.405) .000***	(.404) .000***	(.403) .000***	(.399) .000***	(.387) .000***
ECON		(.313) .025*	(.314) .025*	(.317) .028*	(.319) .027*	(.342) .018*
WHT			(.009) .847	(.009) .855	(.000) .999	(-.030) .581
IEP				(.017) .915	(.000) 1.000	(-.001) .995
FIVE					(.273) .188	(.269) .193
LEP						(-.596) .180
Constant	14.342	-9.939	-10.542	-11.031	-11.035	-9.159

*Coefficients in parenthesis; p Values underneath)
** p<.05* p<.01** p<.001***

To a district with 40% or less of the economic disadvantaged students, a regression was conducted in selected districts (N = 434) (see Table 5). The results show that the relationship at the .001 (p< .001) level is statistically significant, indicating while there are more administrators of color in leadership positions in a school district with 40% or less of the ECON students, there are more teachers of color in the same district. The results also show a statistical significance at the .01 level between teachers of color and the students with

limited English proficiency (LEP), indicating that, while there are more limited English proficiency students in a school, there are more teachers of color hired in the same district.

Table 5

Relationship Between Administrators of & Teachers of Color in NJ)

(N = 434; ≤ 40% Economically Disadvantaged Students)

TEACH	REG-1	REG-2	REG-3	REG-4	REG-5	REG-6
ADMIN	(.246) .000***	(.241) 000***	(.242) 000***	(.239) 000***	(.239) 000***	(.234) 000***
ECON		(.047) .123	(.046) .131	(.045) .144	(.045) .141	(.043) .159
WHT			(-.003) .761	(-.002) .826	(-.003) .775	(.006) .615
IEP				(-.031) .279	(-.030) .298	(-.027) .353
FIVE					(.038) .806	(.006) .967
LEP						(.150) .007**
Constant	4.018	3.32	3.526	4.027	3.946	3.004

*Coefficients in parenthesis; p Values underneath
** p<.05* p<.01** p<.001***

Discussions and Conclusion

Research has long shown that teachers of color can play key roles in reducing racial discrimination in schools challenging the oppression of marginalized communities (Meier, Stewart, & England, 1989; Sleeter, 1993). Quite often, these teachers have experienced racism and ethnic oppressions themselves, and are capable of building relationships with students who have the similar experiences (Borrero, Flores, & Cruz, 2016). They are able to work with students of color by means of critically examining social inequities and their impacts on schooling (Boutte & Jackson, 2013; Camangian, 2013; Duncan-Andrade, 2009).

The results of this study—based on a mixed sequential exploratory research methodology—shed light on a phenomenon where administrators of color can be a potential factor to attract more teachers of color, as is discussed in this section. For the purpose of this study, the term of the administrators of color is interchangeable with the principals of color, as principals are a major force in a school administration.

The Role of Principals of Color for Social Justice

Many scholars in the education field are exploring the role of educators of color, the nature of education for social justice, and the implications of ways to improve the education experiences of students of color (Borrero, Flores, & Cruz, 2016; Fuller, 2012; Howley, Woodrum, Burgess, & Rhodes, 2009; Irizarry, & Donaldson, 2012; Johnson, 2007; Khalifa, et al., 2016; Kohli &Pizarro, 2016; Ryan, 2006; Santamaria, 2013; Scheurich, & Skrla, 2003; Singleton, & Linton,2006; Tatum, & Muhammad, 2012), and those principals for social justice "cultivated trust and gained community support" (Howley, et al., 2009,

p.12). The qualitative results of this study indicate such an approach. Four out of six principals in this study emphasized the importance of trust building with teachers and gaining the community support, believing it should be based on honest conversations, relationship building, and constant modeling. Principals in this study modeled inclusive and socially just ideologies through conversations with teachers and through their own actions and behaviors in schools.

With global migration, economic downturns, and terrorism threats, more immigrants are coming to western countries including the United States, which has shifted the demographics and numbers of school-age children of color attending public schools. Today's elementary and secondary school students in the United States are more diverse, racially and by origin, than 20 years ago (The Pew Research Center, 2018).

The enrollment of students who are White decreased from 59 to 50 percent from 2003 to 2013 and was projected to continue to decline through fall 2027 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Meanwhile, the continuing onslaught of external mandates from the federal and state governments has demanded increasing learning outcomes for *ALL* students, requiring that school leaders acknowledge the differences among students and create positive learning environments for all students, including students with diverse backgrounds.

School principals have responsibilities for setting directions, supervising curricula, advancing improvements, and increasing student achievements in school (Diamond & Spillane, 2016; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Muijs & Harris, 2002).

However, schools seemed not to be fulfilling the expectations of parents and taxpayers (e.g. Johnson, 2006; Taturn & Muhammad, 2012), in particular, the expectations of the parents of students of color.

Such a phenomenon warrants some discussions to diversify school administrators and teachers for the purpose of improving student learning outcomes.

Shields (2004) pointed out more than a decade ago, "When children feel they belong and find their realities reflected in curricula and conversations of schooling, they are more engaged in learning and that they experience greater school success" (p.122).

Thus, it is important for school leaders to develop a school culture that is socially just, deeply understood, and critically examined for its adherence to diversity and inclusiveness. More teachers of color in schools and classrooms can help develop such a phenomenon, and the quantitative results of this study echo it.

Important Roles of Teachers of Color

The statistical results of this study show that while the more principals of color are in a New Jersey district, there are more teachers of color in the same district, in particular, in those districts that have the students with economically disadvantaged backgrounds, 504 plans and limited English proficiency.

While many teachers of color enter the profession with a focus on justice and equity (Hillard, Perry, & Steele, 2003; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016), research has indicated that these teachers are often likely to integrate social justice consciousness into their classroom teaching and instructions (Borrero, Flores, & Cruz, 2016; Boutte & Jackson, 2013; Jackson, 2011; Rios & Montecinos, 1999).

Research also shows that "students of color benefit when teachers who share their ethnic backgrounds and experiences teach them" (Borrero, Flores, & Cruz, 2016, p.28).

Principals in this study narrated they tried to set good examples for their students, because they strongly believed they could be role models for their students, as Principal Decker shared:

> *I'm a role model. I saw a student who was already in High School. She was telling me how much she missed me when I left her. I know I made an impression on her… And that's my job—to make an impression upon them* [students]. *That's what I want to do. I dress like this every day—suit and tie. So when they see me looking like this, they tell me "You smell good". I will say I took a bath today and then joked: "Tuesday is bath day and that's why I smell good." They all laughed. I'm just always trying to make an impression on them that they can be like me.* (Principal Decker)

Having seen what their principals do and observed how they behave and act in daily school practices, students are motivated and encouraged to be like their role models (Borrero, Flores, & Cruz, 2016; Dee, 2005; Villegas, Strom, & Lucas, 2012).

At the same time, students of color believe that principals and teachers who have the same backgrounds and experiences are able to understand them better, considering themselves included. We then argue students of color learn better and their academic performances can be improved in such an

environment. On the contrary, when they feel left out or marginalized, students may act out or shut themselves down, which will have negative effects on their academic performances and achievements.

The literature indicates that it is empirical to match students of color with teachers of color in order for schools to successfully improve the academic achievements for all students (Lindsay & Hart, 2016).

Though the statistical results of this study didn't show that schools and districts in New Jersey intentionally did the matching, it is reasonable to assume that the shared school missions of justice and equity among educators of color bring them together.

The principals of color with the life experiences of social justice are very likely to attract alike-minded individuals who share a collective and similar experiences, and vice versa. Teachers of color recognize that their passions could be understood and supported by principals of color when both have been in historically underserved communities.

Though the results of this study didn't provide the evidence that principals of color directly impact the percentage of teachers of color in school districts, the literature indicates the importance of race matching between students and teachers concerning students' academic achievements and disciplines (Lindsay & Hart, 2016; Wright, 2015; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997).

We then argue that principals of color recognize the need of teachers of color in classrooms, while teachers of color see the needs to address social injustices and racism

when interacting with students, which can be materialized in their teaching, disciplining and mentoring.

Conclusion

What is clear is the impact of social justice teaching on students, particularly students of color. Research suggests that using curricula and instructions that are explicit about race and the impact of racism in schools and society promotes school cultures, in which students of color feel more of a sense of belonging and empowerment (French & Simmons, 2015).

While more study is needed to quantify what teaching and education through the lens of social justice mean for non-white and white students alike, this study recommends that school districts consider hiring more educators of color to benefit all students' academic learning and achievements at large.

Future Research

The findings of this study show important implications for policy makers, educational researchers, and school administrators with regard to the important roles of educators of color in improving the academic performances of students of color and the possible associations between principals of color and the recruitments of teachers of color.

In addition to the important findings in this study, future research would surely prove beneficial in learning how others, such as teachers of and students of color, perceive social justice in school and how they view the possible associations between administrators of and teachers of color in improving student learning.

Though the results of this study show, while there are more principals of color in a district, there are more teachers of

color in the same district, there is a limited empirical evidence to show whether principals of color are the factor that directly impacts the recruitment of the teachers of color. The association of the two warrants the attention of the future research.

The goal of this study was to examine the roles of educators of color. Though a mixed research methodology provided more holistic findings by both qualitative and quantitative analyses, the sample size of six interviewees from elementary schools might be weak because the convenience sampling might not be representative (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1996) and the perspectives from participating principals of color might not be very diverse.

The future research may expand it to recruit more participants from middle and high schools.

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The Impact of Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) on Suspensions by Race and Ethnicity in an Urban School District

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Abstract

Recent federal data shows disparities among school discipline by race. This has been a long running concern in many arenas. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) provides a positive aspirational approach to student discipline instead of taking a more penal-based approach. This paper reviews the implementation of PBIS and queries the impact on middle school and high school suspensions in a midsized Midwest urban school district in Muncie, Indiana. The implementation had a significant impact on reducing inappropriate student behavior as measured by suspensions. Although a significant racial disparity continued between black, multiracial, and white students, the disparity was decreased. The secondary schools involved in the implementation saw a reduction in student suspensions which did lead to increased student achievement and better student attendance.

Key Words

K-12 public schools, discipline and suspensions, PBIS, race and ethnicity

Introduction

Discipline in American schools is often disparate and too often based upon the skin color of the student. The US Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (2018) recently released data showing that the disparity between school-based arrests for white students and students of color is continuing to grow.

Although Black students represent 31% of school arrests or referrals to law enforcement, they represent only 15% of the student population. American Indian, Pacific Islander, and multiracial populations are similarly over represented in law enforcement referrals and arrests. McIntosh and Bastable (2018) articulated that 5% of students are suspended annually through the US.

Data from the 2011-2012 school year from the US Department of Education reported a suspension rate including both in- and out-of-school suspensions of 13.1%. The US Department of Education reported only on out-of-school suspensions for the 2015-2016 School Year, stating 5% to 6% of students were given out-of-school suspensions (US Department of Education, 2012 & 2018). Marchbanks, et al. (2016) reported that 8% of urban students receive a juvenile justice referral compared to only 4% of rural or suburban students even though urban schools tend to have more diverse teaching staffs.

During the 2014-2015 school year, a Midwestern urban school district hereafter identified as Independent School District A suspended more than 31% of its students and nearly 48% of its Black secondary students. At the beginning of the 2015-2016 school year, the Independent School District A's administrative team met with local law enforcement and other juvenile justice officials to address the school's discipline issues. Several school board members identified the need to address student discipline as an immediate priority. Even though Marchbanks, et al. (2016) concluded that urban schools, whether using lenient or strict discipline practices, evidenced a higher level of minority referrals to the juvenile justice system, it was clear the Independent School District A needed to make changes to its disciplinary approach.

PBIS

One of the decisions that came from the meeting was the system-wide implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) According to many educators, PBIS is an excellent choice to address the need for a more fair and equitable discipline program in schools. PBIS is currently in place in nearly 20% of school districts nationally and has at its primary focus improving academic achievement which aligns with national goals (Barrett, Eber, & Weist, 2013).

Recently, the Office of Special Education Programs' (OSEP) Technical Assistance Center on PBIS announced their own review of disproportionality and found that there were still substantial disproportionalities in schools utilizing PBIS among Black and multiracial students, but it was lower than the national average.

Mowen, Mowen, and Brent (2017) studied the discipline disparities at a Department of Defense High School. Overall, they found 17% of students were subjected to a suspension of some type. However, due to the impact of a more stable and homogenized background of military families, they found no significant difference in likelihood of a student to be disciplined based upon their racial background. Mowen, Mowen, and Brent (2017) explain this to some extent to the impact of the military culture and the fact parents of the students studied all have steady employment, stable housing, and adequate

access to health care, childcare, and counseling services.

Bottiani, Bradshaw, and Mendelson (2017) identified poverty and zero-tolerance policies as potential facets aggravating the disparity in school discipline. They found that Black students are disciplined with greater frequency where they feel the school is less equitable in its disciplinary approach.

In general, schools utilizing a school-wide approach to PBIS suspend only about 4% of their students, which is below the national average of 5% (McIntosh & Bastable, 2018). Gregory, Skiba, and Mediratt (2017) showed that PBIS alone doesn't address the racial disparity without conscious effort to explicitly address racial inequalities. Likewise, Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, and Pollock (2017) also found that PBIS alone didn't reduce the racial disparity in school discipline issues.

One of the issues the authors address is the need to impact discipline by engaging in conversations about race in the school environment. For the better part of a decade, Independent School District A had used a system called Cultural Competencies to initiate monthly conversations at the faculty level to address issues of race along with other factors of bias.

Some earlier studies showed a marked decrease in investing in PBIS's proactive discipline approach. Netzel and Eber (2003) reported a 22% reduction in elementary suspension rates in an Illinois district after the implementation of PBIS. Muscott, Mann, and LeBrun (2008) reported a decrease in

suspensions in most types of schools, but not in all schools in their study of New Hampshire Schools using PBIS. They only included two high schools in their study and the results were a 14% reduction to a 97% reduction in suspensions.

The school district Independent School District A believed that implementing PBIS within schools would assist in reducing student discipline issues. The null hypotheses were:

> H-1$_0$: The implementation of school-wide PBIS across the district did not have an impact on the rate of student suspensions?

> H-2$_0$: The implementation of PBIS did not reduce the racial disparities in student suspensions.

Methods

The study was conducted in an urban Indiana school corporation. The community had an estimated population of approximately 70,000 at the beginning of the study. The majority of the population was white (83%) with 10% African American (Suburban Stats, 2018). The school district saw a 14% decline in population from 6,568 students in 2014 to 5,690 students in 2017. While enrollment had declined, the poverty increased to approximately 80% over the past several years. Sixty percent of students were White while 39.5% identified as a minority. The largest minority group was Black students who account for 21.1% of the total population. Yearly changes in demographics and socio-economics experienced by Independent School District A are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1.

Secondary School Demographics

	School Year 2014	School Year 2015	School Year 2016	School Year 2017
Percent of students receiving free or reduced lunch	75.5%	75.8%	75.1%	74.6%
American Indian	0.3%	0.4%	0.5%	0.4%
Asian	0.8%	0.7%	0.6%	0.6%
Black / Non-Hispanic	20.9%	20.6%	21.6%	21.6%
Hispanic	2.8%	2.4%	2.9%	3.5%
Multiracial	9.6%	10.2%	10%	10.4%
Pacific Islander	0%	0%	0.0%[1]	0.0%[1]
White / Non-Hispanic	65.4%	65.6%	64.4%	63.3%

[1] In School Years 2016 and 2017, the district enrolled a single student who identified as a Pacific Islander. That student was never suspended and is not included in subsequent data.

During the study, the district initially operated one high school and two middle schools. At the beginning of the 2014-2015 School Year, the district consolidated to a single high school. The district also operated nine elementary schools and two specialty

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schools which were not included within the scope of the study.

In January 2015, the middle school on the south side of town was deemed to be in such crisis that a wholesale leadership change was made. The new leadership team was extremely supportive of implementing PBIS, so to meet the goal of improving student discipline, Independent School District A implemented a district-wide approach to PBIS. Overall, from the beginning of the 2015-2016 School Year through the end of the 2016-2017 School Year, the number of critical discipline incidents went down by two-thirds.

Traditionally, Independent School District A accounted for discipline problems or "critical discipline incidents" by building ethnicity and gender. The incidents were tallied in 26 categories from accidents through weapon violations. This did not include class tardies or other minor violations. These criteria included events where students were arrested or reported to other state agencies. The reporting criteria for critical incidents were not modified during the two school years of the study; so the

data can be used for accurate comparisons. The critical incident data from 2014-2015 were used as a benchmark prior to the implementation of PBIS in any of the district schools. In 2015-2016, Independent School District A began a systemic implementation of PBIS.

Results

Independent School District A saw a reduction in serious discipline incidents from the 2014-2015 school year through the 2016-2017 school year (See Table 2).

Serious discipline incidents were measured against for criteria. The first was the gross number of incidents, followed by the number of incidents that required staff to make a report to Child Protective Services. The third was the number of referrals to juvenile probation. The last was whether a custodial arrest was made.

Table 3 shows the number of suspensions and the total number of days suspended. Table 3 shows the percentage of students suspended by ethnicity or race as well.

Table 2.

Number of Critical Discipline Incidents and Suspensions by School Year

	School Year 2014	School Year 2015	School Year 2016	School Year 2017
Student Population	6568	6106	5883	5690
Total Number of Suspensions	4543	5032	3769	3143
Total Critical Incidents	1162	1169	969	786
CPS Complaints	937	1010	517	589
Probation Referrals	133	201	118	115
Custodial Arrests	93	59	62	66

Abbreviations: CPS = Child Protective Services

Table 3

Total of Days Suspended by Ethnicity

Race / Ethnicity	School Year 2014			School Year 2015			School Year 2016			School Year 2017		
	% of Students Suspended	Total # of Suspension	Total Days of Suspension	% of Students Suspended	Total # of Suspension	Total Days of Suspension	% of Students Suspended	Total # of Suspension	Total Days of Suspension	% of Students Suspended	Total # of Suspension	Total Days of Suspension
Am. Indian	26.67	24	26	35.71	18	19	31.25	23	41	30.77	16	22
Asian	6.25	5	12	15.38	9	13	10	5	11	15	5	7
Black/ Non-H	47.86	1516	1962	46.38	1648	2293	42.62	1190	1782	40.46	1061	1751
Hispanic	19.09	58	80	23.33	51	74	23.71	66	86	16.81	59	91
Multi-racial	40.75	638	806	36.66	663	925	35.12	463	625	33.14	382	519
White / Non-H	25.82	2302	2877	25.85	2643	3697	24.14	2022	2887	20.68	1620	2271
Grand Total	31.52	4543	5763	31.08	5032	7021	29.16	3769	5432	26.12	3143	4661

Independent School District A saw a reduction of suspensions in both—the total number and the percentage of the student body that experienced one or more suspensions. The number of students who were suspended at least once was reduced from 1,228 in the 2014 School Year to 843 in the 2017 School Year. This was a reduction from 31% of secondary students to 26% of secondary students or a reduction of 17% in the two years since the decision to implement PBIS.

This number is less than that experienced by Netzel and Eber (2003) who saw a 22% reduction in elementary suspensions. However, the differing nature of elementary and secondary students may account for some of the difference. Harper (2018) found a reduction in suspensions led to better attendance and test scores. Independent School District A realized similar results with one of the middle schools no longer being labeled as a failing school by the state's department of education. As part of the study, a total of over 24,040 annual discipline records of Independent School District A were reviewed. The least amount of suspensions any student experienced was zero.

The most received was a single student, a White male, who was suspended 30 times in 2016. Among those students who were suspended, on average, they were suspended 3.7 times per year (see Tables 4 & 6). A p=value of less than 0.05 was required for significance. When the individual suspension data was analyzed using ANOVA, the resulting p value was $p= 1.6205E-12$. Since the p value was < 0.01, the next step was to conduct a Tukey HSD which showed $p = 0.002$ between the School Year 2014 and School Year 2017 data sets. This allowed the null hypothesis $H-1_0$ to be discarded.

This study showed that the impact of implementing PBIS had a positive impact on the students served. Those impacted were not necessarily suspended less often, but not at all. As the average number of suspensions among students suspended remained constant (see Table 4), the impact was simply to allow students to remove themselves from the negative discipline consequences completely.

Table 4: Suspensions per student

School Year	Total Number of Suspensions	Total Number of Individual Students Suspended	Average Number of Times Suspended	Highest Number of Suspensions for a Student
2014	4543	1229	3.699	26
2015	5032	1126	4.47	24
2016	3769	982	3.85	30
2017	3143	842	3.72	22
Percentage Reduction	31.48%			

Regarding the second hypothesis H-2_0 regarding racial disparities among secondary student suspensions, in the 2013-2014 School Year, more than 31% of secondary students were suspended at least once. Among the four largest racial or ethnic groups represented in the school district's student body, Hispanics were the least likely to be suspended being suspended only 19% of those students being suspended, 26% of White students were suspended, nearly 41% of multiracial students were suspended and almost 48% of Black students were suspended at least once. Over the next three years, both the total number of suspensions and the number of students suspended were reduced (See Tables 5 & 6). However, the average number of times a student was suspended among those students who were suspended at least once remained somewhat stable.

Table 5.

Percentage of Students Who Received One or More Suspension by Race and School Year

	2014	2015	2016	2017
American Indian	26.67%	35.71%	31.25%	30.77%
Asian	6.25%	15.38%	10.00%	15.00%
Black	47.86%	46.38%	42.62%	40.46%
Hispanic	19.09%	23.33%	23.71%	16.81%
Multiracial	40.75%	36.66%	35.12%	33.14%
White	25.82%	25.85%	24.14%	20.68%
All Students	31.52%	31.09%	29.16%	26.12%

Table 6.

Average Number of Suspensions Among Students Suspended by Race / Ethnicity

	2014	2015	2016	2017
American Indian	6.0	3.6	4.6	4.0
Asian	2.5	2.25	2.5	1.67
Black	3.88	4.76	3.85	3.76
Hispanic	2.76	2.42	2.87	3.11
Multiracial	4.19	4.88	3.92	3.41
White	3.49	4.30	3.87	3.83
All Students	3.69	4.47	3.85	3.73

A review of the data using Pearson's Chi-square to analyze to determine whether the expected numbers align with the observed number of suspensions by race, it appears that PBIS did have a mitigating impact on the racial disparities relating to the number of students suspended by race, but Independent School District A still showed a significant disparity among most groups.

The values returned showed significant deviance from the expected norms with the following for the 2014 School Year, X^2 (5, N=3,895) = 171.54 p < .01. The trend was towards less but still significant deviance from what would be expected:

> 2014 School Year X^2 (5, N=3,895) = 171.54 p < .01
>
> 2015 School Year X^2 (5, N=3,622) = 126.69 p < .01
>
> 2016 School Year X^2 (5, N=3,357) = 169.11 p < .01
>
> 2017 School Year X^2 (5, N=3,227) = 120.43 p < .01

Although there was a general tendency towards reducing the disparities, they remained significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis H-2_0 could be discarded.

There was not a significant disparity at $p = .05$ between the number of Hispanic and white students suspended. The values returned by Pearson's Chi-square were $p= .1713$ in 2014, $p = .6439$ in 2015, $p = .9323$ in 2016, and $p=3761$ in 2017.

Part of this may be due to the relatively small Hispanic population of the district which never rose above 3.5% well below the national average of 26% (US Department of Education, 2018).

Conclusion

The implementation of PBIS within Independent School District A appears to have had a positive impact on reducing the number and nature of discipline incidents across the board.

One key was the buy-in of the building leadership teams to ensure PBIS was implemented with fidelity in all schools. Both building level administrative buy-in and effective communications were mentioned as essential to the success of the Netzel and Eber (2003) study as well. Through a grant with a local mental health provider, Independent School District A was able to hire an administrator to coordinate PBIS efforts and training for staff across the district. This fulltime coordinator position was extremely helpful in the implementation of PBIS.

However, even though the number of minority students suspended has been greatly reduced, the disparity between the number of White students and minority students experiencing suspension is significant.

Limitations

Without having created a control group, it would not be responsible to identify a causal link between the PBIS program and the positive decline in discipline issues and suspensions that correlated with the implementation. Independent School District A did make some building level and district level leadership changes that could have impacted the overall culture of the district.

The consolidation of the two high schools into one along with the physical movement of the student body of one of the middle schools into the abandoned high school may have contributed to the increase of discipline issues during the 2014-2015 School Year. Independent School District A has a particularly high level of poverty.

The study should be replicated in districts with lower levels of poverty. The area is not as demographically diverse as most urban areas. In particular, the district has a low Hispanic population in comparison to many urban areas.

Recommendations

Further research into the impact of poverty on student discipline is essential. As minority students are more likely to be in a situation involving poverty, what is the impact of poverty factors on the disparities in discipline? Mowen, Mowen, and Brent's (2017) research needs to be replicated to determine if much of the racial disparities in school discipline can be ameliorated when socio-economic differences are mitigated or are there other inherent racial biases at work.

Autobiography

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Resilience and the African American Superintendent

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Abstract

We sought to explore the extent to which race might influence how African American superintendents cope with the stressors of their leadership roles and the presence of support while in such positions. In order to test this question, we recruited African American superintendents across the United States. We specifically measured their ability to cope with stressors and maintain resilience in leadership. African American superintendents indicated that they primarily utilized problem-based coping to navigate role stress and that they perceived themselves as successfully bouncing back from that stress. We offer a brief set of recommendations based upon these results to foster further coping and resilience among this remarkable group of leaders.

Key Words

stress, resilience, coping, African American, superintendent, leadership

African American superintendents often lead large urban school districts faced with numerous structural as well as systemic challenges. These challenges regularly include fiscal underfunding, lack of technology, antiquated classroom affordances, sparse extracurricular and co-curricular experiences, and teachers who lack adequate certification. As result of these complex challenges, large urban school districts experience poor academic achievement and attendance among African American students and other students of color.

In the current political climate (Baker, 2018), African American superintendents may be required to ward off racially hostile environments to promote the psychological safety of their students. With each passing day, African American superintendents must foster the creation and maintenance of emotionally and physically conducive learning environments. In other words, African American superintendents must remain resilient in the face of challenge and model this resilience to the various stakeholders whom they serve.

Although debate continues regarding its definition (Southwick, Bonanno, Masten, Panter-Brick, & Yehuda, 2014), resilience is considered to be the ability to bounce back from adversity (Carver, 1998; Smith et al., 2008). Implicit in the behavior of a resilient superintendent is a strengths-based approach toward leadership in times of difficulty (Saleebey, 1996).

It is conceivable that the current political climate has exacerbated fear and tension among children of color in classrooms across the United States (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2019), a situation potentially worsened by the ubiquity of social media and its ability to manipulate public sentiment (e.g., Stella, Ferrara, & De Domenico, 2018).

The main threat to resilience is the impact of stress on an individual's coping mechanisms. Lazarus (1990) observed that stress is grounded in a transactional relationship between an individual and their environment. An individual's' perception of an event influences how they process an event that appears harmful or threatening (Lazarus, 1990).

Individuals tend to respond to perceived stressors with a range of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies with varied success (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). Problem-focused coping aims "at managing or altering the problem that is causing stress, whereas emotion-focused coping strategies are directed at regulating an individual's emotional response to a problem" (McMillian & Morris, 2012, p. 645). Whereas problem-focused coping occurs when an individual "perceives that (s)he can change the situation...emotion-focused coping strategies are used when an individual perceives that nothing can be done to change potentially harmful or threatening situations" (McMillian & Morris, 2012, p. 645).

The effectiveness of the individual's coping strategies may be strongly influenced by the presence or absence of community and friends (Daly, Jennings, Beckett & Leashore, 1995). According to Cohen and Willis (1985), social support "'buffers' persons from the potentially pathogenic influence of stressful event" (Cohen & Willis, 1985, p. 310).

What matters is that the individual is able to muster some mix of problem-focused and/or emotion-focused coping mechanisms that allow them to remain resilient in the presence of stress. In the absence of such mechanisms, the individual might resort to

maladaptive attempts to cope (e.g., drinking, smoking, engaging in otherwise unhealthy behaviors) that ultimately serve to cause greater harm to the self.

Hacker (1992) further observed that "African Americans experience pressures that can be explained by the stigmas of race or racial origin and that are unlike those encountered by other groups that have immigrated to America" (p. 242). Leading a school district can be challenging work, especially within a political climate that is fueled by a national debate around accountability-driven assessment.

African American superintendents today must cope with the additional stressors of leading school districts in a political climate of presidentially sanctioned bigotry (Graham, Greene, Murphy, & Richards, 2019).

What support factors might contribute to the resilience necessary for leading while Black? In order to test this question, we recruited current and retired African American superintendents throughout the United States. We specifically investigated their ability to cope with the stressors and maintain resilience in leadership. We also asked them to share ways they had sought to navigate the stress of their leadership roles.

Method
Subjects
Participants were current and recently retired public school superintendents recruited via email during 2017-2018 winter season. The sample was comprised of 21 subjects from a recruited total of 363. The genders were balanced within the sample (11 males, 10 females). The typical subject was 50.52 years old (SD = 6.86, range: 38-64 years) and has

been in the superintendency for 8.33 years (SD = 6.24, range: 0-23). All participants were treated in accord with the ethical guidelines of the American Educational Research Association (2011).

Materials
Coping was evaluated via self-report with the Brief COPE Inventory (BCI; Carver, 1997), a 28-item instrument designed to assess the extent to which an individual utilizes a variety of coping mechanisms to deal with stress. The BCI is based on the full-length version of the COPE Inventory (Carver, 1989), which demonstrated acceptable test-retest reliability (.45-.92).

To better understand the relative coping skills endorsed among African American public school superintendents, the 14 scales of the BCI were grouped by rational choice into three general scales: (a) problem-focused coping, (b) emotion-focused coping, and (c) maladaptive coping.

Problem-focused coping is typified by an intentional approach to stress that involves activities such as changing goals, positively reinterpreting dilemmas, and planning. As the term implies, emotion-focused coping is characterized by behaviors such as seeking social support and venting emotions.

Problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping are adaptive response sets. Alternatively, maladaptive coping may involve denial of the situation, self-blame, and substance use. Scores for these three summative scales were derived with a simple summation of their respective scales, and then divided by the number of scales inherent to each overall scale to normalize the new scores relative to one another.

The Brief Resilience Scale (BRS; Smith, Dalen, Wiggins, Tooley, Christopher, & Bernard, 2018) was used to measure via self-report the ability of an individual to recover from stress. A 6-item instrument, the BRS demonstrated strong test-retest reliability (.80-.91).

Subjects were also asked to respond to an open-ended question ("As an African American superintendent, how do you navigate leading your school district during the current political climate?"). This question was intended to provide subjects to an opportunity to share what they thought to be salient to their leadership.

Procedure

Subjects were African American public school superintendents recruited via email during 2017-2018 winter season from the 2016 national list of African American superintendents curated by the National Alliance of Black School Educators (www.nabse.org).

Upon clicking on the link in the recruitment email, subjects were taken to an online survey hosted by Qualtrics (www.qualtrics.com) that presented a statement of informed consent and then requested completion of the Brief COPE Inventory (BCI; Carver, 1997), Brief Resilience Scale (BRS; Smith, Dalen, Wiggins, Tooley, Christopher, & Bernard, 2018), and an open-ended question regarding leading as an African American superintendent.

Results

The current study was intended to explore perceptions of coping and resilience among African American public school superintendents. Although the sample proved quite small ($n = 21$), the superintendents who participated were geographically representative of those school districts in the United States with the highest prevalence of African American students.

At the time of data collection, there were only 363 African American superintendents leading among more than 13,000 public school districts. The majority of these superintendents served in larger urban districts.

It reasonably could be assumed that, as the chief executive officer of their district, the typical superintendent might not have been able to justify setting aside 30 minutes from their day to respond to a survey. The empirical reality is that the data in the present study are likely the best currently available. Nonetheless, the analysis was necessarily limited to a nonstatistical exploratory consideration.

Cognizant of this inferential limitation, the data were interrogated to shed light on the current reported state of coping and resilience among African American public school superintendents in a geographically diverse sample (see Figure 1).

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Figure 1. Geographic distribution of subjects.

Data were collected from two instruments. The Brief COPE Inventory (BCI; Carver, 1997) is a measure designed to assess how individuals perceive their utilization of a range of coping mechanisms to cope with stress. It requires respondents to indicate their level of agreement across 28 items ranging from a score of 1 ("I haven't been doing this at all") to a score of 4 ("I've been doing this a lot"), with a lower overall score suggesting the manifestation of more robust coping mechanisms. In response to the BCI (see Figure 2), the preponderance of mean responses among African American public school superintendents ranked below the midpoint on a majority of items (19 versus 9) of the BCI, suggesting a tendency to enact a variety of coping mechanisms.
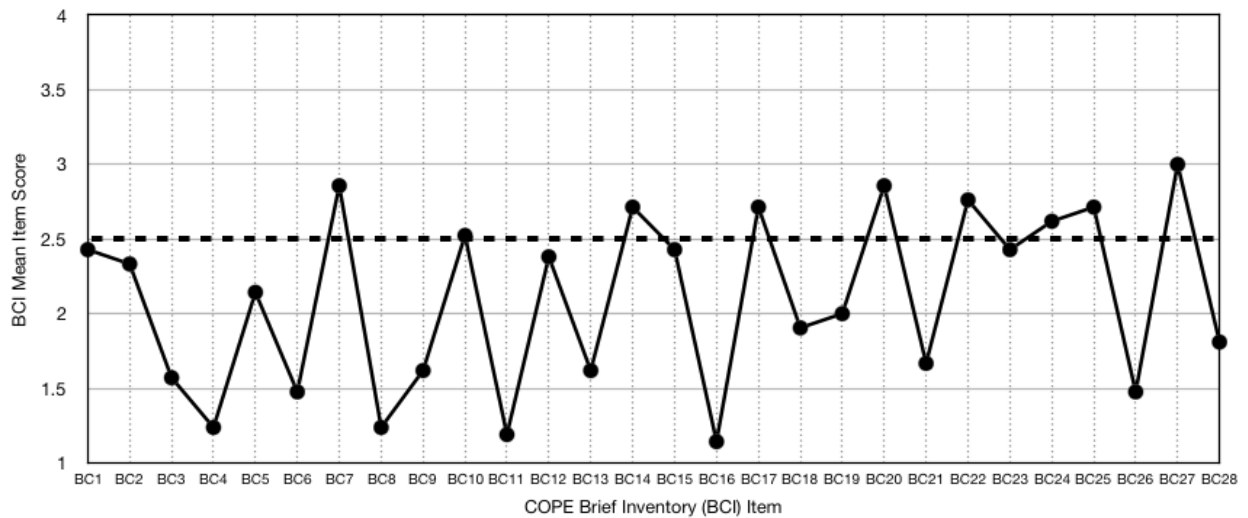
Figure 2. Mean response scores to BCI items.

African American public school superintendents indicated that they primarily utilized problem-based approaches (M_{PROB} = 2.61, SD = .71) to cope with stress. Emotion-focused coping was reported as a close secondary response set (M_{EMOT} = 2.18, SD = .52) toward coping. Maladaptive coping was utilized as the least common (M_{MAL} = 1.54, SD = .44) approach toward coping with stress (see Figure 3).
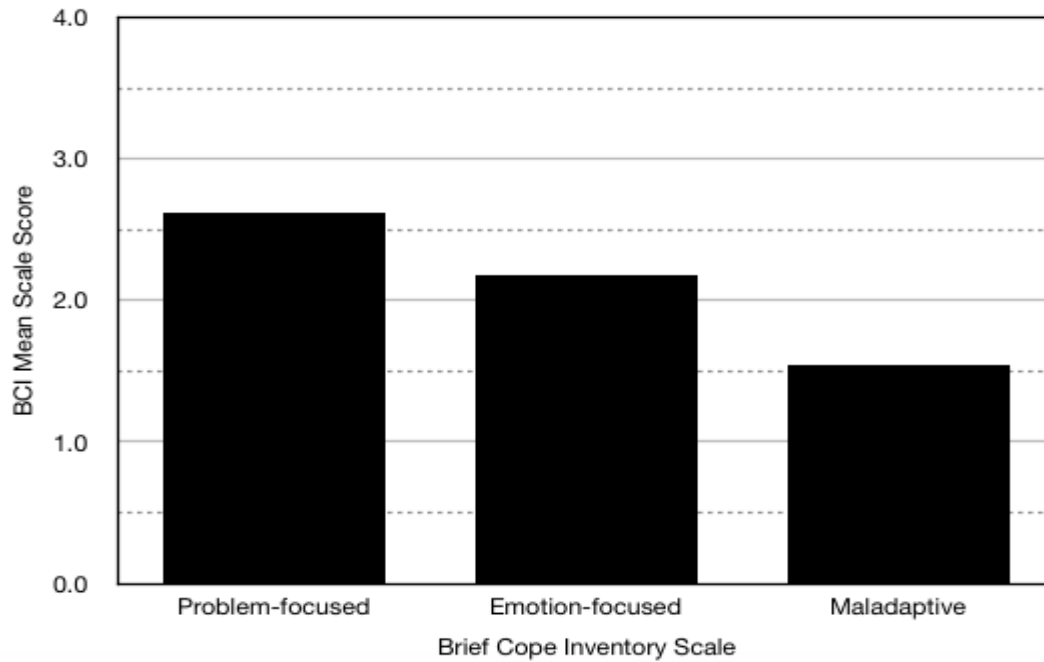

Figure 3. Mean response scores to BCI scale items.

The Brief Resilience Scale (BRS; Smith, Dalen, Wiggins, Tooley, Christopher, & Bernard, 2018) similarly was designed assess how well individuals perceive their ability to recover from stress. It asks respondents to endorse their level of agreement across six items ranging from a score of 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). Higher item scores indicate more successful resilience. In response to the BRS, the average response score across all items clustered tightly around 4, suggesting that African American public school superintendents perceived themselves as successfully bouncing back from the stress of leadership (see Figure 4).
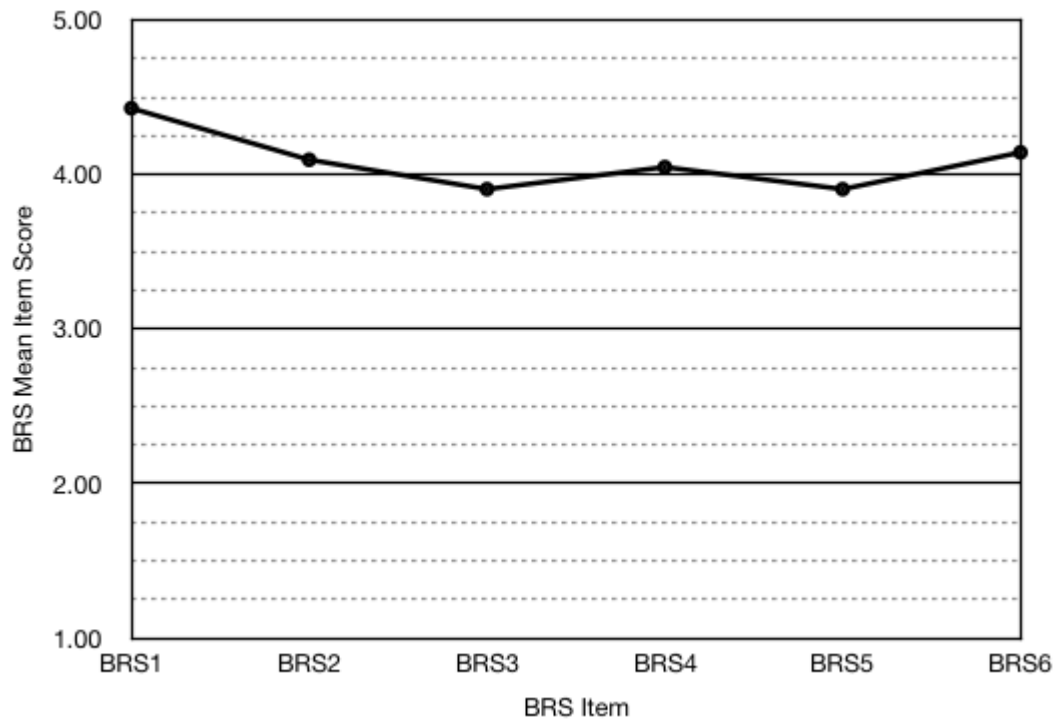
Figure 4. Mean response scores to BRS items.

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African American public school superintendents were also asked to respond to an open-ended question ("As an African American superintendent, how do you navigate leading your school district during the current political climate?"). Nineteen of the 21 responding African American public school superintendents provided a response to the question (see Figure 5). Their responses revealed the presence of the three major themes. Six responses mentioned the "reality" of politics in the relative to the superintendency. Five responses each addressed the importance of remaining focused on the students in one's public school district, as well as the benefits of interacting with colleagues and mentors.

Figure 5. Visual representation of open-ended question responses.

Discussion

African American superintendents often lead complex school districts that present a range of leadership challenges. In addition to addressing the academic needs of their increasingly diverse students, African American superintendents must address community needs, practical concerns, and local politics. African American superintendents resultantly can find themselves searching for additional resources to compensate for systemic issues related to economic pressure, time constraints, and cultural and class differences (Henderson 2004). As people of color, African American superintendents additionally might find themselves pressured by the communities of color they serve to demonstrate the expected academic progress of their students. The result could be a heightened level of stress greater than that experienced by their White peers in leadership.

The small but geographically representative sample of the present study provides some insight into the matter. Overall, African American public school superintendents indicated that they primarily utilized problem-based approaches to cope with stress, with emotion-focused coping was reported as a close secondary response set toward coping.

However, it is noteworthy to consider that neither of these trends rose to the level of what might be considered highly effective coping. Instead, we interpret the results to suggest that the typical African American superintendent in the study was able to muster psychological and social resources necessary to remain successful in the position. As one subject shared, "I understand that navigating the political landscape is a function of the position. It is a component of the job that cannot be avoided."

Maladaptive coping was utilized much less frequently than were the more adaptive strategies, with the report on average that using self-denial was a fairly normative response. Overall, the rather narrow variance on average between problem-focused, emotion-focused, and maladaptive coping strategies begs the question as to the toll the stress of leadership took on the African American superintendents in the present study.

Nonetheless, the African American superintendents indicated that they had remained resilient in the face of role stress. Especially noteworthy was the shared sentiment that it was important to remain focused on the work amidst the challenges of politics. Indeed, the majority of the African American superintendents in the present study most certainly led in highly politicized communities, where the scarcity of resources in interaction with issues of race create tensions among stakeholders. This reality appears concordant with the concept of resilience. As Smith et al. (2008) stated, "while resilience has been defined as resistance to illness, adaptation, and thriving, the ability to bounce back or recover from stress is closest to its original meaning" (p. 194).

Taken as a whole, the responses from the African American superintendents suggest that their coping mechanisms were sufficient, but perhaps not much more so, to foster the resilience necessary for their posts. It is thus problematic that there has been so little ostensible interest among educational researchers and policy leaders to better understand the experiences of this important group of leaders and how to recruit, hire, and retain them for the betterment of students and communities.

Tillman and Cochran (2000) reported that schools and departments of education continue to perpetuate the dominance of White men and generally fail to provide adequate support for diversity in professional preparation programs. They further posited that the relevant coursework is typically taught from a White and male perspective. Issues of gender, race, and ethnicity consequently create "silent preparation programs" (Tillman & Cochran, 2000, p. 55). Such challenges ultimately have a direct effect on the performance and tenure of these leaders. Therefore, it is critical that graduate training programs preparing educators for leadership positions balance theory with a diverse range of practical experiences so that they are prepared for the realities of the position (Brown, 2005). For example, affording care toward selecting the right mentors might promote more women to consider the superintendency.

Future research should recognize that the typical experience of White superintendents might not adequately translate to their African American counterparts. The United States is becoming an increasingly diverse nation. Yet, instead of demonstrating an ethos of a melting pot, it appears that bigotry is on the rise (Anti-Defamation League, 2019). School districts, school boards, and legislators would be wise to take seriously the lack of diversity among available educational leaders.

Establishing incentives, and the resources to support them, for the identification, recruitment, and mentorship of African American superintendents must become a priority if the nation is to equitably educate all of its children.

As the district goes, so goes the city, and the nation.

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- Author
- Publisher, city, state, year, # of pages, price
- Name and affiliation of reviewer
- Contact information for reviewer: address, city, state, zip code, e-mail address, telephone and fax
- Reviewer biography
- Date of submission

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AASA Resources

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✓ From **AASA's Leadership Network**, the first issue of the quarterly *Network News* newsletter has been published. See it at http://aasacentral.org/2019/09/09/network-news-volume-1-edition-1/

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AASA Urban Superintendents Academy
www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=37483
AASA National Superintendent Certification Program®--West Cohort
www.aasa.org/superintendent-certification.aspx
Aspiring Superintendents Academy®
www.aasa.org/aspiring-academy.aspx
National Aspiring Principals Academy 2019-2020
www.aasa.org/aspiring-principals-academy.aspx

Redefining Ready!
www.aasa.org/redefiningready.aspx
Early Learning
www.aasa.org/early-learn-cohort.aspx
Digital Consortium
www.aasa.org/DigitalConsortium.aspx
Personalized Learning
www.aasa.org/personalized-learning.aspx
Leadership Academy
www.aasa.org/AASALeadershipAcademy.aspx
STEM Cohort
www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=37543
SEL Cohort
www.aasa.org/czi.aspx
Aspiring Superintendents Academy® for Female Leaders
www.aasa.org/aspiring-women.aspx
National Principal Supervisor Academy
www.aasa.org/PrincipalSupervisorAcademy.aspx

Innovation and Transformational Leadership Network
www.aasa.org/AASACollaborative.aspx

Impacted by the ESSA requirement to improve the lowest 5% performing schools? AASA has embarked on a new partnership with Talent Development Secondary (one of the premiere school turnaround organizations in the country, meeting the federal thresholds for evidence in multiple categories) to build a networked improvement community (NIC) of 20 districts with up to 40 CSI schools to participate in a rich school transformation initiative. To learn more visit: www.tdschools.org/2018/11/14/you-can-now-apply-for-the-tds-aasa-networked-improvement-community-nic

AASA 2020 National Conference on Education, Feb. 13-15, 2021, San Diego, Calif.

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