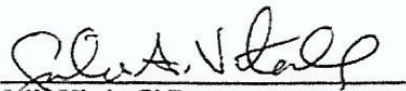


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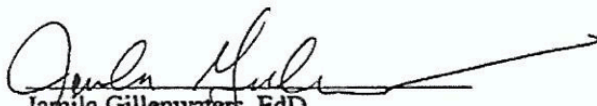
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Deborah Collins, EdD  
Committee Chair



Julie Vitale, PhD  
Committee Member



Jashila Gillenwaters, EdD  
Committee Member

The Dissertation Committee, the Dean, and Executive Director of the Doctor of Education Program of the School of Education, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.



Kent Schlichtemeier, EdD  
Dean



Dwight Doering, PhD  
Executive Director

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## VITA

Thuong Horne

ADDRESS                      1530 Concordia West  
Irvine, CA 92612  
Thuong.horne@eagles.cui.edu

## EDUCATION

EdD	2021	Concordia University Irvine Educational Leadership
MA	2003	University of California, Los Angeles Social Justice Education
BA	2001	University of California, Los Angeles Astrophysics

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2018-current	Induction Specialist Saddleback Valley Unified School District Lake Forest, CA
2016-current	Elementary Instructional Coach Saddleback Valley Unified School District Lake Forest, CA
2014-2016	Instructional Technology Coach Los Angeles Unified School District Los Angeles, CA
2002-2014	Elementary Teacher Los Angeles Unified School District Los Angeles, CA

HOW PRINCIPALS PERPETUATE OR DISRUPT EDUCATIONAL INEQUITY: A MIXED-  
METHODS STUDY ON THE CONCEPTUALIZATIONS AND RESPONSES OF  
SUBURBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS TO CHANGING DIVERSE  
STUDENT POPULATIONS

by

Thuong Horne

A Dissertation

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to understand how traditional public school principals conceptualize and respond to increasing racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic diversity in suburban elementary schools and whether such responses reproduce or disrupt educational inequity. Data was analyzed using Critical Race Theory as a theoretical framework in order to examine principals' conceptualizations through the lens of race and racism.

Analysis found an overarching theme of racism as systemic issue vs racism as individualistic issue. Principals' practices were found to align with state and school district mandates. Recommendations for administrative preparation programs and district professional development to support principals to be explicitly prepared to address educational equity using a critical race lens.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The American journey from racially unjust education to a fair, equitable, and just education for every student is storied and unfinished. In 1931, the case of *Roberto Alvarez v. the Board of Trustees of the Lemon Grove School District* in San Diego County rejected an attempt by a local school board to segregate Mexican American students from White students (Madrid, 2008). In 1946, *Mendez v. Westminster* ended the segregation of Mexican American students in California, but did not end school segregation for other students of color (Santiago & Castro, 2019). *Mendez v. Westminster* was one of many steps that paved the way for the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). The Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) stands as one of the most historically-important American civil rights victories. It not only ended state-mandated racial segregation of public education, but established African Americans as citizens entitled to equal constitutional protection (Bell, 1980). Yet, sixty-six years later, the United States has not fulfilled the promise in *Brown v. Board of Education* of equal educational opportunity for all students as African Americans and other marginalized groups continue to lag behind their white peers academically and economically (Boske, 2015; Liou & Hermanns, 2017; Shields, 2018; Annamma, Morrison, & Jackson, 2014; Allvin, 2018; Gonzales & Shields, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Leavitt & Hess, 2019; Stewart, 2013).

Scholars attributed the racial disparity, an “educational debt” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 5) to a legacy of educational inequities that reached as far back as the forced education of Native children and the enslavement of African-descended people (Kuelzer & Houser, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Latino students similarly received a sub-standard, segregated education and fought for an equitable education (Madrid, 2008; Santiago & Castro, 2019) in cases such as *Mendez v. Westminster* (1946). Educational disparities between Black and Latino students and

their White peers from as early as kindergarten, persists, and ultimately profoundly negatively impact life outcomes (Boynkin & Noguera, 2011).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem remains that racial and ethnic disparities in everyday school experiences remain ubiquitous in American education. Diverse students have different school experiences (Orfield & Lee, 2005); different educational opportunities, resources, and outcomes (Bishop & Noguera, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Boykin & Noguera, 2011); disproportionate identification in special education (Ford, 2012) and gifted education (Ford, 2014); as well as overrepresentation in school discipline and suspensions (Annamma et al., 2014; P. L. Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, & Pollock, 2017; DeMatthews, 2016; Katz-Amey, 2019). These indicators of inequity in education did not emerge in recent years, but are consequences of historical and contemporary racial and ethnic oppression (Kuelzer & Houser, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Shields, 2018; Valencia, 2010). As suburban America becomes increasingly racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically-diversified (Frey, 2011, 2015; Fry, 2009; Kneebone & Garr, 2010), the suburbs have become the new battleground for racial and ethnic equity (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012b; Orfield & Luce, 2013) and the school ground is at the forefront of the battle (Bowles & Gintis, 2002), making the principal, the manager and leader of a school site, a key figure in the fight for educational equity (Aveling, 2007; Fullan, 2014).

While there is extensive research into how district and school leaders respond to inequitable practices in urban schools (Crawford & Fuller, 2017; DeMatthews, 2016; Jayavant, 2016; Johnson, 2007; Liou & Rotheram-Fuller, 2016; Miller, Brown, & Hopson, 2011; Milligan & Howley, 2015; Phelps Moultrie, Magee, & Paredes Scribner, 2017; Riley, 2013; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014; Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014; Swanson & Welton, 2019; Watson &



Rivera-McCutchen, 2016), racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity in suburban schools is a newer phenomenon with limited research (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012b; Frey, 2015; Fry, 2009). As suburban schools become increasingly diverse, understanding how suburban principals conceptualize, understand, and make sense of the changing student population and how they respond to the changing characteristics and needs of diverse students in an equitable and just manner becomes more important. This increased understanding can inform suburban school leadership practice in order to disrupt educational inequities for all students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to understand how traditional public school principals conceptualize and respond to increasing racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic diversity in suburban elementary schools and whether such responses reproduce or disrupt educational inequity. This study was designed to explore the beliefs and practices of school principals through the lens of race and racism in order to disrupt educational inequities and to ensure an equitable, inclusive, and excellent education for all students. How suburban elementary school leaders respond to increasing diversity has implications for the educational opportunities afforded to students of color and other marginalized student groups.

School principals are the educational leaders tasked with supporting the success of all students (Fullan, 2014). As student demographics change, elementary school principals grapple with understanding the change and how to respond to the changing demographics. There is limited research on how suburban principals conceptualize diversity and respond to racially inequitable practices (Ayscue, 2016; Frasure-Yokley, 2012; Irby, Drame, Clough, & Croom, 2019). The value of this study is to contribute to our understanding of how suburban principals make sense of a racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic diversity in the suburban

school setting and, potentially, to understand what supports principals need in order to respond to the changing demographics in a way that disrupts educational inequity and ensures an equitable and just education for all students.

In this study, increasing diversity is defined to be an increase in culturally, ethnically, racially, linguistically and socio-economically diverse student population. While socio-economic status is important, this research will focus on racial diversity, with the recognition that ethnicity and culture can be racialized in White-dominant American culture. In this study, race and racial groups “refer to socially constructed concepts that divide the human population into subgroups based on real or perceived differences in such things as physical appearance or place of ancestral origin” (Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2001, p. 130). Racialization refers to “the process of manufacturing and utilizing the notion of race in any capacity” (Dalal, 2002, p. 27), but especially but in regards to notions of racism, power, and privilege (Dalal, 2002).

### **Research Questions**

The research questions for this study are:

- How do elementary principals in suburban public schools conceptualize increasing racial, ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic diversity within their schools?
- How do elementary principals respond to increasing racial, ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic diversity in their practices?
- What practices do principals engage in that support racially equitable education for all students?
- To what extent do different factors, such as principal preparation programs, district support, and/or life experiences, background, and informal learning experiences, help

principals feel prepared to address issues of racial, ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic diversity?

### **Theoretical Framework**

A theoretical framework is the “idea context” (Maxwell, 2012, p. 39) based on established theories that can provide insights into the phenomenon under study. A robust theoretical framework helps make sense of a phenomenon and sheds light on aspects that might otherwise go unnoticed or misunderstood (Maxwell, 2012). Critical Race Theory (CRT) is used as a theoretical framework to foreground “race and racism in all aspects of the research process” and to explore “transformative solutions to racial, gender, and class subordination” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 93) in order to disrupt systemic barriers to equitable education for all students. According to Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, and Pollock (2017), it is critical that race and racism is examined in any discussions about educational disparities “If we are to undo the racial inequities that continue to plague us” (p. 3).

The application of CRT in this study illuminates the embedded racially-inequitable practices within the educational system that have resulted in the marginalization of diverse students. In this study, CRT is used to interpret suburban principals’ conceptualizations of and responses to increasing diversity and whether such responses reproduce or disrupt educational inequity. As a theoretical lens, it provides a filter for understanding and analyzing the contexts that influences educational leaders’ responses (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004).

CRT emerged from the legal arena through the work of Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado in the 1970s (Brown & Jackson, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Subedi, 2013). The CRT movement emerged as a response to the limited effects of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and as a way to combat the subtle forms of racism gaining grounds in

American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The Civil Rights Act (1964) ended segregation in public spaces, and in education, banned employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, and ensured the constitutional right to vote. However, its effectiveness was chipped away by later court cases such as *Washington v Davis* (1976), which viewed discrimination as the result of actions with discriminatory intent, as opposed to discriminatory effect, making it difficult for underrepresented minorities to seek redress for discrimination (Brown & Jackson, 2013). CRT critiqued traditional legal scholarship as centering the perspectives of the dominant groups, rather than underrepresented minorities, in defining discrimination as intentional acts, a narrow viewpoint which failed to address the complexity of racism in America (Brown & Jackson, 2013). After CRT's emergence, it divided into several branches of scholarship (Brown & Jackson, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Critical Race Theory was introduced to education by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) in a landmark paper that described its relevance and application to education.

The beliefs of CRT could be summarized by five core tenets (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), though different scholars have advanced different tenets (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; T. C. Howard & Navarro, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Subedi, 2013). First, racism is normal, ordinary, persistent and embedded in American society. Racism serves important purposes for the dominant group, psychologically and economically. Because racism is important to the dominant group and considered ordinary in American society, it is difficult to acknowledge and address. The second tenet is the idea of interest convergence, which means that social change happens only when the self-interests of Whites align with the interests of people of color. For example, Bell (1980) argued that, in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the U.S. Supreme Court reversed the national position on racial segregation in education, not because of altruism,

but because international relationships during the Cold War put pressure on the federal government to ease domestic racial tensions. The third tenet holds that race is a social construct, not a biological fact (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Hollie's (2018) "*rings of culture*" described culture as stemming from different identities: gender, nationality, religion, ethnicity, class, and age, but which explicitly excluded race because "race determines nothing about our behavior" (p. 32). Racialization, the social construction of race, is enacted by the dominant group upon other groups of people to maintain power and privilege (Dalal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). For example, while Latinxs encompass a large category of people that contain many cultures, ethnic groups, and languages, Latinxs are racialized in American society and viewed as a single group of people. The fourth tenet captures the idea of intersectionality, meaning, no person has a singular, easily-stated identity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). These identities can stem from race, gender, nationality, religion, ethnicity, class, age (Hollie, 2018) and racialized identity forced upon them by the dominant group (Dalal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). A person's many identities may overlap, conflict, and affect their relationship to society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; T. C. Howard & Navarro, 2016). For example, the relationship that a Black Latina has to American society may differ greatly from the relationship that a White Mexican-American woman may have. The last tenet holds that people of color have unique perspectives due to their different histories and experiences with oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; T. C. Howard & Navarro, 2016). CRT uses the oral traditions of many indigenous people and centers the stories of people of color (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; T. C. Howard & Navarro, 2016; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002)

Using CRT as the theoretical framework helps make sense of school leader's conceptualizations and responses to increasing diversity, provides a framework to analyze the

responses as perpetuating or disrupting systemic racism, and sheds light on nuanced aspects of their leadership that might otherwise go unnoticed or misunderstood (Maxwell, 2012).

### **Conceptual Framework**

According to Maxwell (2012), a conceptual framework is the body of concepts, beliefs, ideas, assumptions and theories, as well as the relationships that the concepts have to each other, that informs a research.

Along with CRT, the transformative leadership model is utilized to examine the leadership practices principals need in order to address critical issues in education within their own schools. Transformative leadership is, in a sense, the solution, as well as a call to action. This study uses Shields's (2018) conception of transformative leadership in education. According to Shield, transformative leadership recognized that inequities exist and that inequities affect the educational outcomes for all students, parallel to CRT's tenet that racism is normal and deeply embedded in the American life (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). At their cores, CRT and transformative leadership advocate for a deep commitment to social justice (T. C. Howard & Navarro, 2016; Shields, 2018). Transformative leadership has no prescribed actions, but have principles that guide leaders (Shields, 2018). These principles include:

- A mandate to effect equitable change
- A need to deconstruct and reconstruct knowledge frameworks that perpetuate injustice
- A need to address unjust distribution of power
- An emphasis on both individual and societal good
- A staunch focus on equity and justice
- A recognition and emphasis on global interdependence, interconnectedness, and

awareness

- A balance of critique with promise
- And a call for leaders to exhibit moral courage in act in the face of injustice

(Shields, 2018)

In this research, CRT is used to help make sense of principals' conceptualizations of diversity and responses to issues arising from racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity. It can also be thought of as the theoretical lens to look at the principal's context, while transformative leadership helps make sense of the principals' practices for educational equity.

### **Significance of the Study**

Lacy (2016) calls for increased research into the suburbs as changing demographics are “raising new questions about the experiences of recent suburbanites” (p. 370). Since the 1990s, the suburbs have diversified dramatically with increasing populations of poor people, immigrants, and blacks, changing how the residents of traditionally white-dominated suburbs live and work (Frey, 2011, 2015; Kneebone & Garr, 2010; Lacy, 2016). These demographic changes reflect trends in the United States as a whole (Lacy, 2016). As the suburbs undergo racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversification, old urban patterns of racial and economic segregation appear (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012b). According to Lacy (2016), “we cannot properly understand core social problems such as poverty, the assimilation of immigrant groups, class-based inequality, or residential segregation without seriously investigating these social dynamics in the suburbs” (p. 370). The need for increased research is especially true for suburban schools that now educate more students than urban or rural schools (Fry, 2009).

While the current literature has several studies examining the responses to increasing racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity at the district level and the school level (Ayscue, 2016;

Diarrassouba & Johnson, 2014; Frasure-Yokley, 2012, 2012; Holme, Diem, & Welton, 2014; Welton, Diem, & Holme, 2015), few studies explicitly examine the elementary school principal's conceptualization of and responses to increasing diversity and how the responses either perpetuate or disrupt educational inequity.

School leadership is central to enacting social justice at the school level (Fullan, 2014; Theoharis, 2007) as they have critical effects on student experiences and outcomes (Fullan, 2014; Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995). Principals who foreground issues such as race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically marginalizing conditions in their daily work (Theoharis, 2007) can have profound effect on student outcomes (Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995). As such, it is important to understand how school leaders conceptualize racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity, how they respond to the changing demographics in their schoolground, and whether the responses are just and foster educational equality.

This study is also uniquely positioned to capture the conceptualizations, experiences, and responses of suburban principals in the midst of a changing landscape when it comes to addressing racial justice in American society at large and in addressing racial justice in the American educational system in particular. At the writing of this passage, the coronavirus pandemic has shut down American schools and sent students home for emergency remote learning, uncovering and highlighting large racial and economic disparities in the educational system (Maxouris & Yu, 2020; Reilly, 2020). At the same time, the killing of George Floyd set off a firestorm of protests against police brutality in every states (Cave, Albeck-Ripka, & Magra, 2020) and engendering conversations about racial justice at every level (Harmon, Mandavilli, Maheshwari, & Kantor, 2020). Schools felt the impact from nation-wide protests on police brutality as communities demanded that school districts cut ties between schools and the police



force (Goldstein, 2020; Sawchuk, 2020). Several districts responded by suspending or dismantling school policing programs, including districts in Oakland, Seattle, and San Francisco (Sawchuk, 2020). Whether this renewed willingness by educational institutions to discuss and address racial justice continues into the future could be a pivotal change for America to finally fulfill the promise of *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)*.

This study is built upon research that challenge educational structures, accepted norms and practices, and discourses of race and power (Ladson-Billings, 2007; Paris & Alim, 2014; Shields, 2018; Theoharis, 2007). It uses theoretical frameworks from Critical Race Theory to center race at every stage in the research process (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). It adds to the body of knowledge of how educational leaders conceptualize and respond to increasing racial diversity in a new suburban context. Increased understanding can inform suburban school leadership practice and, potentially, school leadership preparation.

### **Researcher's Perspective**

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), it is important for researchers to position themselves in the research as it informs their interpretation of the data and reveals what they have to gain from the study. This is particularly important in cross-cultural and cross-racial research when examining issues of race, racism, and power (Milner, 2007). When the researcher overlooks their own racialized and cultural positionality in the research process, it leads to unseen and unforeseen dangers that can introduce “misinterpretations, misinformation, and misrepresentations of individuals, communities, institutions, and systems” (p. 388).

As Critical Race Theory (CRT) uses storytelling as an important tool to “communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 14), I will tell my story

to help the reader understand my researcher's perspective as a Vietnamese American doing cross-cultural and cross-racial research. My story begins with my grandmother who would tell meandering stories that often began with something like "Do you remember the pig butcher's daughter who lived three houses down from us?", had long descriptions of several other families in the village, and unexpectedly ended with my uncle who had gone missing during the First Indochina War. There was no middle or end to grandmother's stories and no central event nor a conflict to resolve. It wasn't until I was much older that I came to realize the litany of people in my grandmother's long life was the story she wanted to tell.

By sharing my grandmother's version of storytelling, I want to contrast my family's form of storytelling with the dominant White American culture's form of storytelling, one that is linear with a beginning, a middle, and an end, and crucially, a conflict or a clear purpose. In this contrast, I want to illustrate the conflicting role I play as a refugee model minority, "better" than and no "better" (Subedi, 2013) than my fellow diverse peers.

When I was four years old, my grandmother fled Vietnam with my baby sister and I in a leaky fishing boat when my parents were sent to re-education camps. We were ones of the refugees lucky enough to be pulled out of the ocean, days before dying of starvation. It was several years later that I ended up in New Orleans in Louisiana and started my formal education in English and American culture, though I was already educated in Vietnamese and French. I was soon identified gifted and excelled in school. I was also identified as needing special education support, though all record of that was lost when my family moved to Garden Grove in Southern California.

For some reason, though I lived in the city of Garden Grove, for four years I walked half a mile to catch a school bus that would drive me and all my fellow Vietnamese immigrants

across town to a high school in the city of Orange. My first day of freshman year in high school was in a new town in a new state, which was hard enough, but then I learned that I was placed in English as a second language (ESL) class, remedial math, and non-credit courses. My excellent school record, along with my gifted identification and special education supports, did not follow me. It took me several months to convince the school staff to place me in the academic track for gifted and high-achieving students. By then, I had already become aware that something was wrong with the education system. I had to vociferously advocate for myself against a large staff of White people who didn't have time to listen to me and was often angry at me. At the same time, I could see that school staff was not advocating for my Black, brown, immigrant and refugee classmates, who were pushed into classes that I knew would do nothing for their futures. I graduated as valedictorian of my class, ironically, the perfect example of a model minority Asian American, with a deep passion for equity in education.

The model minority thesis is often presented as a “positive stereotype” (Covarrubias & Liou, 2014, p. 2) that reinforces the idea that Asian Americans achieves academic success, even economic success, comparable to, if not more than, White Americans despite marginalization and discrimination. This stereotype ignores the complex lived experiences of Asian Americans who suffer the effects of systemic racism and have significant income and educational gaps (Covarrubias & Liou, 2014; Nguyen, Noguera, Adkins, & Teranishi, 2019), the animosity towards Asian Americans by other marginalized groups, and the fear from Whites that limit access to jobs and educational opportunities (Covarrubias & Liou, 2014). More troubling, the model minority myth is used to both disempower Asian Americans in discussions about race and racism (Covarrubias & Liou, 2014; Liang & Liou, 2018a) as they are “no longer considered people of color” (Covarrubias & Liou, 2014, p. 3) and as a “tool to castigate other people of

color and to discredit their struggles for equality and social justice” (Wing, 2007, p. 460).

Race is socially constructed in order to divide and conquer (Takaki, 2011), but Asian Americans have many commonalities and overlapping history of racism with other communities of color (Covarrubias & Liou, 2014; Subedi, 2013). As the researcher, I acknowledge my complex position as a woman of color with an awareness that my racialized identity as an Asian American can be used as an anti-Black tool (Subedi, 2013; Wing, 2007). I also acknowledge that I am performing cross-cultural and cross-racial research on other oppressed groups, which can introduce misinterpretations and misrepresentations of the data (Milner, 2007) if I do not keep in mind that my experiences as an oppressed person may not look the same as other people’s experiences with oppression (Shields, 2018).

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are the scope and boundaries of the study defined by the study (Simon, 2011, p. 277). The delimitations of this study include the following boundaries: the study focus only on elementary public school principals in suburban school districts and school leaders’ perceived preparedness to address issues arising from increasing diversity. The study does not include other school leadership personnel or district leadership and does not include private school or public charter school principals. The delimitations were chosen to limit the scope of the research and to gain deeper insight into a subset of school leaders. Excluding private school and public charter school principals also recognize that the work that these principals do may be in a context that is significantly different from traditional public school districts. Consequently, the study is not generalizable to all principals, but hopes to shed light on the experiences of suburban elementary school principals.

## **Limitations**

Limitations are defined as potential weaknesses in the study and lie outside the study's control (Simon, 2011). They are taken into considerations and addressed in order to maintain validity and reliability of the study. In this study, one limitation is the nonprobability sampling for the initial survey. Nonprobability sampling is a form of sampling that makes use of participants who "happen to be accessible or who may represent certain types of characteristics" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 136). In this study, the principals from two accessible school districts are invited to participate, rather than drawn from a random pool of possible participants in order to increase participation rate and ensure that the participants are from suburban school districts. Another limitation is that participants have the option to agree to participate in the interview portion of the study, which introduces a self-selection component. The sampling process may skew the data in favor of participants who may already be more knowledgeable or interested in addressing increasing diversity as opposed to participants to whom addressing increasing diversity in their schools may be a new aspect to school leadership. Consequently, the results may not be generalizable to all suburban public school elementary principals.

Another limitation is the unique time period in which the study is conducted in the fall of 2020 as schools are grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic, the increasing social push to address racial justice that was intensified with Black Lives Matter protests following the killing of George Floyd, and the 2020 presidential election cycle. The unique time period may heighten school leaders' interest and work in addressing increasing diversity in their school sites. The heightened interest may or may not continue in the years after 2020. The results of the study may not be generalizable to future academic years, but may capture an important moment in

time.

### Summary

The United States have not fulfilled the promise in *Brown v. Board of Education* of equal educational opportunity for all students. African Americans and other marginalized students continue to lag behind their white peers academically and economically (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Racial disparities in education are consequences of historical and contemporary oppression (Kuelzer & Houser, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Shields, 2018; Valencia, 2010). In recent decades, the suburbs have become the new battleground for racial, cultural and ethnic equity as America shifts in demographics throughout the country, and even more so in suburbia (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012b; Orfield & Luce, 2013). The school ground is at the forefront of the battle for educational equity (Bowles & Gintis, 2002) and school leadership becomes even more important in discussions about educational equity (Aveling, 2007; Fullan, 2014).

Increasing racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity in suburban schools is a relatively new phenomenon with limited research. Understanding how suburban principals conceptualize, understand, and make sense of the changing student population, how principals respond to the changing characteristics and needs of diverse students, and how their responses perpetuate or disrupt systems of educational inequity becomes more important as the suburbs continue to diversify. Increased understanding of suburban school leadership can inform principals' practices in order to foster educational equity and excellence for all students. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is used as a theoretical framework to foreground race and racism and to explore solutions (Creswell & Poth, 2018) in order to disrupt systemic barriers to equitable education for all students.

## **Definition of Terms**

*African Americans:* Refers to African-descended people. The term represents a large group of ethnically and linguistically diverse people living in the United States, including but not limited to Black-Indigenous people, Black Latinos, descendants of enslaved people from different regions of Africa, and recent immigrants from Africa or the Caribbean Africa (Charles, Kramer, Torres, & Brunn-Bevel, 2015)

*Asian Americans:* Refers to people of East Asian, South Asian, or Southeast Asian descent. Sometimes include Pacific Islanders.

*Blacks:* Refers to people who self-identify as Black (Charles et al., 2015)

*Culture:* The body of knowledge and ways of being for a group of people which can differ based on factors such as nationality, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, and physical ability (Hollie, 2018).

*Colorblind and color blindness:* Belief that race does not play a role in interpersonal interactions, institutional policies and practices, or unconscious biases and prejudices (P. L. Carter et al., 2017; Chapman, 2013b).

*Colormute:* Refers to the suppression of naming race and racism (M. Pollock, 2009).

*Deficit thinking and deficit perspectives:* Refers to the negative belief that certain students have personal, family, and/or cultural deficiencies that lead to academic failures (Valencia, 2010)

*Diverse students:* Culturally, ethnically, racially, linguistically and socio-economically diverse student population. This term also encapsulates students who are differently abled.

*Implicit bias:* Refers to an unconscious belief, preference, or aversion to a person or a group of people. Implicit bias may lead to discriminatory behavior (P. L. Carter et al., 2017; Marcucci, 2020).

*Increasing diversity:* An increase in culturally, ethnically, racially, linguistically and socio-economically diverse population.

*Ethnicity:* Refers to the self-identified learned aspects of a person's identity, usually involving nationality, language, and culture. In this study, Hispanic or Latino are considered ethnicities ("EdData - State Profile - California Public Schools," 2020; Hollie, 2018).

*Equality:* The belief that everyone has access to the same opportunities and outcomes (Cavendish, Artiles, & Harry, 2014).

*Equity:* The belief that everyone's circumstances might have started at different beneficial or adverse conditions and need different supports to access the same outcomes (Paris, 2017).

*Hispanics:* The term represents a large group of ethnically and linguistically diverse people from many countries that may include descendants of Central American people, South American people, Spain, or Central American and South American people of African-descent. This term may be used interchangeably with Latinxs (MacDonald & Carillo, 2010).

*Indigenous Americans:* This term refers to people descended from the original inhabitants of the North American continent, which encompasses people from many different nations and tribes. This term may be used interchangeably with Native Americans (McCarty & Lee, 2014).

*Latino/a:* Used to represent both Latinas and Latinos. Refers to Cuban, Central American and South American-descended people, and Central American and South American people of African-descent (Education Trust-West, 2017; MacDonald & Carillo, 2010). In this study, Latino/a is considered an ethnicity.

*Marginalized:* This term is used generally to refer to people or groups of people relegated to the marginal position within a society, usually based on power (Shields, 2018; Solórzano &



Yosso, 2002).

*Minority majority or majority-minority:* Refers to a racial, culture, ethnic, or other social minority groups that is more than half of the population in an area or institution while the group with dominant power make up less than half of the population (Craig, Rucker, & Richeson, 2018). For example, Latino/as are the minority majority student population in California.

*Model minority thesis:* The stereotype that a minority demographic, usually Asian Americans, overcame hardships to achieve academic and socio-economic success. This concept is controversial as it is commonly used to contrast the perceived success of Asian Americans against African and Latino Americans, reinforcing negative stereotypes about African and Latino Americans (Covarrubias & Liou, 2014; Liang & Liou, 2018b).

*Native Americans:* This term refers to people descended from the original inhabitants of the North American continent, which encompasses people from many different nations and tribes (McCarty & Lee, 2014). This term may be used interchangeably with Indigenous Americans.

*Oppression:* Refers to the systemic use of power by one group of people that results in injustice, inequalities, or inequities among other groups of people (David & Derthick, 2017; Freire, Ramos, Macedo, & Shor, 2018; Shields, 2018).

*Whites:* In this study, the term Whites refer to the dominant social group marked by skin color (Benitez, 2010; DiAngelo, 2019).

*Whiteness:* Refers to the social construct, power, and privilege of the dominant social group in certain countries, like the United States (Benitez, 2010; DiAngelo, 2019).

*Race:* The categories of people based on perceived physical differences or social qualities. Race is not based on biological fact but is a social construction enacted by the dominant social group (Brown & Jackson, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

*Race-neutral:* Belief that an idea, policy, or system is not based on race or racism or excludes race in its consideration (Diem, Welton, Frankenberg, & Holme, 2016; Leonardo, 2013; Welton et al., 2015).

*Racism:* Systemic discrimination or oppression directed against a person or racialized group of people. While the term can be used to refer to personal prejudices, beliefs, and actions, in this study, the term refers to systemic use of power against a racialized group of people (Brown & Jackson, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

*Racialized:* The categorization of people or ideas based on perceived differences or social qualities. This concept is closely intertwined with concepts of power as the dominant social group is able to categorize other groups of people, usually for the purpose of maintaining power and privilege (Annamma et al., 2014; Ferri & Connor, 2005; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

*Suburb:* In this study, suburb refers to the area outside the primary city of a metropolitan area (Frey, 2011; Fry, 2009).

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In Chapter 2, the background for oppression in the U.S. educational system is presented, followed by a discussion on educational oppression in suburban schools. Next, a review of the current literature details responses to increasing diversity in suburban schools. The review illuminates current research on district-level and schoolwide-level responses, and reveals a lack of research into principals' conceptualizations, responses to changing demographics, and how their practices perpetuate or disrupt systems of oppression. Chapter 2 expands on the critical role that principals play in ensuring an equitable, inclusive, and excellent education for all students at the school level and ends with a discussion on the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory.

### **Background**

In recent years, U.S. national tragedies, including the deaths of George Floyd (Campbell, Sidner, & Levenson, 2020), Breonna Taylor (Andrew, 2020), Ahmaud Arbery (Fausset, 2020), Trayvon Martin (Weinstein, 2012), Tamir Rice (Hanna & Watts, 2017), Eric Garner (Bloom & Imam, 2014), and Philando Castile (Smith, 2017) and the disproportionate deaths of Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans due to COVID-19 (Godoy & Wood, 2020), brought issues of race and systemic racism to the forefront of national (Beachum et al., 2020) and global attention (Cave et al., 2020). With nation-wide protests centered on police brutality, some communities have responded by eliminating district-run, school police departments or suspending contracts with local police department (Balingit, Strauss, & Bellware, 2020; Sawchuk, 2020). This is a significant turnaround as civil rights activists have worked unsuccessfully for years to remove police presence from public schools, arguing that police presence pose a significant threat to students of color (Balingit et al., 2020). The abrupt reversal in district policies on school police indicate a burgeoning recognition of the role that schools play in systemic racism and

oppression.

However, racial injustice is not new to the American educational system; it is the tainted fruit of hundreds of years of oppression. In 1609, British colonists in Jamestown began educating Indigenous children by removing them from their tribes and teaching them English and religion (Kuelzer & Houser, 2019). This practice evolved over the centuries into the Indian boarding school system where children were forcibly removed from their families and educated in the English culture and language (Kuelzer & Houser, 2019), creating a group of people who were neither accepted by reservation Natives, nor by white people (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The historical policy of destroying indigenous languages with the forced education of the English language echoes today in restrictive language policies that promote English-only instruction (Gándara & Aldana, 2014).

Enslaved African people were denied an education entirely (Kuelzer & Houser, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2006). In 1832, anti-literacy laws criminalized teaching reading or writing to enslaved people (Kuelzer & Houser, 2019). Illiteracy provided a layer of control to white slave owners (Kuelzer & Houser, 2019). After the Civil War, schools were rebuilt for white children, but few were provided for Black children (Kuelzer & Houser, 2019). Black children attended sub-standard schools using cast-off textbooks (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Indeed, Black children in the South received schooling for four months out of the year in order to provide labor for the farming industry (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Racial and ethnic disparities in everyday school experiences are commonplace in American education. Racially diverse students continue to have different school experiences from their white peers in segregated schools that impact their outcomes (Orfield & Lee, 2005). Marginalized students have different educational opportunities, resources, and outcomes

(Ladson-Billings, 2006). They are disproportionately over-identified in special education (Ford, 2012); under-identified in gifted education (Ford, 2014); and overrepresented in school discipline and suspensions (P. L. Carter et al., 2017). Educational disparities are merely some of the consequences of historical and contemporary racial and ethnic oppression (Kuelzer & Houser, 2019; Shields, 2018; Valencia, 2010).

As suburban America become increasingly racially, culturally, ethnically, linguistically and socioeconomically diversified (Frey, 2011, 2015; Fry, 2009; Kneebone & Garr, 2010), the suburbs become the new battleground for racial equity (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012b; Orfield & Luce, 2013). The school ground is at the forefront of the battle (Bowles & Gintis, 2002). The principal, occupying the highest leadership position at a school site, is a key figure in the fight for educational equity (Aveling, 2007; Fullan, 2014).

There are many studies into how district and school leaders respond to inequitable practices in urban schools (Crawford & Fuller, 2017; DeMatthews, 2016; Jayavant, 2016; Johnson, 2007; Liou & Rotheram-Fuller, 2016; Miller et al., 2011; Milligan & Howley, 2015; Phelps Moultrie et al., 2017; Riley, 2013; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014; Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014; Swanson & Welton, 2019; Watson & Rivera-McCutchen, 2016). However, racial, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity in suburban schools is a newer phenomenon and has limited research (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012b; Frey, 2015; Fry, 2009). This study is designed to contribute to our understanding of how principals in suburban elementary schools conceptualize and respond to changing racial, ethnic, cultural, socio-economic, and linguistic diversity in their student demographics and how such responses can either reproduce or disrupt oppression in the educational system.

## **Changing Demographics in America**

In 2011, for the first time in the history of the United States, more ethnically diverse babies were born than White babies (Frey, 2015). By 2055, ethnically diverse groups will constitute a numerical majority of the U.S. population (Frey, 2015). The changing demographics will directly impact the American educational system.

In California, the school system currently has a racial minority majority. The term minority majority is used here to refer to a racial, culture, ethnic, or other social group that is more than half of the population in an area or institution while the group with dominant power make up less than half of the population. According to the California Department of Education (“EdData - State Profile - California Public Schools,” 2020), as of the 2017-2018 school year, there were more than six million children enrolled in California schools. White students made up 23.2% of the enrollment, Latino or Hispanic students made up 54.3% of enrollment, Black or African American students made up 5.5% of enrollment, and Asian students made up 9.2% of enrollment. English language learners made up 20.4% of enrollment, with Spanish speakers making up 82.2% of all English language learners in the state.

While non-White students make up almost 77% of all students in California (“EdData - State Profile - California Public Schools,” 2020), they are considered the minority population, or “minoritized” (Benitez, 2010, p. 119). The term minoritized is informed by the work of Benitez in reference to the process by which the dominant White culture socially constructs the identities of non-dominant groups. This term is particularly relevant as, in California, the diverse student population is in the majority based on numbers, but their interests are marginalized by the dominant White culture (Benitez, 2010).

For many, education is viewed as “a primary means of facilitating the harmonious

development of a diverse society” (Lumby & Heystek, 2012, p. 5). For others, education is a culprit in fostering inequality. According to Oakes and Rogers (2007), “inequality is endemic to the logic of our society and to the role schools play in it” (p. 196). The following discussion first defines social justice and oppression in general terms, then narrows to systems of oppression in the K-12 educational context.

### **Changing Demographics in the Suburbs**

The suburbs are quickly transforming (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012b; Frey, 2011, 2015; Lacy, 2016; Orfield & Luce, 2013). At one time, the suburbs were perceived as enclaves of White, prosperous middle-class America (Orfield & Luce, 2013) with manicured lawns, white picket fences, expansive driveways, and “good schools” (Tefera, Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Chirichigno, 2011, p. 1). Now, the suburbs are at “the cutting edge of racial, ethnic, and even political change in America” (Orfield & Luce, 2013, p. 1). The changes are so profound that Lacy (2016) called for a new sociology of the suburbs. Lacy advanced that “we cannot properly understand core social problems such as poverty, the assimilation of immigrant groups, class-based inequality, or residential segregation without seriously investigating these social dynamics in the suburbs” (p. 370). For the same reasons, educational equity should also be studied in the context of demographic change in the suburbs.

The term suburb is broad and changing (Lacy, 2016; Tefera et al., 2011). Some researchers defined suburbs as being the area outside of the primary city of a metropolitan area (Kneebone & Garr, 2010; Tefera et al., 2011). Others defined suburbs as the area outside of the city center with populations commuting to the city for employment (Chapman, 2014). In this study, the term suburb is the Kneebone and Garr definition of an area outside of the primary city of a metropolitan area.

White-dominated suburbanization was the signature demographic change after World War II (Frey, 2015; Lacy, 2016). In the 1950s and 60s, White flight to suburbia left some groups, mostly African Americans, in run-down cities, creating a vision of “chocolate city/vanilla suburbs” (Frey, 2015, p. 149). In the late twentieth and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, as jobs and commerce expanded into the suburbs, the suburbs saw an influx of groups that had long been excluded from the suburbs, including African Americans, people with low-income, and recent immigrants (Lacy, 2016).

Several major trends affect the demographics of the new American suburbs (Frey, 2011, 2015; Lacy, 2016). The first trend is the “suburbanization of poverty” (Lacy, 2016, p. 370). In 2000, the cities have the greatest share of people in poverty (Kneebone & Garr, 2010). Between 2000 and 2008, the population of people with low-income in the suburbs grew by 25%, almost five times faster than the cities and surrounding areas (Kneebone & Garr, 2010). By 2008, large suburbs were home to almost one-third of the nation’s socioeconomically disadvantaged. Alongside the declining growth of White population (Frey, 2011), an increase in immigration and the suburbanization of middle-class African Americans meant that diverse people dominated suburban growth (Frey, 2015). Frey noted that, between 2000 and 2010, about one-half of the suburban population growth is attributable to American-born and immigrant Hispanics, though Asians and Blacks also contributed more than Whites to suburban growth. As the White population ages and the childbearing population is made up increasingly of diverse groups (Frey, 2015), the trend toward increasing diversity in the suburbs looks to continue for the foreseeable future.

The demographics of suburbs can vary widely (Tefera et al., 2011). Orfield and Luce (2013) differentiated three types of suburbs: racially diverse suburbs, where “nonwhite” (p. 4)



residents represent 20%-60% of the community, predominantly “nonwhite” suburbs, where more than 60% are “nonwhite”, and predominantly White suburbs, where Whites make up more than 80% of the community. While some suburbs are racially diverse and integrated, others show signs of racial segregation, and still others raise the specter of resegregation, where once-thriving diverse communities become increasingly racially segregated as white, middle-class Americans leave the area (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012b, 2012a; Frey, 2015; Lacy, 2016; Orfield & Luce, 2013; Tefera et al., 2011).

Altogether, changing demographics paint a picture of a racially, ethnically, and economically diversifying suburb that represents great hope while presenting serious challenges (Orfield & Luce, 2013). According to Orfield and Luce, integrated suburbs with stable populations represent “the best chances to eliminate the racial disparities in economic opportunity that have persisted for decades by offering more equal access to good schools and a clear path to living-wage employment for all of their residents” (p. 16). They have the greatest success at eliminating racial inequities in education and economic opportunities. Yet, integrated suburbs have difficulty maintaining demographic stability; racial resegregation is common (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012a).

Changing demographics have important implications for education. At the educational level, diversifying traditionally White, suburban schools show promise to increase educational and socioeconomic opportunities for diverse students (Mickelson & Nkomo, 2012). However, changing demographics in suburban schools presents many of the same challenges that urban schools confronted (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012b). These include replicating patterns of racial and economic segregation, inadequately trained staff, deteriorating infrastructure, and institutional policies and leadership unprepared for the changing needs of a new demographic of

students (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012a).

### **Oppression in American Society**

Gil (2013) defines oppression as a “mode of human relations involving domination and exploitation” (p. 12) between individuals, between social groups and classes, as well as between entire societies. Oppression is both a state, a condition that exists where there is inequality between groups, and the process that enacts and maintains the state of oppression (David & Derthick, 2017; Gil, 2013). Gil (2013) defines oppression in terms of rights and responsibilities. David and Derthick (2017) also adds that oppression is the unequal distribution of power and privilege between groups and that the dominant group uses their power to exert violence on, exploit, marginalize, and make the dominated groups inferior to the dominant group. Privilege, in this context, is the unearned power that some people have as a result of their group membership (David & Derthick, 2017). Freire connected oppression with the act of dehumanization, defined as “a *distortion* of the vocation of becoming more human” (Freire et al., 2018, p. 43), meaning oppression was a situation where the oppressor prevented the oppressed from realizing their human potential or self-actualizing. Dehumanization was enforced by “injustice, exploitation, oppression, and the violence of the oppressors” (p. 43).

Valencia (2010) defines oppression as “the cruel and unjust use of authority and power to keep a group of people in their place” (p. 9). Young’s (2011) conception of oppression included systemic constraints on groups of people, including structural constraints. Oppression can take the form of unquestioned norms, habits, symbols, underlying assumptions, and the collective consequences of those unvoiced societal norms (Windsor, Dunlap, & Golub, 2011; Young, 2011). According to Young (2011):

In this extended structural sense oppression refers to the vast and deep injustices some

groups suffer as a consequence of often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms – in short, the normal processes of everyday life. (p. 41)

In this form, oppression is invisible to all but the oppressed and is dangerous in its insidiousness and pervasiveness. Societal rules, norms, and unquestioned biases become a restrictive structure of forces and barriers that immobilize and reduce the capacity of a group or category of people to self-actualize or achieve their full potential (Freire et al., 2018; Young, 2011).

### **Forms of Oppression**

“All oppressed people suffer some inhibition of their ability to develop and exercise their capacities and express their needs, thoughts, and feelings” (Young, 2011, p. 39). All oppressed people face a common condition placed upon them by a dominant society, however, not all oppressed people are oppressed in the same manner (David & Derthick, 2017; Gil, 2013; Young, 2011). Young (2011) separated the conditions of oppression into five categories: marginalization, cultural imperialism, powerlessness, exploitation, and violence. Collins (2014) holistically described the “lived experiences within intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and religion” (p. 9).

Oppression can take the form of exploitation, which goes beyond the act of using people’s labors to produce a profit while not compensating them fairly, it is a steady process that transfers the results of the labor of one group to benefit another (Young, 2011). It enacts a structural relationship between social groups that are inherently unequal. The systemic process ensures that those in power maintain power, status, and wealth. In this sense, exploitation is not

merely the transfer of material goods, but a transfer of power.

Racialized and historically marginalized groups in the United States such as Blacks and Latinos are oppressed through a labor market that reserves skilled, high-paying jobs for Whites (Young, 2011). In the U.S., a history of racial discriminatory laws and regulations once reserved menial work for Blacks, Latinos, American Indians, and Chinese workers. That continues today with Black and Latino workers filling unskilled, low-paying jobs that are stripped of autonomy and recognition (Young, 2011). In 2016, the median annual income in the U.S. for a Black person between the ages of 25 and 34 was \$11,200 less than a White person (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Similarly, the annual income for a Hispanic person was \$11,000 less than a White person. The disparity held when educational attainment was taken into account. Disturbingly, the median income for a Black person with a high school degree was \$1,300 less than a White person without a high school degree, while the median income for a Black person with an associate degree was \$4,600 less than a White person with a high school degree, and only \$1,300 more than a White person without a high school degree. The median income for a Hispanic person with an associate degree was \$100 less than a White person with a high school degree. The disparity of Black and Latinxs income when comparing across educational attainment levels is symptomatic of the exploitation of a labor market that denies access to jobs by race and ethnicity.

Oppression can take the form of marginalization. Marginalization occurs when a group of people are pushed out of the labor market and segregated from society, its social cooperation, structures and processes (Young, 2011). While marginalization is about denial of access to the job market, it is also “the deprivation of cultural, practical, and institutionalized conditions for exercising capacities in a context of recognition and interaction” (p. 55). The most glaring

examples of marginalization in education include segregation of students with disabilities (Baglieri & Moses, 2010; Ferri & Connor, 2005; Harry, Klingner, 2014), segregation of English language learners (Gándara & Aldana, 2014; Gándara & Orfield, 2010), and race-based and ethnicity-based segregation of groups such as Black students, Native American students, and Latino students (Diem, Welton, Frankenberg, & Holme, 2016; Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012a; Gándara & Orfield, 2010; Orfield & Luce, 2013; Siegel-Hawley, 2013).

Oppression, in its many forms, including “economic, political, and ideological dimensions” (Hill Collins, 2014, p. 11), seek to maintain the dominance of one group over another group of people (David & Derthick, 2017; Freire et al., 2018; Gil, 2013).

### **Oppression in Education**

Some believe that education is “a primary means of facilitating a harmonious development of a diverse society (Lumby & Heystek, 2012). Others, such as Bowles and Gintis (2002), argued that schooling tended to reproduce societal status quo, by preparing children to function at the same societal level from which they came. Still others believe that “Schools are places where race is made and recreated” (Leonardo, 2015, p. 120) along with systemic racism and other inequitable practices. Freire described a “banking” (Freire et al., 2018) view of education, where schooling was a form of oppression. Students were dehumanized and presumed “absolute ignorance”, awaiting “knowledge..a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable” (p. 72). According to Freire, an oppressive educational system was designed to change the consciousness of people so that they were more easily dominated. “Schools continue to be both testing grounds and battlegrounds for building a society that extends its freedoms and material benefits to all” (Bowles & Gintis, 2002, p. 15).

The following section explores oppression in education through three major issues: the

school-to-prison pipeline, segregation, and deficit thinking. The three issues were chosen as they pertain to elementary schools.

### **School-to-Prison Pipeline**

One of the most prominent marginalization processes in the United States educational system is the school-to-prison pipeline. The school-to-prison pipeline is an exclusionary process through which many children “receive an inadequate education and are then pushed out of public schools and into the criminal punishment system” (Scully, 2015, p. 959). The “criminal punishment system” refers to both the adult and juvenile criminal justice system. The school-to-prison pipeline effectively segregates children, first from the classroom, then from productive lives and, finally, from society as a whole.

The school-to-prison pipeline disproportionately affects Black, Latino, Southeast Asian boys and children with disabilities (Hanna & Watts, 2017; T. C. Howard, 2016; Scully, 2015). While 38% of youths in the U.S. are youths of color, they make up nearly 70% of incarcerated youths (Scully, 2015). This disproportionality, the “*exiling* of American youth in the juvenile justice system” (T. C. Howard, 2016, p. 106) has tremendous negative, life-time impact on historically oppressed and marginalized students.

In California, direct file is a process that allows prosecutors to directly file charges against youths in adult court at their own discretion without judicial oversight (Ridolfi, Washburn, & Guzman, 2016). The prosecutors have 48 hours to make a direct file decision to charge a youth in adult court as compared to the typical six months that a regular judicial hearing takes, in which a judge reviews the circumstances of the case and decides to transfer the case, or not, to the adult criminal justice system (Ridolfi et al., 2016). From 2003 to 2014, the rate of direct file in California for White youths decreased, but dramatically increased for Latino and

Black youths, creating significant racial and ethnic disparities in the criminal justice system for children of color (Ridolfi et al., 2016).

In the United States, school discipline policies, such as zero-tolerance policies, disproportionately affect Black, Latino, and American Indian students (Annamma et al., 2014; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; T. C. Howard, 2016). National and state data showed consistent patterns of Black students disproportionately receiving suspensions, expulsions, and office referrals compared to White students (Gregory et al., 2010). Suspensions are often temporary removal from the classroom for a day or a few days, expulsions are permanent removal from the school, and office referrals are disciplinary actions that involve a temporary removal from the classroom lasting less than a school day. While the findings have been less consistent, Latino and American Indian youths have also been disproportionately affected by school discipline (Gregory et al., 2010).

The Clinton administration adopted the national Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 which mandated a one-year expulsion for bringing or possessing a weapon at school and referral to the juvenile justice system (20 U.S. Code § 7961). This quickly escalated into zero-tolerance policies where many state laws allowed school districts to expel students and commit school-based arrests for possession of drugs and alcohol, fighting, making threats, violating dress codes, engaging in disruptive and insubordinate behavior, using profanity, and the catch-all crime of willful defiance (Scully, 2015).

The increasing presence of school resource officers on school grounds, and the attendant violence against students, disproportionately affect low-income, racially segregated schools where Black and other diverse students were mostly likely to attend (T. C. Howard, 2016). Danker (2019) described an incident in 2007 in which a school resource officer slammed a

student face down on a table and broke her arm for failing to clean up crumbs from a birthday cake. The student was given five days of school suspension and arrested for battery and littering. In another incident, Dankner (2019) described how police officers sprayed pepper spray at a seven-year-old student with disability who refused to climb down from a bookshelf. Some students received suspensions up to twenty days in length for being late, skipping school, asking too many questions, refusing to sit down, talking in class, or public displays of affection (Scully, 2015). In Kenton County, Kentucky, two elementary students ages 8 and 9 were handcuffed on multiple occasions for noncompliance by school resource officers (Ryan, Katsiyannis, Counts, & Shelnut, 2018). With increasing reports of negative, often violent, interactions between school resource officers and diverse students, there is growing concerns that school resource officers are using excessive force and criminalizing traditional school discipline issues “that once would have, in years past, simply earned them a stern talking to by school personnel” (Ryan et al., 2018, p. 190).

One reason why discipline policies disproportionately affect diverse students is the deeply embedded negative biases against cultures, values, and norms outside of White, middle-class norms (Aghasaleh, 2018; Katz-Amey, 2019; Losen, 2013). School dress codes and behavior expectations are two areas particularly impacted by cultural imperialism, resulting in the marginalization of students of color. They are policies that demand diverse students conform to culturally-bound norms of the dominant society and disproportionately punish students for falling outside the norms of White, middle-class America (Katz-Amey, 2019).

Aghasaleh (2018) describes a dress code poster at a suburban high school in a predominantly Black working-class community. The poster had two figures: one is a young Black male wearing baggy jeans, bandana, and a tank top with a beer logo and the other is a



young White female wearing very-short shorts, a hat, and a halter top with spaghetti straps. The dress code portrays “the inappropriateness of hip-hop clothing, revealing too much skin, and working-class attire at school” (p. 101). The image of the Black male wearing baggy jeans, bandana, and a tank top represents Black students. The image of the White female wearing short shorts and a halter top represents common clothing for the working-class area but is not “valued as modesty in the South” (p. 101). Dress codes are policies that “regulate and maintain the normative gender, sexuality, race, and class” (p. 102). Aghasaleh points out that the dress code “means that White middle-class clothing/culture is privileged over working-class and Black clothing/culture” (p. 101). Simply dressing in a manner that does not fit White, middle-class norm can put diverse students in the school-to-prison pipeline as violating the dress code is sufficient reasons for suspensions or expulsions under zero-tolerance policies (Katz-Amey, 2019; Scully, 2015).

More disconcertingly, willful disruption or defiance accounts for the vast majority of the racial and ethnic disproportionality in school discipline. The Center for Civil Rights Remedies reported that the category of disruption or defiance was a major contributor to racial disparities in suspension (Losen & Whitaker, 2017). California defined disruption and defiance as behaviors that “disrupted school activities or otherwise willfully defied the valid authority of supervisors, teachers, administrators, school officials, or other school personnel engaged in the performance of their duties” (Cal Ed Code § 48900). Willful defiance is vague and grants school personnel broad discretion to apply, oftentimes based on implicit bias, an unconscious belief about a group of people (Dankner, 2019; Katz-Amey, 2019; Marcucci, 2020). In California in 2014-2015, disruption and defiance contributed to 41% of the racial difference in suspension between Black students and White students (Losen & Whitaker, 2017). For Latino students,

disruption and defiance contributed to 71% of the racial difference in suspension compared with White students (Losen & Whitaker, 2017).

Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera (2010) posited that there were multiple and interacting variables that contribute to racial and ethnic disparities in discipline. Explanations for the disproportionate differential selection of racially and ethnically diverse students for discipline consequences may include “cultural mismatch, implicit bias, or negative expectations in the classrooms and schools” (Gregory et al., 2010, p. 63). Behavior is a culturally-bound concept, and what is considered acceptable behavior in American schools is based on the perspective of the dominant group (Katz-Amey, 2019). The communication styles, values, and norms of the European-originated middle-class are deeply ingrained in the fabric of the American school experience and disadvantage students with different cultural norms (Gay, 2018).

In general, school discipline policies allowed for the removal of Black, Latino, and Native American students from the classroom (Gregory et al., 2010). Zero-tolerance policies codified ways to further push students out of the school system, into contact with the juvenile justice system and subsequently the criminal justice system (Dankner, 2019). Children caught in the school-to-prison pipeline are marginalized from future productive lives.

There are many negative effects of the school-to-prison pipeline (Dankner, 2019; T. C. Howard, 2016). Children are excluded from quality education and disengaged from society. A large percentage of affected students were left marginally literate or illiterate (Dankner, 2019). Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera (2010) proposed that the racial achievement gap was the result of school discipline policies that disproportionately affected Black, Latino, and American Indian students. Many children caught in the school-to-prison pipeline suffer substance abuse or mental health issues resulting from contact with the justice system (Danker, 2019). As adults, they

continued to experience barriers to employment, housing, and reintegration into society. For Black, Latino, and Native American youths, and students with disabilities, marginalization by the school-to-prison pipeline begins at age five upon entry into the public-school system (Scully, 2015).

### **Segregation in Education**

Few policies have affected American society as deeply as those related to the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) which ruled that racial segregation in schools was unconstitutional. Now, almost 70 years later, segregation persists along race and class divisions, not just in traditional urban centers, but increasingly in suburban areas that are experiencing racial diversity for the first time. School segregation marginalizes students by denying students an equitable education (Orfield & Lee, 2005).

There is a growing concern that as suburban neighborhoods undergo dramatic racial and economic change, suburban communities segregate by race and by class, just as urban neighborhoods did (Orfield, Frankenberg, & Siegel-Hawley, 2010). Segregated schools negatively impact students in many ways. Segregated schools with diverse students “are almost always segregated by poverty as well as race, and sometimes by language as well; they typically have less experienced teachers, less educated and less powerful parents, more untreated student health problems, and many other forms of inequality (p. 23).

School-level segregation and district-level segregation are influenced by federal, state, local, and district policies (Diem et al., 2016; Holme, Frankenberg, Diem, & Welton, 2013; Orfield et al., 2010). Housing policies, district boundaries, and attendance boundaries all contribute to creating segregated schools, but those same policies can assist with desegregation efforts (Orfield et al., 2010). School choice, magnet schools, and charter schools are also found

to contribute to increasing racial and economic segregation in suburban schools (Holme et al., 2013).

The research on segregation of students delineates two forms of segregation:

(1) segregation by school, such that certain students are channeled into schools that disproportionately serve racial, ethnic, and linguistic minorities and the effects of being assigned to such schools; and (2) segregation by classroom, in which students are separated from their peers for purposes of instruction that results in segregation along racial, ethnic, and linguistic dimensions, and the effects on the quality of curriculum and instruction to which they are exposed. (Gándara & Orfield, 2010, p. 4)

Segregation by classroom, also known as within-school segregation and “internal segregation” (Gándara & Orfield, 2010, p. 10), are under the jurisdiction of school leadership and classroom teachers. Internal segregation can be more pernicious as, outwardly, the school appears diverse, but actually “house two different schools within a school: the school that the largely majority, college-bound students attend, and the one that the low-income, minority students attend” (Gándara & Orfield, 2010, p. 10). In elementary schools, this form of segregation presents innocuously as some students getting the best teachers while others get the least effective or the least experienced teachers (Gándara & Orfield, 2010).

Internal segregation includes issues such as the underrepresentation of diverse students in gifted education (Ford & King, 2014; Gándara & Orfield, 2010; Grissom & Redding, 2016), overrepresentation of diverse students in special education (Baglieri & Moses, 2010; Cavendish et al., 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2018), and the linguistic segregation of English Language Learners (Gándara & Aldana, 2014; Gándara & Orfield, 2010; Gifford & Valdes, 2006).

### *Segregation by Language*

The segregation of English Language Learners (ELLs) from mainstream classrooms can have many negative consequences. Segregating ELLs is usually a part of pull-out programs where ELLs are pulled out of the regular classroom and taught in classes with only ELLs (Ayscue, 2016). Oftentimes, it's difficult to reintegrate students later in the day, which results in their segregation for the majority of the day (Gándara & Orfield, 2010).

In California, 82.2% of English language learners were Spanish speakers in the 2017-2018 school year ("EdData - State Profile - California Public Schools," 2020). Given that the majority of California's English language learners are Spanish speakers, there is considerable overlap between ELLs and Latino students. Thus, segregating students by ELL status is a de facto form of racial segregation.

In a study that analyzes the interviews of administrators, staff, and teachers at 19 schools in suburban school districts with changing demographics, Ayscue (2016) found that six out of 19 schools pulled ELLs out of the regular classroom. One participant in the study, a principal, said, "There's a social language and an academic language. They need to be sheltered for the academic instruction, but for everything else, they need to be among everybody else" (Ayscue, 2016, p. 340). This sentiment runs counter to research on best practices for ELLs. According to Goldenberg (2013), "no data suggest that sheltered instruction or any of these modifications and supports help ELs keep up with non-ELs or help close the achievement gap between them" (p. 40).

Rather, pull-out programs segregate ELLs from native English-speakers. ELLs require authentic opportunities to use English (Goldenberg, 2013) and linguistic isolation severely limits ELLs' opportunities to interact with English-speaking peers and, consequently, to their

acquisition of academic English (Gifford & Valdes, 2006). The segregation of ELLs is particularly pernicious as they may be triply segregated, “by ethnicity, by poverty, and by language” (Gándara & Orfield, 2010, p. 4).

### ***Segregation in Special Education***

In 2018-2019, almost 800,000 people from newborn to age twenty-two were provided special education services in the state of California (“Special Education - CalEdFacts,” 2020). The three categories with the most individuals enrolled were specific learning disability with 37.8%, speech or language impairment with 20.7%, and autism with 15.1% (“Special Education - CalEdFacts,” 2020). Of these students, historically marginalized students were disproportionately represented in special education.

Nationally, racially and ethnically diverse students were disproportionately represented in special education (Cavendish et al., 2014; Zhang, Katsiyannis, Ju, & Roberts, 2014). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2018), in 2016, American Indian or Alaska Native, Black or African American, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islanders students ages 6 through 21 were served in special education at much higher rates than would be expected from their percentage of the general school population. For example, Black individuals made up 14.0% of the population ages 6 through 21, and made up 18.5% of individuals ages 6 through 21 provided with special education services under the 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Latino students were as likely to be served in special education as all other racial groups combined. Latino students made up 24.1% of the population, and made up 25% of individuals provided with special education services. Asian and White students were less likely to be served in special education than all other racial groups combined. White students made up 52.1% of the population and made up only 48.8% of individuals needed special education

services. Asian students made up 5.0% of the population, but only 2.4% of individuals needing special education services.

The U.S. Department of Education (2018) reported risk ratios for Black students demonstrating that they were 2.2 times more likely to be identified as needing special education services under the intellectual disability category, 2.0 times more likely to be identified in the emotional disturbance category, and 1.5 times more likely to be identified in the specific learning disability category. Latino students were 1.4 times more likely to be identified in the specific learning disability category and 1.4 times more likely to be identified for hearing impairment. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander students were at least two times more likely to be identified for developmental delay (2.1), hearing impairment (2.7), and multiple disabilities (2.1) than all other racial/ethnic groups combined. White students were more likely to be identified than all other racial/ethnic groups combined for the following disability categories: autism (1.1), multiple disabilities (1.1), other health impairment (1.2), and traumatic brain injury (1.2). Asian students were 1.1 times more likely to need special education for the disability categories of autism and hearing impairment than all other racial/ethnic groups combined.

Historically oppressed and marginalized students are overrepresented in special education. Harry and Klingner's (2014) four-year ethnographic study examined the multifaceted social, political, and historical decisions involved in the entire process from early instruction to special education placement of diverse students. Harry and Klinger found that:

...special education placement showed no systematic relationship either to school quality or to children's own developmental or skill levels. Rather, it reflected a wide range of influences, including structural inequities, contextual biases, limited opportunity to learn, variability in referral and assessment processes, detrimental views of and interactions

with families, and poor instruction and classroom management. (p. 31)

What loomed over all these complex factors was the school's powerful "culture of referral" (Harry et al., 2014, p. 31), which refers to the school's ideology regarding special education. Ford (2012) noted that "Attitudes, expectations, and testing are the fundamental contributors to overrepresentation" (p. 392).

Harry and Klinger (2014) found that the most vulnerable children were at increased risk of special education placement due to factors that were, at least to some extent, within the realm of the school principals' agency. These factors include decisions regarding inequitable hiring practices, assignment of weak teachers to students with the greatest need, retention of weak teachers, homogeneous rather than heterogeneous classroom groupings, unsupportive discipline policies, and poor curricular programming.

One of the factors that contributed to disproportionality was the unstable and ambiguous nature of the disability categories themselves that seemed to reflect responses to changing social and political pressures (Harry et al., 2014). Thirty-five years ago, Sleeter (1986) wrote that learning disabilities were a social construction and, at least in part, "an artifact of past school reform efforts" (p. 47). Some categories, such as emotional disturbance (ED) and specific learning disability (SLD), were thought to be "ephemeral" (Harry et al., 2014, p. 6) and could be broadly interpreted to include students who were simply difficult for the teachers. Ford (2012) stated that "differences in values, beliefs, attitudes, customs, and traditions between White teachers" and their diverse students contributed to deficit thinking, cultural clashes, and, consequently, over-referral of diverse students. Moreno and Gaytán (2013) also argued that a lack of cultural understanding could create a "diversity rift" (p. 89), leading to a mismatch between students and delivery of instruction and behavior supports that might result in



overrepresentation in special education. Disability designations did not take into account the cultural diversity of behavior and deficit interpretations could easily be applied in order to designate culturally diverse students as disabled (Harry et al., 2014).

The overrepresentation of historically oppressed and marginalized students, “particularly black and brown boys” (Baglieri & Moses, 2010, para. 2), labeled a student and segregated students into special education class and low-academic track programs (Baglieri & Moses, 2010; Harry et al., 2014). Special education programs are lower in quality in terms of curriculum, instruction, and ratio of students to teachers (Harry et al., 2014). Furthermore, diverse students with disabilities are disproportionately placed in self-contained, segregated classrooms (Harry et al., 2014). Sleeter (1986) noted that special education was another way to “track” students, where lower tracked students consistently fare worse than others and upper track students were “disproportionately from white middle class backgrounds” (p. 48). Segregation by special education designation becomes another de facto tool of racial segregation (Ferri & Connor, 2005).

A series of recent studies found that racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse students in special education were underrepresented (Morgan et al., 2017, 2018, 2015), meaning that despite diverse students being disproportionately overrepresented in special education, the studies concluded that there should be even more historically oppressed and marginalized students in special education. However, Blanchett and Shealey (2016) challenged the theoretical and conceptual framework in the study by Morgan et al. (2015) as deficit-oriented and charged that Morgan et al. ignored “nearly five decades of empirical evidence” (Blanchett & Shealey, 2016, p. 3).

Since 2004, IDEA prioritized the issue of racial and ethnic disproportionality in special

education by requiring that every state monitor and disproportionality and develop plans to address any identified issues of under or overrepresentation in special education and specific disability categories (Cavendish et al., 2014). As current data revealed, disproportionality in special education and under specific disability categories continues to this day (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

### ***Segregation in Gifted Education***

The U.S. Department of Education defined gifted students as:

Children and youth with outstanding talent perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services are activities not ordinarily provided by the schools. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor. (U.S. Department of Education, 1993, p. 3)

The 1993 definition of giftedness addresses talent, which can be developed, potential, which acknowledges opportunity gaps some students may face, and the environment and experience, which addresses opportunity gaps faced by different racial, ethnic, or socio-economic groups. In 1993, the U.S. Department of Education acknowledged that economically-disadvantaged and diverse students were disproportionately underrepresented and “have access to fewer advanced educational opportunities and whose talents often go unnoticed” (p. 1). Almost 30 years later, historically underrepresented and marginalized racially and ethnically diverse students continue to be underrepresented in gifted education (Ford, 2014; Ford & King,

2014; Ford, Wright, Washington, & Henfield, 2016; Grissom & Redding, 2016)

In the 2011-2012 school year, Ford (2016) found that while Black students comprised 19% of students in the U.S., they only comprised 10% of gifted students. That amounted to a 48% discrepancy in representation in schools and representation in gifted education. Ford also found that while Hispanics comprised 25% of the student population, only 16% of Hispanics were in gifted education, which amounted to a 36% discrepancy in representation.

Students of color are less likely than White students to be identified gifted even when they satisfy the criteria for gifted services (Grissom & Redding, 2016). Ford (2016) attributed under-referrals to implicit bias. Implicit bias was defined as the attitudes or stereotypes that affect a person's understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner (Ford, 2016). Grissom and Redding (2016) found that teachers under-refer Black students for gifted education screening despite the students having the same test scores and grades as their White peers. Grissom and Redding attributed this to teachers underestimating and holding negative beliefs about Black students.

Once students of color are referred for identification, they face the hurdle of biased intelligence tests. Definitions of giftedness are based on the values, experiences, and norms of middle-class Whites, which are expressed through standard intelligence tests and achievement tests (Howard, 2018). Differences in culture, opportunity, and experiences are overlooked (Ford & King, 2014). Standardized intelligence tests, like those used in gifted identification, are full of challenges such as a) being unfairly biased based on race, culture, language, gender, income, and educational level; b) minimizing creativity and practical knowledge; and c) propagating the idea that intelligence is fixed and determines future success (Ford, 2016).

Ford (2014) charged that, as “historically and currently operationalized” (p. 143), gifted

education functioned to racially segregate students through systemic processes disguised as colorblindness. Ford (2014) further charged that gifted education and White privilege are intertwined in several ways. The majority of educators are White; the instruments used to identify gifted students are created by Whites based on White norms and values; and the people who administer and interpret the assessments are predominantly White. The gifted education curriculum is also unlikely to be multicultural and excludes non-White cultural norms and values (Ford, 2014).

Howard (2018) went further to argue that the current structure of gifted education reproduced Whiteness and gives the power and privilege to systemically exclude others based on race. Howard conceptualized gifted education as “White space” (p. 561) that belongs to White students only.

In a 14-month ethnography study at an elementary school, Howard (2018), a teacher-researcher at the school, examined the role that the gifted and talented program played in racial socialization at the school. The elementary school experienced changing demographics between 2000 and 2012. The predominantly White school changed from 90% White student population to a diverse population that included 14% Blacks, 8% Hispanic, and 3% other. The teaching staff stayed overwhelmingly White with 98% of the staff identifying as White and 2% of the staff as Black. The gifted and talented program was also overwhelmingly White. It was designed as a pull-out program and segregated from the regular, general education classrooms. The study included 15 semi-structured interviews with five teachers, 14 months of field notes, two focus groups, extensive observations of classrooms and meetings, and interviews with seven community members.

Howard’s (2018) ethnography study described one particular incident in which a Black

third grade student was excluded from the playground by a White student in the gifted program. The White student told the Black student that “only White boys can play [kickball]” (p. 553) and, later, the two students had a physical altercation. The resulting adult actions reflected and highlighted the difference in treatment that the White student and the Black student received through the privilege afforded the White student by their status as gifted. First, the assistant principal commuted the punishment of the White student after their mother called so that the White student could attend their gifted class. Second, the assistant principal came to the students’ classroom to lecture the class on racism at a time when the Black boy was in attendance, but the White boy, who made the original racist statement, was out of the classroom and in the gifted classroom.

Howard (2018) concluded that the disproportionate tracking of White students into the segregated gifted program “perpetually separated students physically, socially, and academically” (p. 561). Howard’s findings included how racialized exclusion and privilege was taught at school. In this case, a White student’s participation in gifted class was an institutional priority over racist bullying or fighting. Thus, being identified gifted afforded privileges to the students that overrides other considerations, even if they violated other students’ academic and social rights. As the gifted students in this school were overwhelmingly White, all students were socialized to believe that Whiteness meant giftedness, power, and privilege (Howard, 2018). The result of gifted identification is the racialized over-representation of White students and the underrepresentation of racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse students in gifted education (Darity & Jolla, 2009; Ford, 2014; Ford et al., 2016).

“Internal segregation within schools has substituted for segregation at the facility level” (Darity & Jolla, 2009, p. 103). Grouping students by ability, ostensibly to support all students, is

a “scheme” (p. 103) that produced a racialized tracking system resulting in a lower quality education for diverse students (Darity & Jolla, 2009). Whether students are grouped by language ability or by cognitive ability through special education or gifted education, the result is a segregated education that privileges some, while marginalizing others.

### **Deficit Thinking**

Deficit thinking is the belief that the “problem” lies with the individual students, usually historically oppressed and marginalized students, rather than with the educational system or societal norms (Shields, 2018, p. 30). Deficit thinking, used here synonymously with deficit perspective and deficit paradigm, is the belief that diverse students carry personal or family inadequacies that explains their lack of success. Deficit thinking uses “deeply embedded negative biases” to explain the status quo (Valencia, 2010, p. 114). Even more destructively, deficit thinking is “blaming the victim” and ignores the complex nature of the “systemic societal practices of exclusion and oppression” (Valencia, 2010, p. 114). According to Valencia:

Of the several theories that scholars, educators, and policy-makers have been advanced to explicate school failure among low-SES students of color, the deficit model,... has held the longest currency- spanning well over a century, with roots going back even further as evidenced by the early racist discourses from the early 1600s to the late 1800s...The deficit thinking model, at its core, is an endogenous theory – positing that the student who fails in school does so because of his/her internal deficits or deficiencies. (p. 6)

Deficit thinking is so pervasive and insidious that Valencia (2010) calls it its own form of oppression. Deficit thinking shows up in education from the macrolevel to the microlevel, from national educational policies to state constitutional statutes to judicial outcomes, from local

school board policies all the way down to classroom teacher practices (Valencia, 2010).

In a qualitative study, Nelson and Guerra (2014) examined the beliefs and cultural knowledge of practicing teachers and school leaders in two suburban school districts experiencing demographic change, shifting from a predominantly White student population to a more ethnically, racially, and economically diverse student population. Ninety percent of the teachers and administration were White. The participants consisted of 73 educational leaders and 38 teachers. Participants were asked to respond to scenarios that depicted a culture class. Responses were coded to identify examples of educator beliefs, knowledge of culture, and application of cultural knowledge in educational practice. Beliefs were coded as either deficit or pluralistic, while knowledge of culture was coded on a scale based on awareness and deep understanding of culture.

Only one out of 111 participants appeared to be culturally responsive (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). This individual, a school leader, expressed pluralistic beliefs, as opposed to deficit beliefs. The individual demonstrated knowledge about invisible culture and provided culturally responsive solutions to the culture clash scenarios. Eighty (72%) out of the 111 participants expressed one or more deficit beliefs about students and families of diverse backgrounds (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). The deficit beliefs about diverse students ranged from believing that students lack knowledge to believing that students intentionally misbehave (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). Deficit beliefs about parents include making negative interpretations of culturally diverse parents' involvement in their children's education (Nelson & Guerra, 2014), which echoes findings from Christianakis (2011).

Other researchers documented the many forms that deficit thinking takes. In a critical ethnography on gifted education, Howard (2018) documented an incident of a teacher deciding

where to place students for the coming academic year. The teacher looked at a pile of forms that represented all the Black students in a grade level and questioned, “Are there any high [ability students]?” (p. 559). The teacher implied, with a single question, that there were no high-performing Black students in the entire grade level, without having looked at their information. That same question was not asked of the White students. Deficit thinking contributes to the underrepresentation of diverse students in gifted education (Ford, 2014). Conversely, deficit thinking adds to the over-referral and overrepresentation of diverse students in special education (Ford, 2012; Moreno & Gaytán, 2013; Sleeter, 1986).

The rhetoric of “closing the achievement gap” (Burciaga, 2015, p. 4) is an example of deficit thinking in contemporary educational zeitgeist. Educational leaders and teachers feel increasing pressure to close the achievement gap, which focuses on the outcomes of students. Underneath the apparent acknowledgement of equity issues is “the underlying assumptions that our educational systems are fine – it is the *students* who are deficient” (Burciaga, 2015, p. 4), therefore, it is the student who should be fixed, not the systems.

The myth of the lazy parent, particularly Black and Latino parents, who do not value education, thrives despite evidence to the contrary (Valencia & Black, 2002). Christianakis (2011) examined teachers’ perceptions of parent involvement through narrative interviews at an elementary school composed mostly of African-American, Latino, and Asian students in an urban poor, working class community. Christianakis found that teachers perceived parent involvement as a form of “help labor” (p. 165). Help labor is defined as uncompensated work performed by parents in order to make the teachers’ work less laborious.

Parents who actively communicated with the teachers and performed help labor was perceived positively by teachers (Christianakis, 2011). Parents who did not reach out to teachers



or performed help labor was considered “lacking interest” and “indifferent” (p. 166). Teachers perceived low-income and culturally diverse parents as not valuing education when the parents have low-participation in school-based activities. Of the 15 teachers interviewed, 13 teachers called parents who were known to be non-working, but not helping in the classroom, “welfare mothers” (p. 168). Teachers did not indicate an understanding that parents might not have the economic capability or time to perform help labor, nor did they indicate that some parents may have a cultural preference to not initiate contact with teachers out of respect. Low-income and culturally diverse parents were treated as if they had the same resources, life experiences, and values as White, middle-class parents. Christianakis (2011) concluded that teachers perceived parent-involvement through a White, middle-class lens.

Parents who were able to adhere to the dominant cultural vision of parent-involvement were perceived positively as involved in their children’s education, but parents who differed from the White, middle-class ideals were perceived negatively as uninvolved and uncaring, even disparagingly as “welfare mothers” (Christianakis, 2011, p. 168). By making White, middle-class the standard of comparison for parent-involvement, and by not considering cultural or economic diversity, some educators perpetuate structural classism and racism through cultural imperialism.

Deficit thinking in education can lead to deficit actions that harm the academic achievement of historically marginalized students (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). Efforts to improve the educational outcomes often fail because deficit thinking blocks educators’ abilities to look for real and meaningful change (García & Guerra, 2004). When so-called reform efforts fail, deficit thinking reinforces itself (García & Guerra, 2004), perpetuating a “cycle of deficit thinking” (Nelson & Guerra, 2014, p. 89) that has negative consequences for diverse students.

Shields (2018) proposed that rejecting deficit thinking is one of the keys to overcoming oppression. García and Guerra (2004) found that when educators were provided with professional development that deconstructed deficit thinking, participants were able to question and reject previously held deficit beliefs, and were more apt to recognize their role and the role that instructional practices play in student learning.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher chose to focus on racial justice, while acknowledging that oppressed people experience oppression differently and oppression is based not solely on race, but also class, socioeconomic status, disability, gender, sexuality, and linguistics. The above discussions on oppression in education focused on forms of oppression seen in the elementary classrooms and emerging in suburban schools, though other forms of oppression in education exists. Oppression at any level of society is destructive to the individual, the group, and society as a whole. Oppression in education deepens and entrenches social injustices for future generations.

### **Justice for All**

Blackmore (2009) pointedly asked “What do we mean by social justice?” (p. 7). Social justice is not easy to define and is an “elusive construct, politically loaded, and subject to numerous interpretations” (Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009, p. 3). Blackmore (2009) states that social justice “encompasses a range of terms—some more powerful than others—such as equity, equality, inequality, equal opportunity, affirmative action, and most recently diversity” and, further, that each term “takes on different meanings in different national contexts” (p. 7). Freire (2018) equated “freedom and justice” with the “struggle to recover their lost humanity” (p. 44). Different interpretations of social justice, while well-intended, can lead to contradictory efforts (Boyles, Carusi, & Attick, 2009). Boyles, Carusi, and Attick charged that educational

scholars have conflated the idea of social justice with the idea of distributive justice, defined as the equal distribution of resources. Distributive justice, once achieved, does not mean equally enabling educational opportunities (Young, 2011).

Boyles, Carusi, and Attick (2009) distinguish between distributive justice, the equal distribution of resources, and social justice, which seeks to end all forms of oppression not just disparity in resources. Similarly, Theoharis (2007) defines social justice as addressing and eliminating marginalizing conditions while Young (2011) defines social justice as “the elimination of institutionalized domination and oppression” (p. 15). Justice is the absence of domination and the existence of equal rights and responsibilities (Gil, 2013).

More recently, Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2019) conceptualized social justice in education as teaching and leading with a commitment to “highlighting, exploring, and addressing systemic prejudices and inequities through individual and collective action” (para. 7). Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano drew from many scholarships, including critical pedagogy, Critical Race Theory, culturally relevant teaching, culturally responsive teaching and leadership, culturally sustaining pedagogy, racial literacy, and restorative practices to conceptualize social justice. They emphasized that social justice required that educators and educational leaders embraced external actions as well as internal belief systems in order to work toward an inclusive and just education for all students.

Young’s (2011) vision of social justice moves beyond distributive justice, the distribution of material goods, wealth, and income. Rather, it is concerned with “the good life” (p. 37) and ensuring that everyone has access to the good life. Young argues that social justice is the promotion of self-determination and self-development for everyone. This conceptualization of social justice as self-determination is aligned with Freire’s (2018) equating justice with

“humanization” (p. 43), the opposite of dehumanization which was equated with oppression.

Critical to the work of educators is the idea that social justice is not on a continuum (Gil, 2013). Gil emphasized that equal rights and responsibilities is “the zero point on the continuum of inequality” (p. 17). According to Gil,

Under such genuinely democratic conditions, everyone would enjoy the same level of liberty and would be subject to the same level of expectations and constraints concerning work and other aspects of life. (p. 15)

### **Justice in Education**

An education that is the opposite of oppressive is necessarily just (Gil, 2013). A just education is not simply an education with an equal distribution of resources (Young, 2011). Rather, a just education empowers an individual to lead a fulfilling life, where one person, regardless of differences, has the same opportunity as the next person to be economically, socially, and personally successful (Gil, 2013; Theoharis, 2007; Young, 2011). Freire (2018) rejected the “‘banking’ concept of education” (p. 71), where students become receptacles of knowledge, as a mirror of the oppressive society. Instead, Freire envisioned education as reflective and dialogical, where students and teachers co-create knowledge and become critical beings. There is no one prescription for what a just education looks like. The following section highlights a few practices that have been shown to be effective at providing a high quality, equitable, and inclusive education for all students.

### **Asset-Based Pedagogy**

Asset-based pedagogy refers to teaching and learning that center the strengths of students, particularly students of color and students whose languages, cultures, and ways of beings are historically marginalized in schools. Asset-based pedagogy is a direct counter to

traditional deficit-based educational practices (Paris & Alim, 2014). Several major strands of educational research were developed to counteract deficit-thinking and forms of teaching based on deficit-thinking. Three strands are culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 1975, 2018), culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, 2014), and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014). Each strand is distinct, yet build upon and complement each other.

In 1975, Geneva Gay proposed strategies for designing culturally-pluralistic curriculum that was inclusive of all culture and ethnicity (Gay, 1975). Over the decades, Gay's original framework evolved into what is now known as culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive teaching focuses on teacher and school practices that ensures the educational and personal success of diverse students (Gay, 2018).

Culturally responsive teaching uses “the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (Gay, 2018, p. 36). This includes, but is not limited to affirming students' cultural heritages, challenging racial and cultural stereotypes, and using knowledge of the community to guide curriculum development. Culturally responsive teaching is comprehensive in nature and inclusive of the needs of the whole child. This means that the academic success of the student is as important as “helping students of color maintain identity and connections with their ethnic groups and communities” (Gay, 2018, p. 38). In order to be comprehensive and inclusive, culturally responsive teaching involves the student's entire educational system, requiring positive changes on multiple levels, including instructional techniques, instructional materials, student-teacher relationships, classroom climate, and self-awareness to improve learning for all students. Culturally responsive teaching also places a

strong emphasis on providing opportunities for students to think critically about inequities in not only their own, but also their peers' experience (Gay, 2018).

Ladson-Billings identified cultural relevant teaching as key to multicultural education (Ladson-Billings, 1992). Ladson-Billings' framework evolved into what is known as culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Both culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy focused on social justice and the classroom as a site for social change (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995b).

Culturally relevant pedagogy had three goals for teacher practice (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). First, teaching must develop students academically and prioritize their academic success. Second, teaching must nurture and develop students' own positive ethnic and cultural competence while simultaneously helping them to gain access to the dominant culture (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Third, teaching must develop students' sociopolitical and critical consciousness, meaning "they must help students to recognize, understand, and critique current social inequities" (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 476). By centering these goals in their practices, culturally relevant teachers can empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically.

Building on culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy, Paris (2012) offers culturally sustaining pedagogy as a way of teaching and learning based on the understanding that language and culture are "dynamic, shifting, and ever changing" (Paris, 2012, p. 94). Culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to sustain, meaning to perpetuate and foster, "linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (Paris, 2012, p. 95). While culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy centers the cultural heritage of marginalized students, culturally sustaining pedagogy takes into account the

fluid nature of youth culture and evolving community practices (Paris & Alim, 2014). As an example, Paris (2012) pointed out the phenomenon of Latino and Pacific Islander youths participating in and making use of African American language, Hip Hop, and other African American and Caribbean American cultural norms, a pluralism of culture that could be used in the classroom to make teaching and learning relevant to students. Culturally sustaining pedagogy requires that teaching and learning support students in sustaining the shifting cultural and linguistic competence of their own culturally-pluralistic communities while simultaneously providing access to the dominant culture.

Howard and Terry (2011) provided an example of culturally responsive pedagogy enhancing the academic performance of marginalized students, in particular African American students in an urban high school. In the article, Howard and Terry documented findings from a school program that successfully improved outcomes using culturally responsive teaching. The program, a joint university and high school partnership, provided intensive academic support through in-classroom and after-school tutoring, as well as parent advocacy and college preparation services. The program also trained tutors and teachers on instructional practices using culturally responsive teaching. In the three-year period of the program, from 2004 to 2007, the program was able to record several academic successes for all students as well as for African American students. For example, the percentage of tenth graders taking geometry increased from 23% to 65% between the academic year 2004-2005 and 2005-2006. The school increased the number of students graduating high school by 25% in 2007 as compared to the previous year. In the final year of the program in 2007, 60 African American students were accepted to four-year colleges, which was double the number accepted as compared to the previous year.

Asset-based pedagogies continued to evolve to meet the changing needs of students

(Hollie, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2014) Culturally sustaining pedagogy was a “remix” of culturally relevant teaching, allowing it to evolve to meet the fluid needs of changing cultures and new research (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 74). Hammond (2015) aligned culturally relevant teaching with new research into the neurology of learning and demonstrated that learning for culturally and linguistically diverse students was a holistic and rigorous experience. Culturally and linguistically responsive teaching (CLR) remixed culturally relevant teaching with explicitly affirming and leveraging student’s home languages to produce measurable, specific student outcomes (Hollie, 2018, 2019) Other researchers continued to add to the body of work of culturally relevant teaching, producing new offshoots responsive to student needs (Hollie, 2019).

### **Asset-Based Parent Involvement**

Asset-based programs for parents also showed signs of improving parent involvement and school-community relationship. In an article describing two Latino advocacy training programs for parents of K-12 students, Behnke and Kelly (2011) proposed that programs that use culturally appropriate activities designed to meet the needs of Latino parents and youths would be more successful than programs that translated and replicated ones developed for English-speaking families. In the elementary program, the organizers reached out to the Latino parents to collaboratively design topics that were relevant to the community. The 6-week workshop program held sessions in a variety of community locations and provided onsite childcare, dinner, and transportation as needed. Ninety percent of the participating parents reported increased confidence in working with their children’s school. The elementary program served 212 Latino parents in three years.

The second program served Latino parents and students in grades six through twelve (Behnke & Kelly, 2011). The program specifically sought to reduce Latino drop-out rates,



improve academic success, and promote interest in higher education. It paralleled the 6-week workshop design of the elementary program but included the students in the workshop sessions, involved experiential activities and games, involved school staff, and used college age peer mentors. The senior program served over 450 parents and students. At the conclusion of the program, 92% of participating parents reported increased confidence in working with the school and 93% of parents reported that they had the information needed to support their children through high school. Behnke and Kelly showed one example of meeting the needs of Latino parents in order to increase parent involvement. When deficit thinking about diverse parents' involvement in school is set aside and parent involvement programs are designed with their needs and perspectives in mind, parent involvement programs see more success (Behnke & Kelly, 2011; Christianakis, 2011; Valencia, 2010; Valencia & Black, 2002).

### **Equity in School Discipline**

Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, and Pollock (2017) argue that schools cannot effectively target racial disparities in school discipline without talking about race. Without the ability to analyze disparities through the lenses of race and culture, there is the risk that advantaged students will continue to be advantaged by less punitive discipline policies and practices while marginalized students will continue to face more punitive treatment (P. L. Carter et al., 2017; Gregory, Skiba, & Mediratta, 2017). Thus, any school discipline policy that seeks to interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline must prioritize race-conscious, culturally responsive and anti-deficit policies (Baker, 2019; P. L. Carter et al., 2017; Gay, 2018; Gregory et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Valencia, 2010).

For example, asset-based pedagogies such as culturally responsive teaching, culturally relevant pedagogy, and culturally sustaining pedagogy promise positive student outcomes for

marginalized students, including student discipline (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Dee & Penner, 2017; Gay, 2018; T. Howard & Terry, 2011; Ijei & Harrison, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014).

In a recent study, Dee and Penner (2017) estimated the causal effects of ethnic studies, a culturally relevant curriculum, on the academic trajectories of eighth-grade students identified as at-risk of dropping out with a grade point average (GPA) below the 2.0 threshold. The study used a regression discontinuity design that compares outcomes of students below the threshold with students just above the threshold. The sample consisted of 1,405 ninth-grade students in five unique school-year cohorts enrolled in three urban high schools. The sample student population is 60% Asian, 23% Latino, 6% Black. Data were collected on and controlled for whether students were in special education, had a history of being suspended, or identified as English language learner. Students identified as at-risk of dropping out of school were encouraged, but not required to take ethnic studies. Dee and Penner (2017) found that students enrolled in ethnic studies saw statistically significant improvements in attendance, grade point average, and ninth-grade credits earned. Most importantly, the findings controlled for prior school suspensions, indicating that culturally relevant pedagogy can disrupt traditional school discipline disparities.

### **Suburban Responses to Changing Demographics**

The current body of research on suburban educational leaders' responses to rapid demographic change have focused on districts and district-level leaders (Diarrassouba & Johnson, 2014; Frasure-Yokley, 2012; Holme et al., 2014; Welton et al., 2015) or on school responses to changing demographics (Ayscue, 2016; Frasure-Yokley, 2012). The leadership, even well-intentioned ones, do not demonstrate what enacting and advancing racial equity

reforms requires: addressing racial injustice head on (Theoharis, 2007).

Diarrassouba and Johnson (2014) examined district leaders' responses to changing demographics in one suburban school district in West Michigan. The study was a descriptive single-case study looking in-depth at the actions taken to adapt the district to the increase in racially, ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse student population. The district had a student population of 49,694 with 63.65% European American or White, 13.30% African American or Black, 9.75% Latinos, 6.57% Asian American, with Biracial and multiracial, Native American or American Indian, Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, and other not identified constituting the rest of the population. The teaching staff was 95% White and did not reflect the diversity of the student population. The demographic data showed inconsistencies that "seems to indicate that there is an attrition of European American learners in the district", a phenomenon known as "White flight" (p. 42). Although the city has a White population estimated at 63.65%, only 42% of the student enrollment was White students.

Diarrassouba and Johnson's (2014) findings showed that the suburban school district implemented policies that complied with federal and state mandates in response to changing demographics. For example, the district created a multicultural advisory committee, a newcomer center, and push-in and pull-out English development programs. They also hired certificated teachers in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). While the district provided cultural sensitivity training to the staff, they did not seek to diversify the overwhelmingly White teaching staff.

The study was limited in that it focused on district-level policies and did not examine how the district policies were applied at the school level (Diarrassouba & Johnson, 2014). The researchers pointed out that the study did not focus on the effectiveness of the policies in meeting

the needs of racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse students. The researchers also recommended that further research was needed to examine the teachers' and parents' perceptions of diversity and demographic changes, particularly as there seemed to be a wide discrepancy between the demographic of the school district and its surrounding area.

Holme, Diem, and Welton (2014) looked at responses to changing demographic at the district leadership level. They examined factors that shaped the responses and found that district leaderships conceptualized demographic change as an academic shift, rather than a shift requiring deep cultural and systemic change. The researchers examined the case of one rapidly changing demographic, suburban school district in San Antonio, Texas. The K-12 district had a significant demographic shift between 2000 and 2010, moving from majority middle-class, White to majority non-White. During the same time period, the percentage of economically disadvantaged rose from 36% to 42.8%. The case study included interviews with 28 district leaders, community members, and school administrators, as well as 26 educators in three focus schools across the district. The interview protocol was designed to elicit participants' conceptualization of demographic change, the policies and program initiatives implemented to address the changes, and the larger sociopolitical context of the decision-making.

Holme, Diem, and Welton (2014) used Oakes, Welner, Yonezawa, and Allen's zone of mediation framework. The zone of mediation was defined as the range of potential decisions considered feasible by district-level leadership. Forces that influenced the zone of mediation could include legislative and judicial decisions, community and business groups, parents, and educators. Inequitable power distribution in the larger society could influence the local district's zone of mediation which then affects district decisions, particularly when it comes to policies that involved equity. The zone of mediation framework proposed that the range of possible

decisions was heavily influenced by forces external to the school district, from national policies to pressures from the local community. Such decisions lead to district responses that could be a) technical in nature, affecting structures and practices, b) normative in nature, affecting beliefs and ideologies, or c) political in nature, affecting power and politics.

Holme, Diem, and Welton (2014) found that district responses were influenced by local cultural and political dynamics. The responses were overwhelmingly technical in nature. For example, the district hired instructional specialists and concentrated professional development on differentiated instruction. These technical responses illustrated the district leadership's beliefs that demographic change represented an academic shift rather than a cultural shift. The district resisted normative and political changes. Normative and political changes required shifts in beliefs and/or power and privileges. While the district attempted to deepen cultural understanding and implemented diversity trainings, inconsistent implementation due to decentralized decision-making meant many schools adopted trainings that did not facilitate "genuine understanding between a mostly White teaching force" and the "mostly non-White students they were serving" (p. 52). Many of these efforts "ended up reinforcing deficit perceptions held by teachers" (p. 53). One school administrator participant pointed out that the lack of adequate response might be due to the district's predominantly White leadership team. Holme, Diem, and Welton posited that the weak responses to increasing student diversity might be due to lack of diversity at the district leadership level, "a lack of comfort with race" (p. 59), and the district's decentralized decision-making culture. At the same time, the district had to contend with political pressures from the dominant middle-class, White parents who the study termed the "local elites" (p. 59). In one example, the middle-class, White parents pressured the district to redraw attendance boundaries that further segregated students along racial and class

lines.

Holme, Diem, and Welton (2014) found that district level responses to increasing racial, ethnic, cultural, and economic diversity were superficial at best, staying at the technical reform level, with little effect on the district's beliefs or politics. The study concluded that district leadership conceptualized changing demographics as an academic shift and not as a normative, cultural shift that needed deep equity-oriented work in order to sufficiently meet the needs of racially, ethnically, culturally, and economically diverse student populations (Holme et al., 2014).

Frasure-Yokley (2012) looked at both district- and school-level conceptualizations of demographic change. Frasure-Yokley examined a suburban county that became majority-minority between 1980 and 2010. White population decreased from 78.2% to 44.1% while Latinos increased from 14.8% to 33.7% and Asians increased from 4.1% to 17.7% of the population. In 2010, one-quarter of the student enrollment in the district qualified for free or reduced-price lunch (FRL), an indicator of poverty. However, poverty was not evenly distributed throughout the district; only some schools had concentrations of 50% of students with FRL. Similarly, the district schools were not evenly distributed racially and ethnically, but were segregated along racial and ethnic lines. Almost one-third of Latino students in the district attended "intensely segregated schools" (p. 102). While Latinos made up 46% of enrollment, the typical Latino student attended schools comprised of 69% of Latinos.

Frasure-Yokley (2012) found that while some district policies indirectly addressed the demographic change, none of the shifts made a significant impact on racial, ethnic, and economic-class segregation. The lack of impact might be due to the different conceptualizations of demographic change throughout the district. The district superintendent voiced that, while

one-fourth of the schools were Title I schools with lower socioeconomic and a high percentage of Latinos, “there isn’t a sense of the haves and have-nots” (p. 106). A district administrator voiced the opposite, “This district is a district of haves and have-nots, and they are very – as all of [the] County is...segregated” (p. 106). An English Language Learner (ELL) program coordinator expressed frustration with teachers’ perceptions of English learners, “The deficit [is] the lack of education that our professionals have; it’s not a deficit to have a second language, and they treat our kids that way” (p. 119). In short, Frasure-Yokley (2012) looked closely at a suburban school district with a reputation for serving a White, affluent population and found “long-standing suburban racial and class stratification” (p. 109). The study recommended further research into schools transitioning from relative homogeneity to rapid racial, ethnic, and class diversity to address the needs of emerging racially, culturally, ethnically, socioeconomically, and linguistically diverse.

Ayscue (2016) found similarly mixed, and often contradictory, responses to increasing diversity. Ayscue analyzed how administrators, teachers, and staff adapted their policies and practices in response to increasing racial diversity in suburban public schools. The study examined 94 interviews from administrators, teachers, and staff at 19 elementary, middle, and high schools in six suburban school districts with increasing racial diversity. The interview participants were 74% white, 15% Latino, 6% black, 2% Asian, and 2% not reported. Three districts were majority white. Three districts were multiracial, defined as having at least three racial groups with at least 10% of enrollment. The study looked at two elementary schools and one high school from each district, with one middle school included from one district. The districts selected were based on where diversity was becoming a central focus, thus might overrepresent districts actively responding to racial change. The data was analyzed for how

schools conceptualized and responded to changing demographics.

Ayscue (2016) found that many schools engaged in some responses that might create inclusive, enriching and academically rigorous learning environments for all students while other responses were potentially harmful to racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students. For example, while 15 out of 19 schools acknowledged the racial gap in achievement, only 9 out of 19 schools discussed facilitating diverse student groupings. Only two schools explicitly took race into consideration when creating classroom groupings. One teacher noted that “we try to evenly distribute race and gender, academics, and good behavior” (p. 332). Two-thirds of the schools acknowledged the need to support English language learners (ELLs) and provided professional development to train teachers in ELL education. However, six schools segregated ELLs, a problematic practice that linguistically isolated students, limited their English language acquisition, and prevented social reintegration throughout the school day (Gándara & Orfield, 2010; Gifford & Valdes, 2006; Goldenberg, 2013). Ayscue (2016) further described how 12 schools developed policies to support struggling learners such as providing tutoring or integrating multicultural content into the curriculum, but another seven schools, rather than enriching the curriculum, narrowed the curriculum to focus on test preparation. Ayscue suggested that the responses, a mix of potentially beneficial and harmful policies and practices, were likely due to the “complex and sometimes contradictory conceptualizations of diversity” (Ayscue, 2016, p. 343).

In a companion study to Ayscue’s (2016) examination of suburban school responses to racial change, Tyler (2016) examined conceptualizations of diversity in racially diverse suburban school districts. The focus of the study was how teachers and administrators conceptualize racial, ethnic, linguistic and socioeconomic class diversity. Tyler emphasized that how schools



responded to increasing diversity depended on how educators and educational leaders perceived the diverse students in the classroom. Using qualitative data from a multidistrict study that examined school districts' responses to changing demographics, Tyler analyzed interviews from 40 teachers, 23 principals and assistant principals, and 16 school staff across six suburban school districts in America. The participants were 75% White, 6% black, 16% Hispanic, and 3% Asian.

The findings indicated that conceptualization of diversity was complex and “sometimes self-contradictory” (Tyler, 2016, p. 295). While there was a “theoretical commitment to diversity” (p. 295), there was ample evidence of deficit perspectives that prevented real structural reforms to take place. For example, teachers and school administrators both expressed enthusiasm for increasing diversity, however, a closer examination of the enthusiasm revealed a deficit perspective. One teacher voiced that “You never know if you’re going to be the only one in their life that really has high expectations for them, and I always do have high expectations for my kids” (p. 296). The underlying assumption was that the students were deprived at home and positioned the teachers as heroes and saviors (Tyler, 2016).

Tyler (2016) pointed out that administrators' conceptualizations parallel that of teachers' beliefs. “Like teachers, many administrators lack deep knowledge about diversity and hold deficit beliefs about diverse students” (p. 292). One principal referred to students from the local Mexican barrio as “the Atwood kids”, a pejorative term in the local community. Another principal stated that once students leave the school, “there are no procedures in their lives” (p. 300), a belief that echoed teachers' negative assumptions that students were deprived at home.

Tyler (2016) also found that teachers and school administrators conceptualized increasing diversity using terms that avoided explicitly naming race. Tyler called this tendency “color-muteness” (p. 297). Instead of discussing racial diversity, the participants substituted “culture”

(p. 296), “poverty” (p. 297), and “disabilities” (p. 297) as the relevant factors though independent racial effects existed.

In a case study of one large suburban school district undergoing rapid racial and socioeconomic change, Welton, Diem, and Holme (2015) examined how the school district responded to the change and how their policies affect equity and access within the district. In the 1998-1999 academic school year, the district enrollment consisted of 51.7% White, 36.3% Hispanic, 9.4 % African American, with 2.4% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.2% Native American. By the 2008-2009 academic year, the enrollment flipped to become majority-minority with 48.6% Hispanic and 37.9% White. African Americans made up 9.3% of enrollment with 3.9% of Asian/Pacific Islander and 0.3% Native American students making up the balance. In the same ten-year period between 1998 and 2008, enrollment of students living in poverty increased from 36.6% to 42.9%. The study included interviews with eleven district-level leaders, eleven school-level administrators, and six community members in order to get a wide perspective on the district’s responses to changing demographics.

Welton, Diem, and Holme (2015) found that the suburban school district adopted a race-neutral approach that caused them to overlook the needs of diverse learners and further perpetuated racial inequities. Welton, Diem, and Holme termed the race-neutral approach as a “nonracial” or “race-blind” (p. 698) approach, similar to Tyler’s (2016) finding that districts avoided explicitly naming race in discourses, which Tyler termed “colormuteness” (p. 297). For example, Welton, Diem, and Holme (2015) noted that the superintendent of the district avoided talking about race in regards to some school campuses demographics changing from predominantly White students. Instead, the superintendent said that the schools were becoming “very diverse, very at risk” (p. 704). Other district-level administrators used terms such as

“minority”, “low SES” (p. 704), and “high need” (p. 708) in discussions about racial change.

The district did not acknowledge the complexity of the diverse student population. Some school-level teachers and administrators were able to describe racial demographic change; while others exhibited reluctance to naming race. In turn, the school district responded to changing demographics using race-neutral responses that focused on instruction and interventions rather than altering instructional and school practices to be more culturally responsive to the needs of students.

Diem, Welton, Frankenberg, and Holme (2016) examined discourses around race and demographics change in suburban school districts undergoing rapid demographic changes. The focus of the study was to understand how discourse was related to the districts’ responses to changing demographics. Diem et al. noted that it was important to examine how district and school leaders talk about demographic change, particularly race, class, and linguistic diversity, as educational leaders were key in shaping policies.

The qualitative case study was part of a multidistrict study examining changes in racial and socioeconomic composition at suburban public schools (Diem et al., 2016). The setting of the study was three suburban districts situated in an area with high levels of residential racial segregation in the 2009-2010 academic year. The districts had at least three racial groups that each comprised of at least 10% of the district’s enrollment. The racial groups were defined as White, Black, Latino, and Asian. The study included a total of 36 flexibly structured interviews across the three districts, focusing on district-level leaders and school-level administrators, their conceptualizations of demographic changes, particularly their understanding of race, and their understanding of district responses to the demographic changes. The interviews were analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA examines the role of discourse in the

reproduction of structural systems of dominance, discrimination, power and control. CDA looks closely at verbal interactions as well as structures and properties of text and talk. Diem et al. (2016) used CDA as a way to understand conceptualizations of demographic changes through discourse.

Diem, Welton, Frankenberg, and Holem (2016) found that federal and state policy contexts significantly affected how three suburban school districts conceptualized demographic change and their corresponding responses. Discourses about racial issues appeared binary, that is, district and school-level leaders “either explicitly addressed race-related issues or subverted the topic all together using terms like socioeconomic status, culture, learning styles, accountability, and academic achievement” (p. 739). In one district, race was addressed explicitly in accountability measures, but was dismissed as socioeconomic differences or “learning styles” (p. 757). In another district with strong desegregation policies, district and school leaders engaged more deeply in discussions about the racial achievement gap and had stronger responses to racial inequities, including professional development that allowed teachers to grapple with their own racial biases. The findings strongly suggested that federal and state policies shape leaders’ conceptualization of race which, in turn, affected district and school responses to the changing demographics (Diem et al., 2016).

In order to understand White suburban school leadership for equity, Irby, Drame, Clough, and Croom (2019) described the experiences of one middle-class, White, suburban high school principal enacting racial equity reforms in a composite counter-story. Irby et al. defined composite counter-stories as fictional narratives derived from a variety of data and used to challenge dominant White narratives. The researchers acknowledged that focusing on the experience of a White leader might not be appropriate in a counter-story, but proposed that a

profile of “white leaders trying and losing” (p. 199) in the struggle for racial equity was indeed counter to the dominant discourse of White educational leadership.

Irby, Drame, Clough, and Croom’s (2019) findings suggested that White leadership’s socio-political identities and understandings of equity emerged through the struggle and practice of leadership for equity, not from previously held beliefs or values. Resistance to racial equity came externally from both teachers and White parents and internally from within the White principal. This caused the emergence of an increasingly ambivalent White identity, rather than a strict anti-racist identity. The findings ran counter to the dominant “victim/hero, racist/anti-racist, failure/success school leader narratives that characterize the field of educational policy and leadership” (p. 207).

### **Identifying the Gap in Research Literature**

Collectively, the research literature highlights a need for leadership that explicitly addresses issues of racial and social justice as suburban schools become increasingly diverse. Racially changing suburban schools pursue a variety of approaches in responding to their changing student population. Tyler (2016), Ayscue (2016), Welton, Diem, and Holme (2015), and Diem, Welton, Frankenberg, and Holme (2016) all found that suburban districts and schools relied on colorblind, race-neutral, and colormute policies and reform approaches that failed to respond to racial diversification in just ways. The leadership these researchers identified do not demonstrate what enacting and advancing racial equity reforms requires: addressing racial injustice head on (Theoharis, 2007).

While some researchers have examined how suburban school districts and district-level leaders have responded to increasing diversity (Diarrassouba & Johnson, 2014; Frasure-Yokley, 2012; Holme et al., 2014; Welton et al., 2015) and some researchers have examined school-level

responses to increasing diversity (Ayscue, 2016; Frasure-Yokley, 2012), little attention has been paid to the responses of suburban high school principals (Irby et al., 2019), and none to the responses of suburban elementary school principals. However, principals have critical effects on student experiences and outcomes (Fullan, 2014; Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995). Oftentimes, elementary principals are the sole administrators of a school and responsible for the beginning of a student's journey through the educational system. Therefore, it is important to understand the conceptualizations and experiences of elementary principals as they work in schools with rapidly increasing racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and linguistic diversity as they could be key figures in ensuring equity and access for all students.

### **Critical Role of the Principal**

As the suburbs change, suburban schools change as well. Increasing demands placed by new populations with different economic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds (Frey, 2015) challenge educational leaders to understand and respond in ways that ensure all students have a high-quality, equitable, inclusive, and excellent education. It becomes ever more critical and urgent that school leaders confront inequitable policies and practices. Without the hard work necessary to systematically face racial biases and deficit thinking, schools can continue to reinforce inequitable practices and perpetuate systems of marginalization and oppression, regardless of well-intentioned school reform efforts (Liou & Rotheram-Fuller, 2016).

Successful principals have oftentimes been defined in narrow terms of managerial efficiency and effectiveness (Crow & Møller, 2017; Scribner, Crow, Lopez, & Murtadha, 2011). More often than not, educational leadership programs trained school leaders to meet the technical demands of school administration, while diminishing the significance of values, beliefs and expectations that shape a principal's identity and practices (Crow & Møller, 2017). However,

Scribner, Crow, Lopez, and Murtadha (2011) expanded the definition of a successful principal to encompass beliefs, values, practices, as well as outcomes, habits, and rituals. A successful principal is no longer defined only in terms of their process, but also the underlying intent and purpose of their endeavor (Scribner et al., 2011). Leadership and management are not interchangeable ideas in educational leadership. Management is about seeking order and stability, whereas leadership is about seeking adaptive and lasting change (Northouse, 2016).

Rather than just any intent and purpose, Fullan and Quinn (2016) explicitly focused on the “moral imperative” (p. 17). The moral imperative is “deep learning for all children regardless of background or circumstance” (p. 17). According to Fullan and Quinn, leaders need the ability to focus the direction of school efforts on success for all students.

Starting in the late 1970s with the work of Ronald Edmonds, effective schools research established that strong instructional leadership was a necessary condition for effective schools to ensure that all students can and will learn (Lezotte & Snyder, 2011; Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995; Trujillo, 2013). The responsibility of strong instructional leadership oftentimes falls first on school principals (Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995). Indeed, the role of the principal is crucial to making an impact on student learning (Fullan, 2014).

The early body of research on effective schools was one of the first to task school leadership with the responsibility for building a school culture of high expectations to counter deficit narratives that hinder the educational outcomes of historically oppressed and marginalized students (Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995; Trujillo, 2013). For example, teachers’ high expectations are considered one of the most powerful predictors of student achievement (Lezotte & Snyder, 2011; Liou & Rotheram-Fuller, 2016). Unaddressed racial attitudes, as well as negative beliefs about students’ ethnicity, social class, and linguistic differences, can influence

teachers' low expectations (Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995). Teachers' expectations manifest as classroom behaviors and instructional decisions that ultimately affect student academic success (Lezotte & Snyder, 2011; Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995). Principals are responsible for working with their staff to create a culture of high expectations to ensure that all students receive a high quality education (Lezotte & Snyder, 2011). To be able to do so successfully, principals must understand and act on their own conceptual framework about marginalized students.

Issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other marginalizing conditions in the United States have become a central focus of analysis in recent educational leadership research (Aleman, 2009; Brooks, Knaus, & Chang, 2015; Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Horsford, Grosland, & Gunn, 2011; Theoharis, 2007). Principals who create equitable schools for marginalized students do so with intentionality and for a moral purpose (Theoharis, 2007).

Principals can no longer excuse themselves from the responsibility to provide all students with an excellent, equitable, and inclusive education, nor can they allow themselves to be paralyzed by seemingly unsurmountable barriers toward an equitable education by accepting societal resistance toward change as inevitable (American Educational Research Association, 2015; Fullan, 2014; Theoharis, 2007; Young, 2011). Principals must also understand the nature of their equity work as leaders in a highly racialized context (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Parker & Villalpando, 2007). In short, principals are no longer efficient managers, but are charged with being change agents. Thus, it becomes more urgent that we understand how principals conceptualize and respond to changing demographic in the suburban setting as the United States continue to diversify.

## **Leadership Styles**

Effective leadership is highly sought after in both the corporate and educational realm



(Northouse, 2016). The corporate world seeks leaders that maximize their profits and the academic world responded by providing a multitude of programs to produce leaders (Northouse, 2016). There is a dizzying variety of leadership styles, approaches, and theories. The following section explores a few leadership styles that hold promise to produce an equitable, excellent, and inclusive education for all students.

### ***Servant Leadership***

Servant leadership is an approach that emphasizes that leaders attend to the concerns of their followers, empathize with and nurture their followers (Northouse, 2016). The focus of servant leadership is shifted from the self-interest of the leader, to understanding and addressing the needs of the community that the leaders serve. Keith (2015) describes servant leadership as a positive form of leadership that is ethical, practical and meaningful. Servant leadership holds great promise in ensuring an equitable education for all students as it prioritizes their needs as it seeks to positively contribute to society (Northouse, 2016).

However, conflicts become apparent in a situation in which one group dominates another and the interest of the dominant group, of necessity, subverts the interest of the marginalized group. For example, in a study that analyzes the servant leadership role of an Asian male senior manager in a White-dominant workplace, Liu (2019) found that servant leadership is embedded in power structures that defines who gets to be a leader and who is the servant. The Asian senior manager, while exhibiting servant leadership characteristics in a managerial role, was subordinated to his White employees, who rejected the role of followers and treated the Asian manager as servant to their demands. Servant leadership becomes problematic in a context in which one group is dominant to another (Liu, 2019).

### ***Transformational Leadership***

According to Northouse (2016), transformational leadership is a model of leadership that seeks to inspire and motivate followers to accomplish more than what is expected of them. It seeks to transform the followers and the organization. The transformational leader inspires a shared vision, models how to behave and achieve the shared vision in order to create change, empowers the followers to act, and supports the followers.

Transformational leadership has many weaknesses (Northouse, 2016). One weakness is its focus on creating a vision. While transformational leadership emphasizes a shared vision, that shared vision can be defined by the leader or co-created with the followers. Transformational leadership can be coopted to become pseudotransformational, that is, transforming people and organizations in negative ways. Northouse (2016) has Adolf Hitler as an example of a pseudotransformational leader that inspired and transformed a nation, but in dramatically negative ways.

### ***Leadership for Social Justice***

Servant leadership and transformational leadership have many positive qualities, but may not have a sufficient focus on equity to overcome injustices. In this study, leadership with the explicit goal of addressing justice and equity issues will be called leadership for social justice.

Leadership for social justice includes social justice leadership, culturally responsive leadership, and transformative leadership. Social justice leadership is conceptualized as “leading driven by a commitment to highlighting, exploring, and addressing systemic prejudices and inequities through individual and collective action” (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2019). It requires addressing internal mindsets and external actions and behaviors in order to enact change (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2019). Culturally responsive school leadership

expands the work of culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995b) and culturally responsive pedagogies (Gay, 2018) into the work that school leaders do to ensure that the entire school environment is responsive to the needs of culturally diverse students, not just in the classroom (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). Culturally responsive school leaders work to develop a school that welcomes, supports, responds to and is inclusive for all diverse students and their community. Similarly, transformative leadership foregrounds the explicit goal of social justice in the work that leaders do (Shields, 2018). This list of leadership for social justice is not exhaustive, but is illustrative of a drive to explicitly address equity issues through leadership to effect system-wide change.

### **Transforming Leadership**

Transforming leadership was defined by James MacGregor Burns as leaders who “shape and alter and elevate the motives and values and goals of followers through the vital *teaching* role of leadership” (Burns, 2012, p. 425). Burns advanced that leadership cannot be divorced from values, but is value-laden and value-driven (Burns, 2007). To Burns, “Deep and durable change, guided and measured by values, is the ultimate purpose of transforming leadership, and constitutes both its practical impact and its moral justification” (Burns, 2007, p. 213). The values that Burns directly refers to are the values in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1973), that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (Article 1) and that “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person” (Article 3).

Tierney (1989) utilizes Burn’s conception of transforming leadership and focuses on social relations and values, and creating a community of “critical, reflective citizens” (p. 170). In contrast to transformational leadership, which Tierney equates with organizational change management, Tierney defines transformative leadership as leadership “centrally concerned with

issues of social justice and empowerment, whose overriding commitment is on behalf of the disadvantaged and silent” (p. 170). Transformative leadership emerges as a form of leadership rooted in social justice, equity, and committed to creating authentically inclusive schools for all students (Bader, Horman, & Lapointe, 2010).

Transformative leadership is “an exercise of power and authority that begins with questions of justice, democracy, and the dialectic between individual accountability and social responsibility” (Weiner, 2003, p. 89). Transformative leadership’s great promise is in its focus on both “structural transformations at the material level that reflect a new hegemony, in addition to the ideological work that is done at the pedagogical level” (p. 89). In simpler terms, transformative leadership holds the promise to change systems of inequity, as well as the hearts and minds of people.

Shields (2018) further refined transformative leadership and proposed that transformative leadership was the way forward toward an education that was socially just, equitable and excellent for all students, where learning promoted individual development as well as global awareness and responsibility. For Shields, transformative education combined personal leadership characteristics with a focus on collaborative, dialogic, and democratic processes of leadership in order to meet the educational goals of individual intellectual development as well as the goals of social justice and the good of the global community. Shields argued that leadership that combined attention to characteristics, processes, and goals was robust enough and powerful enough to enact critical changes necessary to transform education in a complex and quickly change world.

While Shields (2018) cautioned that there were “no magic formulas, no recipes for achieving success” (p. 20), she offered eight tenets of transformative leadership theory:

- the mandate to effect deep and equitable change;
- the need to deconstruct and reconstruct knowledge frameworks that perpetuate inequity and injustice;
- the need to address the inequitable distribution of power;
- an emphasis on both private and public (individual and collective) good;
- a focus on emancipation, democracy, equity, and justice;
- an emphasis on interdependence, interconnectedness, and global awareness;
- the necessity of balancing critique with promise; and
- the call to exhibit moral courage. (pp. 20-21)

Throughout the stories of transformative leaders, two critical behaviors were necessary to the work of transformative leaders. Shields called these “two keys to overcoming this marginalization” (p. 29). The first key was to actively reject deficit thinking and the second key behavior was to courageously engage in dialogue, authentic democratic discourse, and difficult conversations.

The eight tenets of transformative leadership were “dynamic, interconnected, and interdependent” (Shields, 2018, p. 21), thus all tenets were important and must be in place in order to effect change. The eight tenets of transformative leadership not only offered the moral purpose of a socially just, equitable, and excellent education for all students, but also offered actions that educational leaders can take in order to effect enduring change in education (Shields, 2018; Weiner, 2003).

In a study by Bader et al. (2010), the result revealed that transformative leadership can create a democratic, engaged learning experience for low-income, multicultural students centered on their sense of community and social relationship. Bader et al. (2010) examined how

transformative leadership enabled students to succeed in a project aimed at teaching democracy, responsible citizenship, and community engagement at a school in a low-income, multicultural neighborhood in Quebec. Seven students from grades 11 and 12 and their teachers were interviewed. A common theme that emerged was school leaders and teachers actively fostered a pedagogical relationship with students that focused on the overall development of young people and addressed their diverse needs. Out of that commitment, students felt a sense of mutual respect that enabled them to succeed in the authentic civic-engagement learning experience. The study had limited generalizability as it focused on one project in one high school and included only seven students interviews.

Despite the limited nature of the study, Bader et al. (2010) showed that school leaders changed the context in which learning took place by actively fostering a pedagogical relationship that enabled mutual respect between students and educators. This is “ideological work that is done at the pedagogical level” (Weiner, 2003, p. 89) and disrupts the deficit thinking that too often is the barrier to equitable schooling.

As Cooper (2009) pointed out, there was limited literature that tied transformative leadership to the complex issues that changing student demographic presented. Cooper’s comparative case study on two rural elementary schools with changing demographics was one of the few studies that explicitly examined school leaders’ responses to changing demographics through the lens of transformative leadership. Cooper found that the two principals voiced acceptance and inclusion of other cultures; however, the principals did not address issues that were dividing the community, such as increasing hostility between community groups, nor the discriminatory attitudes and practices within the school. The two rural principals in Cooper’s comparative case study did not have much social justice work as part of their preparation

program and did not explicitly identify social justice as a primary goal for equitable education for all students.

Transformative leadership shows promise of making structural changes to systems of oppression and to entrenched mindsets that perpetuate inequalities. It is leadership that allows school leaders to facilitate school-level change to create a culture of strong beliefs, values, and behaviors that are inclusive and equitable. Transformative leadership extends leadership responsibilities from technical and managerial work to encapsulate social justice work in order to address structural inequities in schools and communities (Oakes & Rogers, 2007; Shields, 2018).

This study utilizes Shield's (2018) definition of transformative leadership as the conceptual framework as Shield's transformative leadership centers race and echoes Ladson-Billings' call to move beyond justice as a theory to justice as a praxis (American Educational Research Association, 2015). Transformative leadership promises to help principals address issues of racial and social justice. Examining principals' practices through the conceptual lens of transformative leadership can provide insights into principal's practices.

According to Maxwell (2012), a conceptual framework is the body of concepts, beliefs, ideas, assumptions and theories, as well as the relationships that the concepts have to each other, that informs a research. The transformative leadership model (Shields, 2018) was utilized to examine the courageous leadership practices principals needed in order to address critical issues of justice in education. Alongside Critical Race Theory, which is used as the theoretical lens to examine the principal's conceptualizations and responses, transformative leadership helps make sense of the principal's leadership practices. These theories frame the context of this study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides an insightful theoretical framework for

understanding the inequalities in education that result from race and racism, and lays a foundation for reforms to address systemic educational inequity and oppression (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004). CRT focuses on the ongoing, persistent adverse impact of racism and how institutional racism privileges White students while simultaneously disadvantaging diverse students.

Scholars (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) have asserted that one of the goals of CRT in education research is to examine issues of race, class, and gender in educational settings. Indeed, CRT is “an important intellectual and social tool for deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction: deconstruction of oppressive structures and discourses, reconstruction of human agency, and construction of equitable and socially just relations of power” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 9). In this study, CRT is used to interpret suburban principals’ conceptualizations of and responses to increasing diversity. As a theoretical lens, it provides a filter for understanding and analyzing the contexts that influences educational leaders’ responses (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004).

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) had its roots in legal scholarship through the work of Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado (Brown & Jackson, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Subedi, 2013). After its emergence from legal scholarship, CRT evolved into several branches of scholarship (Brown & Jackson, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), including disability critical race theory, Latino critical race theory, and AsianCrit. Critical Race Theory was first introduced to education by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) in a landmark paper that described its relevance and application to education. It was a radical departure from more traditional views of educational inequity. Today, critical race theorists used CRT ideas to understand all issues in



education, ranging from school discipline to testing, curriculum, and charter schools (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

According to Ladson-Billings (1998), CRT asserted that racism was enmeshed in the fabric of American society and perpetuated the oppression of people of color. Disproportionality and educational inequity were not accidental, but a result from racism, which was the norm of society, not the exception (T. C. Howard & Navarro, 2016). CRT used stories to add context to seemingly objective facts and to give voice to the lived experiences of historically marginalized people (Cook, 2013; T. C. Howard & Navarro, 2016; Montevirgen, 2011). CRT criticized the liberal perspective that proponents of social justice should be satisfied with incremental change (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2017), the beliefs of CRT could be summarized as five tenets:

- racism is normal and ordinary in American society, not aberrational;
- interest convergence or material determinism;
- race as a social construct;
- intersectionality and anti-essentialism;
- voice-of-color thesis, or counternarrative.

### ***Racism is the Norm***

The first tenet, and arguably the most important and what distinguished CRT from other social justice frameworks, is the belief that racism is the norm and not the exception in American society. Racism is endemic and deeply ingrained in the fabric of everyday American life (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; T. C. Howard & Navarro, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Ladson-Billings and Tate uses Wellman's definition of racism. Racism is the "culturally

sanctioned beliefs which, regardless of the intentions involved, defend the advantages Whites have because of the subordinated positions of racial minorities” (Wellman, 1993). Racism is so that deeply ingrained that “it appears both normal and natural to people in this culture” and to countering it involves “unmasking and exposing racism in its various permutations” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 11).

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) divided race thinkers into two groups, the idealists and the realists. The idealists believed that racism was a matter of attitude and thinking and can unmake racism by changing systems of “images, words, attitudes, unconscious feelings, scripts, and social teachings” (p. 20). The idealists, in effect, focused on the unconscious biases that produced racisms. The realists, in contrast, believed that “racism is a means by which society allocates privileges and status. Racial hierarchies determine who gets tangible benefits, including the best jobs, the best schools, and invitations to parties in people’s homes” (p. 20). Countering racism for the realists involve addressing the systems that perpetuate racism.

### ***Interest convergence.***

The second tenet of CRT is material determinism, or interest convergence. Interest convergence is the idea that White people will seek racial justice when there is something in it for them. According to Ladson-Billings (2013), interest convergence is better characterized as interest alignment, not altruism. Bell (1980) first argued that civil rights gains occurred only where they coincided with the self-interests of Whites. As an example, Bell analyzed *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court unexpectedly reversed a long-standing national position on segregation of the races. Bell proposed that at that time, due to the Cold War, international relations put pressure on the federal government to ease domestic racial tensions. Though Bell’s proposal was first met with outrage, it was later proven largely correct

through extensive archival evidence by historian Mary Dudziak (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Dual-language programs, also known as two-way immersion programs, are a contemporary example of interest convergence (D. Palmer, 2010; Turner, 2015). It is a popular form of bilingual education in which English-speaking children and other language speakers learn together in order to become bilingual, with explicit goals of cross-cultural understanding and high academic achievement for all (D. Palmer, 2010). While other English language learner programs for linguistically diverse students suffer from linguistic segregation that negatively impact student outcomes (Ayscue, 2016; Gándara & Orfield, 2010; Gifford & Valdes, 2006), dual language programs are applauded for being integrated and prioritized equity for all students (D. Palmer, 2010). Turner (2015) found that while dual language programs benefited Spanish-speaking immigrant students, the popularity of the programs for predominantly White monolingual English speakers drove the programs' growth. Palmer (2010) found that middle-class White students dominated one school's dual language program and the program enrolled only a few linguistically diverse students, effectively becoming another form of racial segregation.

### ***Race is Socially Constructed***

The third tenet of CRT is that race is a social construct, meaning that race and racism are products of social thoughts and construction (Brown & Jackson, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2013). Society's conception of race have moved beyond biology and now include "racialization of multiple cultural forms" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 8). Culture refers to beliefs, behaviors, norms, and ways of beings that might stem from different sources of identities like gender, nationality, religion, ethnicity, class, and age (Hollie, 2018) whereas racialization is the social construction of race and is enacted by a dominant group upon other

groups of people to maintain power and privilege (Dalal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

While race does not scientifically exist, critical race theorists acknowledge that race is “a social reality that allows for significant disparities in the life chances of people based on the categorical understanding of race” (Ladson-Billings, 2013, p. 39). Moreover, racialization, the social construction of race, changes with time and context to suit the needs of the dominant society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Noguera et al., 2011). For example, in early U.S. history, Irish, Jews, and Italians were designated “nonwhite” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 88) but overtime, they gained the social standing of being White (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

### ***Intersectionality***

The fourth tenet of CRT is the notion of intersectionality, the examination of how race, sex, class, national origin, sexual orientation, and gender identification play out in various settings and under different contexts (Brown & Jackson, 2013; Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). According to Delgado and Stefancic (2017), “No person has a single, easily stated, unitary identity” (p. 10). One person’s different identities interact to shape different experiences even within the same group (Crenshaw, 1991). For example, Crenshaw pointed out that feminist and antiracist discourses did not adequately take into account the “intersecting patterns of racism and sexism” (p. 1243) that made up lived experiences of women of color which differed from the experiences of White women. CRT scholars are urged to look at the ways that different identities and status categories may interact to produce one person’s experience (Crenshaw, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2013).

The flip side of intersectionality is essentialism. Essentialism is the belief that all people in a group act and think in the same ways (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). For example, African Americans are an increasingly culturally, ethnically, socioeconomically, and linguistically

diverse group with complex and nuanced self-identification based on whether they identify as monoracial or mixed-race, recent immigrant or U.S.-born, and influenced by childhood experiences of racial segregation (Charles et al., 2015). Yet, African Americans are still popularly viewed as a homogeneous racial and ethnic group (Charles et al., 2015). CRT scholars are urged to maintain an anti-essentialism framework. While shared group identities exist, people do not relinquish their individual perspectives and lifestyles (Ladson-Billings, 2013).

### ***Counter-stories***

The final tenet of CRT is the importance of storytelling and counter-narratives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). All people have a vested interest in telling stories that center their experiences and perspectives (Ladson-Billings, 2013). It becomes problematic when one group's worldview is accepted as "universal", "truth", or "objective science" while another group's worldview is dismissed as myth or lore (Ladson-Billings, 2013, p. 42). Delgado and Stefancic (2017) used the terms voice-of-color thesis and counternarratives. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) used the term counter-story and defined it "as a method of telling stories of those people whose experiences are not often told" (p. 32). Solórzano and Yosso further defined it as "a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege" (p. 32). Ladson-Billings (2013) cautioned against using counter-stories as a means to complain about racial justice, rather, counter-stories should be a tool to share a personal reference and advance broader social justice meaning.

CRT is an appropriate theoretical lens for connecting educational leader's conceptualizations of diversity with institutional policies, practices, and norms that create and sustain oppression in the educational setting (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). CRT connects the

historically White-dominated vision of American suburbia to the current, rapidly diversifying demographic contexts of suburban schools.

### **Summary**

Current and historic systems of oppression continue to drive student outcomes in the American educational system. Race-based disparities exist along many dimensions of the educational experiences for students of color. Racially, culturally, ethnically, linguistically, and socio-economically inequitable practices have long been studied in urban schools. As America's demographics shift to become more diverse, the suburbs also shift in demographics, bringing with it questions about how the suburbs are grappling with increasing diversity.

Race-based disparities in education begin at kindergarten. As the suburbs struggle to understand and adjust to increasing diversity, the elementary public school principal is positioned to dramatically impact the life outcomes of young diverse children. The focus of this study is to understand how elementary principals in suburban schools conceptualize increasing racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity, how the principals respond to issues that arise from increasing diversity, and how they are prepared to meet these new challenges. As the principal can have a dramatic impact on school practices that promote equity or school practices that reinforce systems of inequities, it is urgent that suburban principals' conceptualizations are understood and their practices are examined in order to disrupt oppression in the educational system.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this mixed-methods study is to understand how traditional public school principals conceptualize and respond to increasing racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and linguistic diversity in suburban elementary schools. Another purpose of this study is to explore the beliefs and practices of school principals through the lens of race and racism in order to better understand how to disrupt systemic oppression in schools for historically marginalized and oppressed populations. This study is designed to contribute to our understanding of how principals' responses can either reproduce or disrupt educational inequity.

This methodology chapter includes the description for this mixed-method, multiple-case study design. An initial survey that included demographic questions, quantitative questions using the Likert scale, and qualitative open-ended questions was administered through Survey Monkey. The initial survey was shared with principals from two suburban school districts. From the initial survey respondents, two principals from each school district were purposefully sampled for follow-up interviews. The principals were interviewed using semi-structured, open-ended interview protocols. They described their personal experiences, beliefs, and practices in addressing the needs of increasingly diverse students in their suburban schools. Data analysis included the triangulation of interviews from principals, teachers, and classified staff. Ethical considerations and the researcher's positionality were discussed.

All research was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines from the National Institutes of Health and with the approval from the Institutional Review Board. The quantitative and qualitative instruments were developed specifically for this study based on literature review with input from two pilot focus groups.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions for this study are:

- How do elementary principals in suburban public schools conceptualize increasing racial, ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic diversity within their schools?
- How do elementary principals respond to increasing racial, ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic diversity in their practices?
- What practices do principals engage in that support racially equitable education for all students?
- To what extent do different factors, such as principal preparation programs, district support, and/or life experiences, background, and informal learning experiences, help principals feel prepared to address issues of racial, ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic diversity?

### **Research Design and Rationale**

In order to answer these research questions, this study was designed as a mixed-method, multiple-case study in which semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants from four elementary school sites from two suburban school districts.

An initial survey was administered using Survey Monkey, a cloud-based, online survey software. Nonprobability sampling was used to encourage the greatest number of participants possible (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The initial survey included demographic questions, quantitative questions using the Likert scale, and qualitative open-ended questions (See Appendix A). Respondents were asked at the end of the initial survey if they would be interested in participating in the interview portion of the study. This introduced an element of self-selection. Purposeful sampling was used for the interview portion of the study (Creswell & Poth,



2018). From the interested respondents, four participants were selected for the interviews, two white principals and two principals of color. The interviews were semi-structured interviews that followed an interview guide developed specifically for this study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Validation of the study was provided through triangulation of data using interviews with parents and teachers from the participants' school sites (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The quantitative portion of the study was designed to analyze how different factors help principals feel prepared to address issues of racial, ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic diversity in their schools. As such, the quantitative portion of the study was designed as a nonexperimental, causal-comparative study. A causal-comparative study seeks to find relationships between independent and dependent variables and allows tentative causal conclusions between a condition that has already occurred and a subsequent behavior or condition (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In this study, the independent variables are different forms of principal preparation, including formal programs such as administrator preparation and informal preparation such as school district support, life experiences, personal background, and/or other informal learning experiences. The dependent variable is principals feeling prepared to address diversity at their schools. An ANOVA test was run to see the effects of principal preparation on principals' perceptions of being prepared to address diversity issues at their school sites.

The qualitative portion of the study focused on exploring principals' conceptualizations of and responses to increasing racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity in their student demographics. It also captured the practices that school leaders enact in response to increasing diversity. Critical Race Theory (CRT) was used as the theoretical framework in order to better understand the principals' conceptualizations, responses, and practices through the lens of race and racism. The qualitative portion of the study used the multiple-case study method to provide an in-depth

examination of principals' conceptualizations and responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A qualitative approach was appropriate when examining complex problems from participants' multiple experiences and perspectives and required inductive reasoning to arrive at patterns and emerging themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A case study method was preferred when examining a current experience in a bounded system (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For the qualitative study, the cases were bounded by the experiences of principals in suburban elementary schools where the student populations were becoming more racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse. Multiple case studies would provide deeper insight into the how and why of a central phenomenon across several cases (Yin, 2018). This study explored how principals responded to demographic changes and also explored how principals conceptualized the demographic changes.

Qualitative data came from open-ended questions from the initial survey and from interviews. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was used to analyze the data from the interview transcripts and from the open-ended questions. CDA examined talk, written text, and other available communications for structures that serve to either reproduce or challenge existing power relationships (van Dijk, 1993). The discourses that principals used to discuss the diverse students in their schools were analyzed and used as representations of their conceptualizations of diversity. The interview transcripts and responses to open-ended questions were coded using open coding. In open coding, categories of information about the phenomenon were formed by segmenting information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The categories included codes related to perceptions of racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic diversity; benefits of increasing diversity, and challenges associated with increasing diversity (Tyler, 2016).

### **Setting, Population, and Sample**

The sample was determined through a mix of nonprobability sampling for the initial survey of the study and purposeful sampling for the interviews. The initial survey established a pool of potential interview participants. Purposeful sampling was used to select four interview participants in order to provide deeper insight into principals' conceptualizations and responses to increasing diversity.

Two school districts were selected as the setting for the research. Both school districts were selected based on access. Both districts were at the beginning stage of addressing increasing diversity, which could provide useful information for other districts beginning to grapple with increasingly diverse demographics. Two elementary schools from each districts, a total of four schools, were selected for the settings for the multiple-case study.

#### **Selecting the Principals**

An initial survey, shown in Appendix A, was administered using Survey Monkey, a cloud-based, online survey software. Nonprobability sampling was used to encourage the greatest number of participants possible (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). An introductory mass email was sent to the principals of suburban elementary schools at the two school districts. The email included a brief introduction by the researcher, a summary of the study, and assurances of confidentiality. The introductory email informed prospective participants that participation was voluntary. The introductory email had a link to an online initial survey using Survey Monkey that included a digital consent agreement, participant demographic and background questions, quantitative questions, and qualitative open-ended questions.

One difficulty in sampling was the identification of suburban elementary schools with changing demographics. This difficulty was addressed in the initial survey, which included

questions that allowed the respondents to self-identify as a principal working in suburban elementary schools with changing demographics. These questions also allowed for the possibility of capturing data from a variety of schools such as urban schools, middle schools, and high schools, which would provide data for comparison with suburban elementary schools.

Respondents were asked at the end of the initial survey if they would be interested in participating in the interview portion of the study. This introduced an element of self-selection to the sampling and was taken into account as part of the validation process.

Purposeful sampling was used for the interview portion of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). From the interested respondents, two participants from each district would be selected for the interviews, a total of four principals. Two white principals and two principals of color would be purposefully sampled to provide a variety of perspectives. The interviews were semi-structured interviews that followed an interview guide developed specifically for this study, shown in Appendix B. The interviews were 45-minute interviews conducted online using the Zoom software. Only the audio portion of the interviews were recorded to maintain participant confidentiality.

### **Teachers and Classified Staff Members**

The settings for the multiple-case study were based on the four principals selected for the interview portion of the study. Teachers and classified staff at the four elementary schools were recruited to participate in the study in order to provide triangulation of the data.

In this part of the study, the selected principals became the gatekeepers. Gatekeepers helped the researcher gain access to teachers and classified staff (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The principals were asked to send an introductory email with information about the study to all teachers and classified staff members at their school site. Inviting all teachers and classified staff

at each school site to participate minimized the possibility of biases in favor of the principals.

Two teachers and two classified staff from each school were purposefully selected in order to include voices from historically oppressed populations where possible. The introductory email included a brief introduction by the researcher, a summary of the study, and assurances of confidentiality. The introductory email informed prospective participants that participation was voluntary. It also included a link to an online digital consent agreement and a brief survey that included demographics questions and requested contact information in order to set up an online interview. The brief survey is shown in Appendix C.

The interviews were semi-structured interviews that followed an interview guide developed specifically for this study (see Appendix B). The interviews were 25-minute interviews conducted online using the Zoom software. Only the audio portion of the interviews were recorded to maintain participant confidentiality.

## **Instrumentation**

### **The Initial Survey**

An online initial survey using Survey Monkey was sent with the introductory email to the potential participants. The initial survey, the Principal's Preparedness and Response to Increasing Diversity Survey shown in Appendix A, was developed specially for the study focusing on the research questions to ensure that only relevant data was collected. All of the questions were designed to address the research questions in part or in whole. The Principal's Preparedness and Response to Increasing Diversity Survey had three parts: the demographic questions, the quantitative questions, and the qualitative open-ended questions.

The demographic questions were used to understand who the participants were and to create a useful description of the context. It included questions about the principal's family

background and leadership experience. The demographic questions were also used to purposefully sample participants of diverse backgrounds for the interview portion of the study. As the research focused on race, ethnicity, and culture and acknowledged that race, ethnicity, and culture were complex ideas, the race/ethnicity demographic question included the option to “check all that applies” and “Other (please specify)”.

The quantitative questions focused on how different factors, such as administrative preparation programs or district support, prepared principals to address issues arising from increasing diversity. The qualitative portion had five open-ended questions designed to elicit stories and beliefs in order to capture principals’ conceptualizations, responses, and practices as they address increasing racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity in their schools.

The first draft of the Principal’s Preparedness and Response to Increasing Diversity Survey was shared with doctoral cohort members who were current or past principals for their overall impressions and suggestions. The survey was revised based on their feedback.

As this was a new instrument and involved research that explicitly focused on race and culture, further work was needed to ensure validity and reliability (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and to guard against “misinterpretations, misinformation, and misrepresentations” (Milner, 2007, p. 388) that can be dangerous to communities of color. The revised survey was shared with principals of scholars. Further revisions were made using their feedback and addressed their concerns. (See Appendix for the full survey.)

### **The Teacher and Classified Staff Survey**

An introductory email was sent to all teachers and classified staff of the selected principals’ schools. The introductory email included a link to the digital consent form and a brief survey. The teacher and classified staff survey, shown in Appendix C, included three

demographics questions and one question regarding current employment at the school in order to determine if the potential participant was a teacher or a classified staff member. The survey concluded by gathering contact information in order to arrange the interview.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

An interview was an appropriate instrument of data collection for this study as it allowed the researcher to understand the experiences and perspectives of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, a semi-structured interview protocol, shown in Appendix B, was developed and used for the principal interview (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The questions were structured to be open-ended and prompted the participants to expand on their responses to the initial survey. Interview probes were included in the interview protocol to increase comprehensiveness of the responses (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

A second interview protocol was used for teachers based on the qualitative open-ended portion of the Principal's Preparedness and Response to Increasing Diversity Survey. The teacher interviews focused on their perspectives and served to triangulate the data from the principals' interviews.

A third interview protocol was used for classified staff that focused on how the school treated different parent populations. The classified staff interviews also served to triangulate the data from the principals' interviews. See Appendix B for all three interview protocols.

The interviews were held online using the Zoom software. Only the audio portion was recorded to protect participant confidentiality. The audio was then transcribed for data analysis.

### **Reliability**

Reliability in qualitative research means the "stability of responses" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 454). This means that there is consistency of participants' responses. If the research is

carried out by different researchers using the same methods, the results would be consistent and, therefore, reliable (Gibbs, 2012).

For this study, the researcher was the primary coder of responses. To ensure reliability, this study followed a specific process for coding (Creswell & Poth, 2018). First, REV, a computer-assisted transcription software transcribed recorded audio interviews into texts. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was used to analyze the data from the interview transcripts and from the open-ended questions (van Dijk, 1993). The interview transcripts and responses to open-ended questions were coded using open coding. In open coding, categories of information about the phenomenon were formed by segmenting information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The categories included codes related to perceptions of racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic diversity; benefits of increasing diversity, and challenges associated with increasing diversity (Tyler, 2016). To ensure reliability, the study had an academic peer from the doctoral cohort confirm consistency by using the codes across different transcripts.

### **Validity**

The validity of a study helps the readers believe the conclusions of the study. This study used Maxwell's (2012) definition of validity, which is the "credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account" (p. 122).

Validation was done through triangulation. Triangulation was the process of using several different sources of information, different methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study used triangulation to increase the validity of the study because examining the evidences from different perspectives allowed for cross-checking and strengthened the findings. It also reduced the risk of chance associations and strengthened the generalizability of the findings (Maxwell, 2012). In this study, the triangulating



method was the cross-checking the principals' responses with the teachers' and parents' responses.

In qualitative research, the participants are valuable sources of data (University of Derby, 2013). One validation technique this study used was member checking. The analyses and findings were shared with the participants to verify that it captured their perspectives accurately (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This ensured that the study did not misrepresent the data, which was their experiences. This was particularly crucial in racial and cultural research so as not to misrepresent the perspectives and experiences of people of color (Milner, 2007).

### **Researcher's Position and Reflexivity**

In qualitative research, the researcher is the major instrument for collecting data (Green, 2014). Reflexivity meant that the researcher acknowledged that past experiences informed the current approach to the study and influenced the interpretation of the evidences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This disclosure would help the readers understand the study from the researcher's lens. This is particularly important in cross-cultural and cross-racial research when examining issues of race, racism, and power (Milner, 2007). Taking into account their own racialized and cultural positionality in the research process allows the researcher to reflect on the nuanced ways that their worldview and personal experiences may influence their interpretations of participants' stories and perspectives without privileging one over the other (Milner, 2007).

As an Asian American, am I positioned as the model minority, in a complex web of "negative stereotypes about African American students and positive stereotypes about Asian, immigrant students" (Garver & Noguera, 2015, p. 335). The model minority is presented as a "positive stereotype" (Covarrubias & Liou, 2014, p. 2) that reinforces the idea that Asian Americans achieves academic success and economic success, comparable to Whites despite

discrimination. The model minority stereotype carries with it several implications, including: a colorblind assumption that Asian Americans don't experience racial discrimination, internalized beliefs about unrestricted social mobility of Asian Americans, and colorblind perception that race and ethnicity does not affect social mobility of Asian Americans and does not affect the social mobility of other groups (Law, Kim, Lee, & Bau, 2019). This stereotype can complicate relationships with other diverse groups (Covarrubias & Liou, 2014; Garver & Noguera, 2015). The model minority myth is also used to delegitimize Asian Americans in discussions about race and racism (Covarrubias & Liou, 2014) and as a tool to castigate other marginalized groups for their perceived lack of achievement (Garver & Noguera, 2015; Law et al., 2019; Subedi, 2013; Wing, 2007). As the researcher, I acknowledge my complex position as a woman of color with an awareness that my racialized identity as an Asian American can be used as a tool against other marginalized groups.

I was sensitive to the fact that during the research process how my visibility as an Asian American might affect how participants perceive me and how that might affect their responses. Additionally, I was sensitive to the fact that my experiences as an oppressed person may not look the same as other people's experiences (Shields, 2018) and had to guard against misinterpretation of participants' responses based on own my worldview and experiences (Milner, 2007).

In response, my research methods include extensive and continuous member checking with the participants and other scholars of color throughout the research process in order to ensure validity of the research. I sought feedback from scholars and educational leaders of color during the development of the research instruments. During the analysis, I continually looked for alternate plausible interpretations and reflected on how my worldview might have influenced my analysis. Taking such measures ensured that my data and analysis accurately reflected the

stories, beliefs, and perspectives that participants shared.

### **Plan for Data Collection**

An online initial survey, the Principal's Preparedness and Response to Increasing Diversity Survey, was sent as a link with the introductory email to potential participants. The survey used Survey Monkey, an online software, to disseminate the survey and record responses. The survey link took potential participants to the digital consent to participate information page first before the survey. The survey contained three parts, the demographic and background information, the quantitative questions, and the qualitative open-ended questions. The survey ended by asking respondents if they were interested in participating in the interview portion of the study.

The survey questions included name, role, and site to provide robust information for the case studies, but names and sites were anonymized through the use of pseudonyms to protect the identity and privacy of the individuals and the school sites.

The interviews for the principals, teachers, and parents used Zoom in order to record the interviews. Only the audio was recorded, not the video, in order to protect the identity and confidentiality of the participants. Then, the recorded interviews were transcribed using REV, an online transcription service.

The principal interviews were semi-structured interviews with a set of pre-determined questions and probing questions. An interview protocol was used in order to capture the principals' experiences, practices, and beliefs and provided data that can be compared between participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Similarly, an interview protocol was used for the teacher and parent interviews.

## **Plan for Data Analysis**

### **Quantitative Analysis**

The quantitative portion of this mixed-method study is a nonexperimental, causal-comparative research design. A causal-comparative study seeks to find relationships between independent and dependent variables and is appropriate when a pre-condition or independent variable has already occurred (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In this study, the independent variables were different forms of principal preparation, including formal programs such as administrator preparation and informal preparation such as school district support, life experiences, personal background, and/or other informal learning experiences. A causal-comparative study allows tentative causal conclusions between a condition that has already occurred and a subsequent behavior or condition (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In this study, the dependent variable was principals feeling prepared to address diversity at their schools. However, data analysis in a causal-comparative research must still be cautious about making cause-and-effect conclusions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

An ANOVA test was run to see the effects of different factors on principals' perceptions of being prepared to address diversity issues at their school sites.

### **Qualitative Analysis**

Data analysis in qualitative research “involves organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation of them” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 335). Qualitative research is best when “any component of the design may need to be reconsidered or modified during the study in response to new developments or to changes in some other component” (Maxwell, 2012, p. 2). Qualitative research produces a lot of data. One strategy for reducing the data into

meaningful units is through coding.

A code “symbolically assigns a summative or evocative attribute for a portion of qualitative data” (Mod•U: Powerful Concepts in Social Science, 2016). A code can be assigned for any attribute, based on the research questions. Once coded, the data is ready to be examined for patterns, similarities, differences, and relationships. The goal is to find meaning in the vast quantity of data relevant to the research.

Before qualitative data analysis, the interviews were transcribed using the REV transcription service. MAXQDA was used as the data analysis software as it was able to analyze texts, documents, and images. This study used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze the data from the interview transcripts and from the open-ended questions (van Dijk, 1993). The categories included codes related to perceptions of racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic diversity; benefits of increasing diversity, and challenges associated with increasing diversity (Tyler, 2016). As data analysis was an iterative process, several passes were made to refine the codes (Maxwell, 2012). Once the transcripts and open-ended responses were coded, the data was categorized and then examined for patterns, frequency, relationships, and salient themes. The categories were compared with the literature to find meaning. A visual representation of the data was made to convey meaning as it related to suburban principals’ responses to changing demographics. Finally, the data was summarized in theme passages. The fundamental goal of the qualitative data collection and analysis was to explore the beliefs, behaviors, and practices of school principals and how they conceptualized and responded to increasing diversity, and whether they were able to disrupt inequitable practices in suburban elementary schools.

### **Plan to Address Ethical Issues**

All of the participants were treated in accordance to the ethical guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA) and the Concordia University Irvine Institutional Review Board (IRB). Digital consent forms were sent to all potential participants. The consent forms were transparent about the purpose and nature of the study and informed participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Participant names, districts, and school sites were anonymized through the use of pseudonyms to protect participants' privacy and to ensure confidentiality. The data in this study were collected, analyzed, and reported using appropriate methods and in a secure manner.

Several considerations were kept in mind in terms of risk to the participants in the study during the research process. First, principals were surveyed and interviewed about issues that might be considered sensitive and might be emotionally charged. Principals might feel personally threatened by the topics or might feel that honest responses might threaten their employment. Second, teachers and classified staff members were interviewed about their perspectives on the similarly sensitive issues as well as their views on the principals. Participants might feel uncomfortable discussing these issues. Rapport and trust between the participants and researcher were taken into consideration, and was built into the design of the interview protocol, in order to maximize the authenticity of the participants' responses (Maxwell, 2012). Privacy and confidentiality were ensured at every step of the research process in order to maximize the authenticity of the participants' responses as well as protect participants from any potential repercussions.

### **Change in Methodology**

During the data collection stage, survey respondents did not consent to participate in the

interview portion of the study. One respondent consented to the interview and then subsequently withdrew consent. This change necessitated several adjustments in the design of the study. There were no principal interviews and no access to elementary school sites, therefore, there were no teacher and instructional assistant interviews. The change in methodology, along with challenges and possible reasons for the changes, will be discussed further in the Limitations section of Chapter 5.

### **Summary of Methodology**

The mixed-method, multiple case study design was used to explore how suburban elementary principals conceptualized and responded to increasing racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity in their schools. A three-part survey instrument and interview protocols were developed specifically for the study. The instruments were created, tested, and revised to ensure reliability and validity. The survey was administered to principals through nonprobability sampling. Interview participants were planned to be selected through purposeful sampling. Data was collected in the form of surveys and interviews. Triangulation of data was planned to include using parent, community member, and teacher interviews. The quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS. The qualitative data was analyzed using MAXQDA using Critical Discourse Analysis. Ethical considerations and the researcher's positionality were used throughout the research process.

## CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of the mixed-methods study was to understand how traditional public school principals conceptualize and respond to increasing racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic diversity in suburban elementary schools and whether such responses reproduce or disrupt educational inequity. This study was designed to explore the beliefs and practices of school principals through the lens of race and racism in order to disrupt educational inequities and to ensure an equitable, inclusive, and excellent education for all students.

The research questions for this study are:

1. How do elementary principals in suburban public schools conceptualize increasing racial, ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic diversity within their schools?
2. How do elementary principals respond to increasing racial, ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic diversity in their practices?
3. What practices do principals engage in that support racially equitable education for all students?
4. To what extent do different factors, such as principal preparation programs, district support, and/or life experiences, background, and informal learning experiences, help principals feel prepared to address issues of racial, ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic diversity?

The study employed a mixed-method approach incorporating quantitative and qualitative research methods by administering a two-part survey that included quantitative and qualitative questions. The study was conducted in the fall of 2020 after gaining site authorizations from two school districts (Appendix D). Convenience sampling was used to select the two school districts, though the researcher was not connected to either school districts. A digital survey instrument



was disseminated to all elementary principals at the two school districts as part of the recruitment email. The survey contained 15 demographics and background information questions, 11 quantitative questions, which included 8 Likert-type scale questions, and 5 qualitative, open-ended questions. While the original design of the study called for semi-structured interviews with principals who might volunteer to participate in the second portion of the study, along with interviews with other school staff, no interviews were conducted. Only one principal consented to the interview and then subsequently withdrew consent. The changes in methodology and participation, along with challenges and possible reasons for the changes, will be discussed further under the Limitations section of Chapter 5. Analysis of data were performed using the survey responses.

This chapter will first describe the two suburban school districts and the survey participants that are the focus of study to provide context for the survey response data. The context of the school districts within which respondents worked will provide a foundation to understand the principals' perspectives. Then, an analysis of the quantitative and qualitative responses is provided.

### **Description of the Suburban Districts**

The purpose study was to understand how principals conceptualize and respond to increasing racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic diversity in traditional suburban elementary schools and whether such responses reproduce or disrupt educational inequity. This section describes the suburban school districts within which the principals lead in order to foreground the analysis with the inequity issues facing the suburban principals and to contextualize the principals' conceptualizations of racial diversity and their responses within the phenomenon of changing demographics in suburban school districts.

Using data from the California Department of Education, this section describes two suburban school districts that were disproportionately White compared to the surrounding counties. The description of District A and District B served to provide the context for the study and illustrated the phenomenon that suburban elementary principals experienced of serving in disproportionately White-dominated school districts undergoing demographics shift, one becoming more racially and ethnically diverse while the other was becoming more White-dominated, but linguistically diverse. Both suburban school districts were high-performing when compared with state data and both exhibited racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and linguistic disparities in student academic achievement. The description of the suburban school districts provided the context for the educational equity issues facing the principals. This study was designed to explore the beliefs and practices of school principals through the lens of race and racism in order to disrupt educational inequities and to ensure an equitable, inclusive, and excellent education for all students. How suburban elementary school leaders respond to and address the equity issues at their schools has implications for the educational opportunities afforded to historically oppressed and marginalized student groups.

### **District A**

District A is a K-12 suburban school district in California. Based on data from the 2019-2020 academic year, District A had an enrollment of 27,979 with 30.2% of enrollment identified as socioeconomically disadvantaged, and 4.5% identified English learners (ELs) (California Department of Education, 2021a).

In this study, a racially/ethnically diverse school district is defined as having three or more groups making up 10% or more of enrollment (Ayscue, 2016). Using this criteria, District A was a racially/ethnically diverse school district. Enrollment in 2019-2020 consisted of 42.0%

White students, 34.1% Latino students, 10.0% of students identified with two or more racial categories, 4.8% Filipino students, 4.5% Asian students, 3.5% African American students, with the rest of enrollment consisting of students identified as American Indian and Pacific Islander (California Department of Education, n.d.).

**Table 1. 1**

*Change in District A Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity from 2014-2015 to 2018-2019*

Student Groups	2014-2015 Enrollment	2019-2020 Enrollment	Change
All	28,478	27,979	-499
White	45.5%	42.0%	-3.5%
Hispanic	31.8%	34.1%	+2.3%
Two or More Races	7.8%	10.0%	+2.2%
Filipino	5.4%	4.8%	-0.6%
Asian	3.9%	4.5%	+0.6%
African American	3.8%	3.5%	-0.2%
American Indian	1.1%	0.7%	-0.4%
Pacific Islander	0.3%	0.3%	No change

*Note.* (California Department of Education, 2021a).

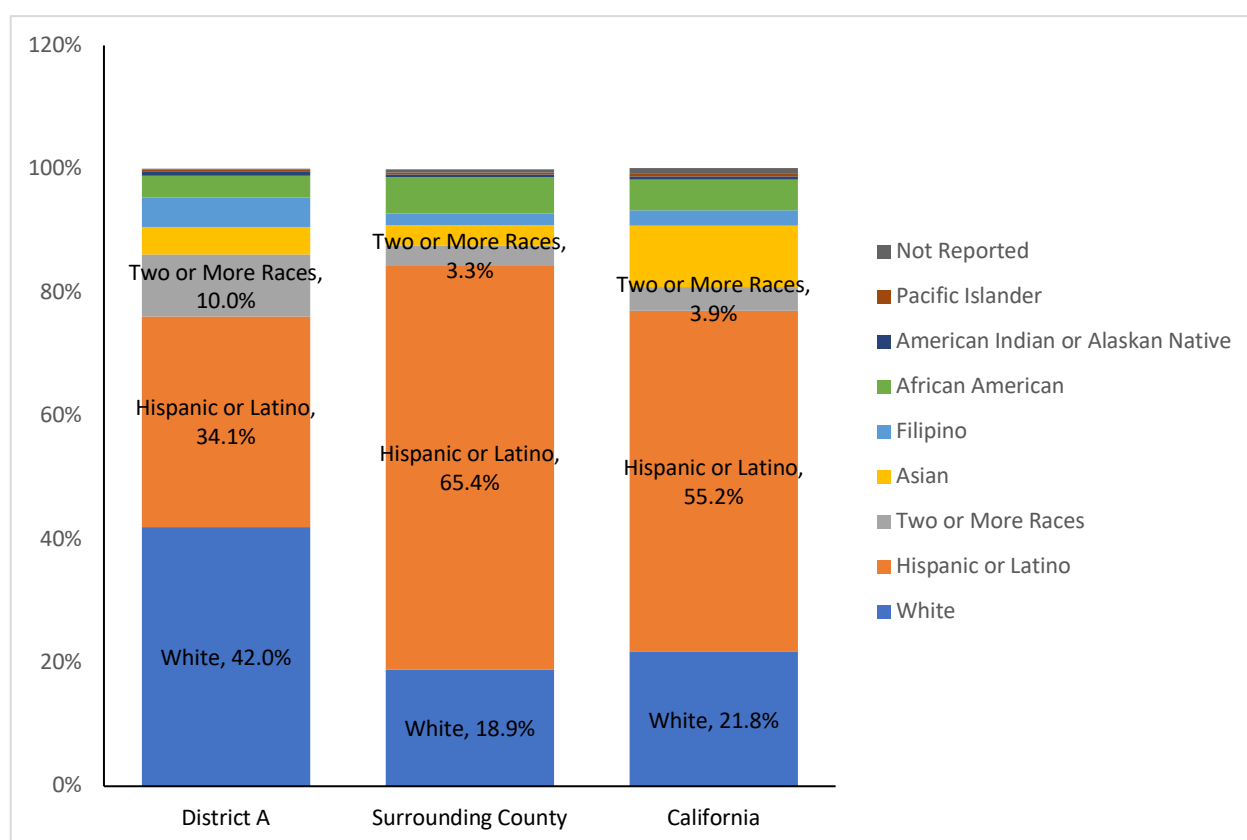
Enrollment data from academic year 2014-2015 as compared with 2019-2020 indicated a shift in racial and ethnic make-up in District A, becoming more diverse (California Department of Education, n.d.). White students declined by 3.5% from 45.5% to 42.0% of total enrollment while Latino students increased by 2.3% from 31.8% to 34.1% and students identified as being two or more races increased by 2.2% from 7.8% to 10.0%.

Enrollment data, as shown in Figure 1. 1 also showed that District A was disproportionately White as compared with the surrounding county (California Department of Education, n.d.). In 2019-2020, White students made up 42.0% of district enrollment as compared with 18.9% of enrollment throughout the surrounding county, a difference of 22.2%.

Latino students made up 33.1% of district enrollment as compared with 65.4% of enrollment throughout the surrounding county, a difference of 32.3%. Students who identified with two or more races made up 10.0% of district enrollment as compared with 3.3% countywide, Filipino students made up 4.8% of district enrollment as compared with 1.9% of countywide enrollment, and African American students made up 3.5% of district enrollment as compared with 5.9% of countywide enrollment.

**Figure 1. 1**

*Comparing District A, County, and California Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity 2019-2020*



*Note.* (California Department of Education, n.d.).

California reports educational performance data in the California School Dashboard

(California Department of Education, 2021a). Indicators for school and district performance include but is not limited to graduation rate, English learner progress, as well as student performance in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics.

**Table 2. 1**

*Performance Data for All Students in Academic Year 2018-2019*

Performance Indicator	District A	California
Graduation Rate	91.9%	85.9%
ELA	37.4 points above standard	2.5 points below standard
Math	6 points above standard	33.5 points below standard

*Note.* (California Department of Education, 2021a).

According to the 2018-2019 data from the California School Dashboard, District A outperformed the state in graduation rate and in ELA and math performance. District A graduated 6% more of their students than California as a whole. District A averaged 37.4 points above standard in ELA as compared with California's 2.5 points below standard, a difference of 39.9 points. District A scored 6 points above standard in Math while California scored 33.5 points below standard, a difference of 39.5 points. While high-performing when compared with state data, a closer look revealed large achievement disparities within District A between racial/ethnic groups, by socioeconomics, and by language needs in graduation rates and academic achievement in ELA and math.

**Table 3. 1***District A Enrollment and Performance Data for Academic Year 2018-2019*

Student Groups	Enrollment	Graduation Rate	ELA	Math
All	27,992	91.9%	37.4 points above standard	6 points above standard
Socioeconomically Disadvantaged	28.9%	88.5%	7.2 points above standard	26.1 points below standard
English Learners	5.7%	73%	8.5 points below standard	37.6 points below standard
White	42.5%	93.1%	47.5 points above standard	17.9 points above standard
Hispanic or Latino	33.7%	89.2%	16.8 points above standard	17.9 points below standard
Two or More Races	10.2%	94.3%	46.8 points above standard	13.1 points above standard
Filipino	4.9%	94.9%	68 points above standard	41.8 points above standard
Asian	4.3%	95.6%	72.2 points above standard	62.2 points above standard
African American	3.5%	88.2%	6.4 points above standard	40.9 points below standard
American Indian	0.7%	94.4%	3.1 points below standard	42.9 points below standard
Pacific Islander	0.3%	*	16.4 points above standard	26.6 points below standard

*Note.* \*No performance data available or data not displayed to protect student privacy.

(California Department of Education, 2021a).

According to data from the California School Dashboard (California Department of Education, 2021a), there were disparities between racial/ethnic groups in graduation rates and academic achievement in ELA and math. The two largest racial/ethnic groups were White (42.5% of enrollment) and Hispanic/Latino (33.7% of enrollment). White students scored 47.5 points above standard in ELA while Hispanic/Latino students scored 16.8 points above standard, a disparity of 30.7 points. White students scored 17.9 points above standard in Math while

Hispanic/Latino students scored 17.9 points below standard, a disparity of 35.8 points. Their graduation rate differed by 3.9%. The largest disparities were between the highest scoring racial/ethnic group, Asian students, and the lowest scoring group, American Indian students. The Asian group scored 72.2 points above standard for ELA while the American Indian group scored 3.1 points below standard, a difference of 75.3 points. The Asian group scored 62.2 points above standard for Math while the American Indian group scored 42.9 points below standard, a difference of 105.1 points. Their graduation rate differed by 1.2%

District A also exhibited racial disparity between White students and African American students. White students scored 47.5 points in ELA above standard while African American students scored 6.4 points above standard, a difference of 41.1 points. White students scored 17.9 points above standard in Math and African American students scored 40.9 points below standard, a difference of 58.8 points. Their graduation rate differed by 4.9%.

There were also achievement disparities within District A by socioeconomics and by language needs in graduation rates and academic achievement in ELA and math. Socioeconomically disadvantaged students had a graduation rate of 88.5%, 3.4% less than all students, while EL students had a graduation rate of 73%, 18.9% less than all students. Socioeconomically disadvantaged students scored 7.2 points above standard in ELA and 26.1 points below standard in Math. When compared with all students, socioeconomically disadvantaged students scored 30.2 points less in ELA and 32.1 points less in Math. EL students scored 8.5 points below standard in ELA and 37.6 points below standard in Math, a difference of 45.9 points in ELA and 43.6 points in Math when compared with all students.

**Table 4. 1**

*Comparing Graduation Rate, ELA, and Math Data Across Different Demographics Group in District A 2018-2019*

Comparison Groups	Difference in Graduation Rate	Difference in ELA	Difference in Math
English Learners vs. All Students	18.9%	45.9 points	43.6 points
Socioeconomically Disadvantaged vs. All Students	3.4%	30.2 points	32.1 points
Hispanic/Latino vs. White Students	3.9%	30.7 points	35.8 points
African American vs. White Students	4.9%	41.1 points	58.8 points
Asians vs. American Indian Students	1.2%	75.3 points	105.1 points

*Note.* (California Department of Education, 2021a).

Taken as a whole, District A was a suburban school district undergoing a racial/ethnic demographics shift and becoming a more diverse school district. Nonetheless, it was disproportionately White as compared with the surrounding county. District A performed better than California in graduation rates and in ELA and math achievement, but also exhibited racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and linguistic disparities.

### **District B**

Similar to District A, District B was a disproportionately White, suburban school district undergoing demographics shift. It was a high-performing school district when compared to the state average and, like District A, it exhibited racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and linguistic disparities in academic achievement. District B was a TK-12 school district in California. In the academic year 2019-2020, District B had an enrollment of 25,528 students. District B had



48.7% of students identified as socioeconomically disadvantaged, and 23.5% of students identified as English learners (California Department of Education, 2021a). Of the English learners, the primary languages were Armenian (59.24% of ELs), Spanish (19.76%), Korean (6.88%), Russian (2.95%), and Tagalog (2.44%) (California Department of Education, n.d.)

District B was also a racially/ethnically diverse school district with three or more groups making up 10% or more of enrollment (Ayscue, 2016). Enrollment consisted of 58.9% White students, 20.3% Latino/Hispanic, 11.4% Asian students, 4.8% Filipino students, 3.2% of students identifying with two or more racial categories, 1.2% African American students, with the rest of enrollment consisting of students identified as American Indian or Pacific Islander (California Department of Education, 2021a).

**Table 5. 1**

*Comparing Change in District B Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity from 2014-2015 to 2019-2020*

Student Groups	2014-2015 Enrollment	2019-2020 Enrollment	Change
All	26,168	25,528	-640
White	55.0%	58.9%	+3.9%
Hispanic or Latino	23.1%	20.3%	-2.8%
Asian	11.9%	11.4%	-0.5%
Filipino	6.4%	4.8%	-1.6%
Two or More Races	2.1%	3.2%	+1.1%
African American	1.3%	1.2%	-0.1%
American Indian	0.2%	0.1%	-0.1%
Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.1%	No change

*Note.* (California Department of Education, 2021a).

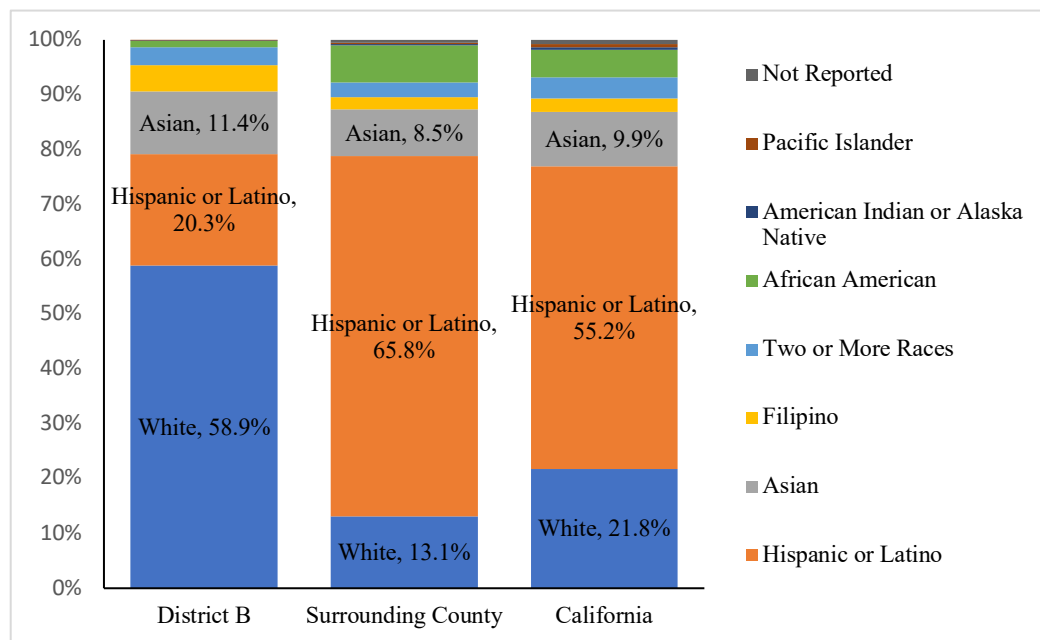
Enrollment data from academic year 2014-2015 as compared to 2019-2020 indicated a shift in racial and ethnic make-up in District B, becoming more White-dominant (California Department of Education, 2021a). White students increased by 3.9%, with an accompanying loss

in Hispanic/Latino (2.8% decrease), Filipino (1.6%), Asian (0.5%), African American (0.1%), and American Indian students (0.1%). Enrollment of students identifying with two or more races increased by 1.1%.

The increase in enrollment of White students might be due to an increase in Armenian immigration. In 2014-2015, Armenian-speaking students accounted for 52.79% of ELs in District B with a total enrollment of 3,309 (California Department of Education, 2021a). By 2018-2019, Armenian-speaking students accounted for 59.24% of ELs with a total enrollment of 3,520 students.

**Figure 2. 1**

*Comparing District B, County, and California Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity in 2019-2020*



*Note.* (California Department of Education, n.d.).

Enrollment data also indicated that District B was disproportionately White as compared with the surrounding county (California Department of Education, 2021a). In 2019-2020, White students made up 58.9% of district enrollment as compared with 13.1% of enrollment throughout the surrounding county, a difference of 44.8%. Hispanic or Latino students made up 20.3% of district enrollment as compared with 65.8% of enrollment throughout the surrounding county, a difference of 45.5%. Asian students made up 11.4% of district enrollment as compared with 8.5% countywide, Filipino students made up 4.8% of district enrollment as compared with 2.3% of countywide enrollment, and African American students made up 1.2% of district enrollment as compared with 6.8% of countywide enrollment.

**Table 6. 1***Performance Data for All Students in Academic Year 2018-2019*

	District B	California
Graduation Rate	88.4%	85.9%
ELA	28.2 points above standard	2.5 points below standard
Math	4.6 points above standard	33.5 points below standard

*Note.* (California Department of Education, 2021a).

Measurements for academic achievement in the California School Dashboard showed that District B outperformed the state average in graduation rate and in ELA and math. In 2018-2019, District B graduated 88.4% of all students while California graduated 85.9% of all students (California Department of Education, 2021a). District B scored 28.2 points above standard in ELA compared with the state's 2.5 points below standard, outperforming the state by 30.7 points. District B also scored 4.6 points above standard in math compared with the state's 33.5 points below standard, outperforming the state by 38.1 points.

**Table 7. 1***District B Enrollment and Performance Data for Academic Year 2018-2019*

Student Groups	Enrollment	Graduation Rate	ELA	Math
All	25,789	88.4%	28.2 points above standard	4.6 points above standard
Socioeconomically Disadvantaged	51.9%	85.6%	0.6 points above standard	24.3 points below standard
Students with Disabilities	9.3%	74.6%	66.1 points below standard	98.2 points below standard
English Learners	23%	70.5%	8.9 points below standard	22.6 points below standard
White	58.4%	86.8%	23.4 points	2.7 points

			above standard	above standard
Hispanic	20.5%	86.7%	2.2 points above standard	39.7 points below standard
Asian	11.6%	95.8%	80.6 points above standard	83.5 points above standard
Filipino	5.2%	93.7%	52.7 points above standard	21.5 points above standard
Two or More Races	2.9%	94.7%	78.8 points above standard	51.7 points above standard
African American	1.1%	83.3%	1.5 points below standard	48.2 points below standard
American Indian	0.2%	*	31.2 points above standard	26.8 points above standard
Pacific Islander	0.1%	*	2.6 points below standard	17.8 points below standard

*Note.* \*No performance color available or data not displayed to protect student privacy.

(California Department of Education, 2021a).

District B demonstrated racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and linguistic disparities in ELA and Math according to the 2018-2019 data from the California School Dashboard (California Department of Education, 2021a). The two largest racial/ethnic groups were White (58.4% of enrollment) and Hispanic or Latino (20.5% of enrollment). District B achieved parity between White students and Latino students in graduation rate, though not in ELA and math. The two student groups had nearly identical graduation rates, 86.8% and 86.7% respectively. White students scored 23.4 points above standard in ELA while Latino students scored 2.2 points above standard, a disparity of 21.2 points. White students scored 2.7 points above standard in math while Latino students scored 39.7 points below standard, a disparity of 42.4 points.

**Table 8. 1**

*Comparing Graduation Rate, ELA, and Math Data Across Different Demographics Group in District B for Academic Year 2018-2019*

Comparison Groups	Difference in Graduation Rate	Difference in ELA	Difference in Math
English Learners vs. All Students	17.9%	37.1 points	27.2 points
Socioeconomically Disadvantaged vs. All Students	2.8%	27.6 points	28.9 points
Hispanic/Latino vs. White Students	0.1%	21.2 points	42.4 points
African American vs. White Students	3.5%	24.9 points	50.9 points

*Note.* (California Department of Education, 2021a).

The greatest disparity in District B was in the graduation rate when comparing ELs to all students, a difference of 17.9%. English learners also scored 37.1 points less than all students in ELA and 27.2 points less than all students in math. Socioeconomically disadvantaged students also had a lower graduation rate when compared with all students, though to a lesser degree than EL students. District B graduated 2.8% fewer socioeconomically disadvantaged students than all students. Socioeconomically disadvantaged students scored 27.6 points less than all students in ELA and 28.9 points less than all students in math.

District B also exhibited racial disparity between White students and African American students. In ELA, White students scored 23.4 points above standard while African American students scored 1.5 points below standard, a difference of 24.9 points. In math, White students scored 2.7 points above standard and African American students scored 48.2 points below standard, a difference of 50.9 points. District B graduated 3.5% less African American students than White students.

District B was a suburban school district undergoing a racial/ethnic demographics shift and becoming a more White-dominated school district nestled inside of a Latino-majority county. Increasing enrollment of White students might be due to an influx of Armenian-speaking English learners, an indication of increasing immigration. District B exhibited racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and linguistic disparities in graduation rates and academic performance.

The description of District A and District B provided the context for the study and illustrated the phenomenon that suburban elementary principals experienced of serving in disproportionately White-dominated school districts undergoing demographics shift. Both suburban school districts were high-performing and yet both also exhibited racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and linguistic disparities in student academic achievement. The disparities in student achievement indicate educational equity issues that the suburban principals must address. This study was designed to explore the beliefs and practices of school principals through the lens of race and racism in order to disrupt educational inequities and to ensure an equitable, inclusive, and excellent education for all students. How suburban elementary school leaders respond to and address the equity issues at their schools has implications for the educational opportunities that they provide to historically oppressed and marginalized students.

### **Description of Participants**

Principal survey responses were collected in the fall of 2020. There were a total of twelve valid responses, four from District A and eight from District B. District A had 17 elementary schools, thus 24% of elementary schools were represented in the sample. District B had 21 elementary schools, thus 38% were represented in the sample. However, with only four and twelve valid responses respectively, there were not enough responses to analyze the data by comparing the two districts. Instead, the unit of analysis was the principals.

The respondents were overwhelmingly female, White, post-graduate, high-income earners. Eleven out of 12 principals were female. Six were age 40 to 49, six were age 50-59 with an average of 8.9 years of experience as a principal. Every respondent had a household income over \$101,001 ( $n=12$ ) while some respondent had a household income over \$200,001 ( $n=4$ ). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median household income in California in 2019 dollars was \$75,235. Fifty percent of respondents ( $n=6$ ) considered themselves a first-generation college graduate. Ten out of 12 held a master's degree and 2 respondents held a doctorate degree. Most respondents identified as White ( $n=8$ ), three identified as Latino, and one identified as Asian/Pacific Islander. According to the 2019 data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the race/ethnicity make-up of California was 36.5% White, 39.4% Latino, and 15.5% Asian/Pacific Islander.

To help make sense of the data, four principals are highlighted and introduced in narrative form as part of the multiple-case study. The multiple-case study method was used to provide an in-depth examination of principals' conceptualizations and responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). They were highlighted because their narratives were typical of similar respondents, as was the case with Principal F.J., or represented unique outliers. Principal L.N. was the only representative of the Asian group in the sample and Principals F.J. and D.Z. had stories that provided interesting insights into the phenomenon of principals grappling with diversity and equity at the school level. The principals were randomly assigned initials unrelated to their names to maintain anonymity. Their stories will be shared in the qualitative analysis section in Chapter 4 as part of the multiple-case study.

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

Quantitative data analysis and qualitative findings were organized by research questions.



The survey contained eleven quantitative questions, which included 8 Likert-type scale questions, and 5 qualitative, open-ended questions. For the Likert-type scale questions, a scale of 1-7 was used where 1 represented “Not at all” and 7 represented “Absolutely”. The responses were analyzed by comparing the means of each question. Where appropriate, Pearson’s linear correlation was used to determine the strength of the correlation between different variables. The survey included five open-ended questions that captured qualitative responses. The survey also included one additional open-ended question about the respondents’ schools’ current student demographics. The researcher used critical discourse analysis (CDA) and case study to examine respondents’ written responses. CDA was used to interpret principal’s responses to reveal their conceptualizations behind their words (van Dijk, 1993).

### **Research Question 1: Principals’ Conceptualizations**

Qualitative analysis was used on two open-ended questions to address the research question: How do elementary principals in suburban public schools conceptualize increasing racial, ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic diversity within their schools? The responses were analyzed using open coding and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine language that might reinforce or reproduce structural systems of dominance, discrimination, power and control (Diem et al., 2016; van Dijk, 1993). Diem et al. (2016) used CDA as a way to understand conceptualizations of demographic changes through language.

### ***Conceptualizations of Demographics***

The survey included one open-ended question about the respondents’ schools’ current student demographics: What is your school’s current student demographics? This question was originally intended to provide a space for respondents to share the demographics context of their schools. It was not initially intended to capture respondents’ conceptualizations of racial, ethnic,

cultural, and/or linguistic diversity. However, the open-ended nature of the question allowed for written responses that provided insight into principals' conceptualizations.

**Table 9. 1**

*Demographics Data Principals Chose to Share (n=12)*

	Count
Shared racial/ethnic data	6
Shared socioeconomic data	5
Shared English language learner status	5

*Note.*  $n = 12$ ; \*Responses written in by respondents. Data totals more than the number of respondents as respondents may share more than one type of demographics data.

Six respondents shared specific racial/ethnic demographics such as “45% White, 28% Hispanic, 13% Two or More Races, 11% Asian, 2% Black, and less than 1% American Indian and Hawaiian”. Five respondents shared socioeconomic data such as “66% Free and Reduced Lunch”. Five respondents shared English learner (EL) status such as “more that 50% English Learners”. Five respondents shared more than one type of data such as “550 students TK - 6th grade 60 students English Learners 15% low SES”.

Notably, five principals shared only racial/ethnic data while three principals shared both socioeconomic and EL data, but did not share racial/ethnic data. One respondent wrote, “Beautiful blend! We have a wonderful diverse campus” and another wrote, “We are a melting pot. I love that we are the overflow school which allows us to have a diverse population”. Which data were shared and which was not shared provided an indication of how principals conceptualized student diversity and added weight to the theme of colormuteness.

### ***Conceptualizations of Challenges***

The survey included an open-ended question about the respondents' beliefs about what they considered challenges that might stem from racial, cultural, ethnic, and/or linguistic diversity. Open coding was used to find emergent themes and CDA was used to analyze the written responses.

Themes that emerged included deficit perspective and, in contrast to the deficit perspective, system-thinking. Several responses indicated a growing understanding of the challenges as a systemic issue that could be addressed as a school. Alongside system-thinking, another theme emerged: ownership, or lack of ownership, of responsibility.

**Table 10. 1**

*Participant Responses to Beliefs About Issues or Challenges Stemming from Racial, Cultural, Ethnic, and Linguistic Diversity (n=12). (D) Deficit Perspective, (S) Understand Issue as Systemic (P) Possible Understanding of Issue as Systemic, (O) Ownership of Responsibility, (NO) Not Responsible,*

Codes	Sample Response
O, S	My school is full or hard-working, student-centered staff who care about students. We are a high-performing school. Getting staff members to admit they have biases and that they may be negatively impacting students as a result of those biases is a challenge. We also have reluctant parent participation from diverse families. The same families feel included and the need to participate while others consistently are not engaged. We have not found a way to reach all our families yet.
P, NO	Few students of color (Hispanic, African American); Dual language program; lack of urgency on the part of staff
D, P, NO	Lack of parent participation Students insulting other students due to their race, cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity Lack of conversations on this topic with staff and students
NO	Lack of parent participation due to work. Many of my parents work long hours. We provide translation for our parents at all meetings.

D, P, NO	parent participation, staff/teacher understanding/recognition of their impact on student perspectives/experiences related to diversity.
D, NO	Parent Participation Cultural beliefs and experiences of majority of students
D, NO	Insensitive comments because the students don't understand how offensive they are (comes from the lack of knowledge)
D, NO	Language barriers and groups that prefer to self isolate.
D, NO	Social interactions outside of the school setting.
D, *	Parent participation
O, S	I believe as an elementary school, we are the foundation to the students' learning. 96 percent of my teachers are on board and willing to implement morning meetings to help address the topics above. It's the 4 percent that administration has to go toe to toe with to change their mindsets it's exhausting but so worth it.
*	We are a school bound by traditions - and often times traditions do not reflect racial, cultural, ethnic, linguistic diversity

*Note.* \*Did not provide enough data to code.

Deficit perspective, characterized as negative perspective of a group and exculpate systems that perpetuate inequity (Valencia, 2010), was identified in 7 responses. One principal wrote that the challenges were “Language barriers and groups that prefer to self isolate.” Another principal wrote that “Social interactions outside of the school setting” were the challenges that stem from racial, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity.

Six respondents believed that parent participation was a challenge stemming from diversity. Believing that parent participation was a challenge was identified as a deficit perspective during open coding. However, two respondents expanded further in their written responses. One respondent noted that lack of parent participation was due to work as many parents worked long hours. Another respondent explicitly wrote that “We have not found a way

to reach all our families yet”, indicating a sense of responsibility for creating solutions to reach all families.

An emergent theme was the ownership of responsibility for the challenges or issues identified as stemming from racial, ethnic, cultural, or linguistic diversity. As discussed above, one principal took full responsibility for reaching out to families in order to increase parent participation. Three respondents placed the responsibility for the challenges or issues on the teachers or staff. Responses included “lack of urgency on the part of staff”, “lack of conversations on this topic with staff and students”, and “staff/teacher understanding/recognition of their impact on student perspectives/experiences related to diversity”. While these respondents did not take ownership of responsibility, their responses indicated a growing understanding that some challenges were systemic issues that could be addressed as a school.

### ***Conceptualizations of Racial Conflicts***

One open-ended question was designed to capture how respondents conceptualize racial conflicts. The question prompted respondents to tell stories to elicit deeper beliefs. The open-ended question was: During your career as an administrator, can you recall a situation or incident in the past that may have been racially charged? If so, what happened? If that happened today, how would you react?

This question elicited the most thoughtful responses as it provided 608 words to analyze across 12 respondents. Other open-ended questions provided 301 words, 282 words, 253 words, and 135 words each. This indicated that respondents were most invested in sharing stories about racially-charged incidents.

**Table 11. 1**

*Participant Responses to Reacting to Racially Charged Incident (n=12). (C) Change in Response, (NC) No Change in Response, (S) Systemic Change, (P) Racial Conflict as Personal Issue*

Codes	Sample Response
C, S	Yes, we had a student that was experiencing severe behavioral episodes. The student was emotionally disturbed but there was a definite bias against him because he was black. There were many assumptions about his life, his parents, and his motivations as a result of the color of his skin. I believe the fear that people associated with him was a result of bias, beyond the behaviors he was exhibiting. If this happened today, I would want to have a specific, targeted discussion about his behaviors, his identified disabilities, and bias. I would hope to use his situation as a platform for discussion but I know this would be incredibly challenging. There are confidentiality issues and more importantly, so much emotion in moments like these. With the staff as emotionally charged as they were in that moment, I would likely go the route of conscious conversations with specific staff members to spur on-going conversations within teams and smaller cohorts of staff members about the situation, its factual causes, misplaced bias, and attempt to debunk rumors or myths to create a better understanding and acceptance of the student.
C, S	Yes. Student's family felt the teacher was discriminating against them (they were not from the same ethnic, cultural background). The same way - be fair, honest and provide opportunities for respectful discourse between the parties; also address perceived or explicit bias; provide PD for all staff. Provide opportunities for students to engage in circles/class discussions, voice. Provide opportunities for parents to be engaged in learning in meaningful ways.
C, P	A comment was made in terms of me being Latina and having a young child but yet was able to make it in life. I was an Assistant Principal at that time. At that moment, I didn't know how to react. It was the first day of me meeting this male teacher. If it happened today, I would hope that I could let them know that was racially charged.
C, P	Yes, disagreements among students. I would use RJ practices today to mend the relationship between students
C, P	Yes, I remember where a parent of a majority population expressed that we need to see the differences as much as the similarities in

	cultural approaches. AT that time, I did not accept that, but now I have learned that we do need to see how culture may play a role in how we view or react to different situations (even if we are not aware of it).
NC, P	The situations I've encountered have been racial, but I have been able to remain calm so as not to make it worse.
NC, P	Absolutely. Two groups of students from different cultures got into a horrible fight. I would not change my reaction. I had built deep connections with these kids and was able to talk them through. Relationships are the key!
NC, P	Yes, there has twice been altercations between families in our school parking lot. There was a disagreement about a traffic incident and one of the involved parties began using racially charged statements while blaming the other driver. My role was to de-escalate the situation and to clear the area to prevent it from engaging more onlookers. I believe that if it happened today I would do the same.
NC, P	Yes It was complicated. Bottomline - I think actions were misunderstood. It was a good lesson on reviewing practices to ensure that no one feels left out.
*, P	Yes, I had a parent accuse a teacher of a racially charged statement. Teacher decided that it was not worth it and put in her retirement paperwork and team had an IEP meeting to address concerns. Child is no longer with us.
**	None
**	Not at the moment

*Note.* \*Did not provide enough data to determine. \*\*Respondent did not share a racial incident.

### ***React Different***

Out of 12 respondents, five respondents explicitly stated how their reactions would be different if the racially charged incident occurred again, indicating a change in perspective or understanding of racially charged conflicts. Four respondents also explicitly stated that their reaction or response would not change.

One respondent detailed how their reaction would be different:

“If this happened today, I would want to have a specific, targeted discussion about his behaviors, his identified disabilities, and bias. I would hope to use his situation as a platform for discussion but I know this would be incredibly challenging. There are confidentiality issues and

more importantly, so much emotion in moments like these. With the staff as emotionally charged as they were in that moment, I would likely go the route of conscious conversations with specific staff members to spur on-going conversations within teams and smaller cohorts of staff members about the situation, its factual causes, misplaced bias, and attempt to debunk rumors or myths to create a better understanding and acceptance of the student.”

In contrast, one respondent wrote, “It was complicated. Bottomline - I think actions were misunderstood. It was a good lesson on reviewing practices to ensure that no one feels left out.” Another wrote, “My role was to de-escalate the situation and to clear the area to prevent it from engaging more onlookers. I believe that if it happened today I would do the same.”

### ***Racism as a Systemic Issue or a Personal Issue***

Two respondents stated that they would work with the staff to address the racial conflict or provide professional development for the staff as well as opportunities for students and parents. One respondent indicated a desire to “spur on-going conversations” and the other indicated a desire to “provide PD for all staff” and also “opportunities for parents to be engaged in learning in meaningful ways.” Addressing the racial conflict issue at a staff and parent-group level indicated a conceptualization of racism as a systemic issue.

Eight respondents indicated that they conceptualized racism as a personal issue to be addressed case-by-case, person-by person. One respondent stated “I had built deep connections with these kids and was able to talk them through. Relationships are the key!” Another wrote “I would use RJ practices today to mend the relationship between students.” Another respondent wrote that “It was a good lesson on reviewing practices to ensure that no one feels left out.”

### **Research Questions 2 and 3: Principals’ Responses and Racially Equitable Practices**

Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to address the research questions:



- How do elementary principals respond to increasing racial, ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic diversity in their practices?
- What practices do principals engage in that support racially equitable education for all students?

Both research questions were addressed in this section as principal's responses and whether practices support racially equitable education were intertwined in the design of the survey questions. In this part of the study, principals' responses and practices were represented in part by the schools' policies, programs, and efforts.

The survey contained two multiple selection questions to capture data on schools' current policies, programs, and efforts that support diversity and/or address inequity issues and respondents' possible future policies, programs, and efforts. Multiple selection questions allowed respondents to "check all that applies" as well as provided space for respondents to include other efforts outside of the checklist.

**Table 12. 1***Policies, Programs, and Efforts Currently in Place (n=12)*

	Count
Restorative justice or alternative to suspensions	11
Culturally responsive teaching/Culturally relevant pedagogy	9
Heterogeneous grouping during class formation	8
Teaching staff demographics that reflect student demographics	5
Consistent conversations about race	4
Other*:	
Staff development on cultural proficiency	1
Staff development on equity, access, and inclusion	1

*Note.*  $n = 12$ ; \*Responses written in by respondents. Data were organized from most prevalent policy, program, or effort to least prevalent.

Data showed that the most prevalent program was Restorative Justice (RJ) or other alternative to suspension at 11 out of 12 schools. Culturally responsive teaching and/or culturally relevant pedagogy was the second most prevalent program at 9 out of 12 schools. Eight out of 12 respondents reported that class formation was heterogeneous. Less than half (5 out of 12) respondents indicated that their teaching staff demographics reflected student demographics. Four out of 12 respondents reported that their schools held consistent conversations about race. Other policies and efforts included staff development on cultural proficiency and equity, access, and inclusion.

**Table 13. 1***Policies, Programs, and Efforts Under Consideration to Address Systemic Racism and Inequity**(n=12)*

	Count
Staff development on culturally responsive teaching and/or culturally relevant pedagogy	12
Engage all staff in examination of current school practices through the lens of equity for all	12
Consistent conversation about race	10
Staff development on restorative justice or other alternative to suspensions	8

*Note.*  $n = 12$ ; \*Responses written in by respondents. Data were organized from most prevalent policy, program, or effort to least prevalent.

One multiple selection question was: Consider that recent racial protests have brought national attention to systemic racism and inequity, what are some things you will do as a principal or might do differently? This question was designed to capture data on whether respondents were considering changes in policies, programs, and efforts. Data indicated that there were changes between current policies, programs, and efforts compared with possible, future policies, programs, and efforts.

Focus on culturally responsive teaching/and or culturally relevant pedagogy increased from 9 to 12 respondents. Focus on consistent conversations about race increased from 4 to 10 respondents. Focus on restorative justice or other alternatives to suspensions decreased from 11 to 8 respondents. All respondents (12 out of 12) indicated they might or would implement a policy of engaging all staff in examination of current school practices through the lens of equity. Though this policy was not explicitly in the checklist of current policies, programs, and efforts,

two respondents wrote that they currently held staff development on equity, access, and inclusion and on cultural proficiency.

***Programs to Address Diversity and Inequity***

The question, “What are some specific programs or protocols that you use to address issues at your school that stem from racial, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity and/or inequity?” expanded on the quantitative question “What are some policies, programs, and efforts your school currently have in place that support diversity, either racially, culturally, ethnically, and/or linguistically? Check all that applies.” Qualitative responses were coded to indicate the type of programs or practices used. The codes were then counted and summarized in Table 11. 1

**Table 14. 1***Participant Responses to Programs or Protocols Used to Address Diversity and/or Inequity**(n=12). (M) State/District Mandated Programs, (DC) Diversity/Culture Clubs or Celebrations,**(A) Anti-bias Curriculum or Initiative, (SEL) Social-emotional Learning Program (CC)**Conscious Conversations, (PD) Staff professional development*

Codes	Sample Response
M, PD, SEL	We began the PBIS process last school year and are focusing on restorative practices as alternatives to suspension. We are working with teachers of EL clusters in developing their capacity and understanding of EL standards and how to focus instruction in this area, we have had teacher representatives participate in district Cultural Proficiency training. We are mindful of images that we share in newsletters as well as considering equity in terms of student access to learning especially during this time of on-campus school closure. Also Sanford Harmony SEL materials.
CC, *	With staff, I am working on knowledge and understanding. We need to understand the issues so that we can address them. I also make conscious decisions to talk to all staff members about equity, access, and inclusion as it relates to them as individuals and staff members on our campus. With students, I always advocate for an understanding of the whole situation. We do not administer discipline or responses to incidents based on a handbook or required responses. We look at each situation and respond based on the student involved and history of that student. With families, I continue to seek engagement and develop opportunities for families to build connections with the school.
M	We use our morning meeting platform to address these issues
M, SEL	Community building and restorative practices Mindfulness Activities PBIS ( Positive behavior support and intervention)
M, AB, CC	We use our community circles, anti-bias curriculum, and we use literature stories and or scenarios that describe situations so that we can start the conversations.
M, DC	We provide translations, we have celebrations and assemblies that promote diversity and celebrating our cultural background.
M	Restorative Justice, PBIS
M	Stakeholder meetings, family events, restorative practices, student-led circles.

M, PD	Restorative Practices - Circles – training for all teachers
DC	Armenian Parent Club, Korean Parent Club, Inclusion committee.
None	No programs
None	Still working on this

*Note.* \*Response included complex elements not coded. \*\*Respondent did not share a racial incident.

The most commonly used programs or protocols to address diversity and/or inequity issues were state or district mandated programs such as Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) programs, Restorative Justice Practices (RJ) or alternatives to suspensions, or stakeholder meetings. Two respondents indicated that they used culture clubs or culture celebrations and two respondents indicated that they used social-emotional learning programs to address diversity and inequity. Two respondents used staff professional development. Two indicated the use of conversations to address diversity and/or inequity. One respondent wrote, “I also make conscious decisions to talk to all staff members about equity, access, and inclusion as it relates to them as individuals and staff members on our campus.” Another used stories to initiate conversations, though it was unclear if the conversations were with students or with staff. One respondent explicitly noted the use of anti-bias curriculum to address diversity and inequity issues. One respondent wrote “No programs” in response while another wrote that they were “Still working on this”.

**Table 15. 1**

*Types of Programs or Protocols Used to Address Diversity and/or Inequity (n=12)*

	Count
State/District Mandated Programs	9
Diversity/Culture Clubs or Committees	2
Social-emotional Learning Program	2
Staff professional development	2
Consistent Conversations about Race	2
Anti-bias Curriculum or Initiative	1
*None	2

*Note.*  $n = 12$ ; \*No program was shared. Data totals more than the number of respondents as respondents may share more than one type of programs or protocols.

#### **Research Question 4: Principals' Preparedness**

A Likert-type scale was used to gather quantitative data to address the question: To what extent do different factors, such as principal preparation programs, district support, and/or life experiences, background, and informal learning experiences, help principals feel prepared to address issues of racial, ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic diversity? A scale of 1-7 was used where 1 represented "Not at all" and 7 represented "Absolutely". The responses were analyzed by comparing the means of each question.

**Table 16. 1***Principals' Perceptions of Being Prepared*

Principal Responses <i>n</i> =12	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
How would you rate your own personal preparedness in addressing racial, cultural, ethnic, and/or linguistic diversity and inequity issues at your school?	4.58	2.08
How would you rate your district's support in preparing you to address racial, cultural, ethnic, and/or linguistic diversity and inequity issues at your school?	4.58	3.35
How would you rate your administrative preparation program in preparing you to address racial, cultural, ethnic, and/or linguistic diversity and inequity issues at your school?	3.41	2.44
How would you rate other factors, such as life experiences, your background, or informal learning experiences, in preparing you to address racial, cultural, ethnic, and/or linguistic diversity and inequity issues at your school?	5.25	1.65

The results demonstrated that respondents rated their administrative preparation program lowest in preparing principals to address racial, cultural, ethnic, and/or linguistic diversity and inequity issues at their school ( $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = 2.44$ ). Respondents rated other factors, such as life experiences, background, or learning experiences, highest at preparing them to address diversity and inequity issues ( $M = 5.25$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ ). Respondents rated their school district's support in preparing them ( $M = 4.58$ ,  $SD = 3.35$ ) the same as their self-perception of being prepared ( $M = 4.58$ ,  $SD = 2.08$ ) to address diversity and inequity issues.

Pearson's linear correlation was used to determine the strength of the correlation between respondent's self-perception of being prepared to support diversity efforts and address inequity compared to how respondents rated their administrative preparation. The results rejected the null hypothesis and demonstrated there was a statistically significant correlation.



**Table 17. 1**

*Pearson's Linear Correlation, Self-Perception of Preparedness Compared to Administrative Preparation (n=12)*

	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	Significant Result
Administrative preparation program vs. Personal preparedness	0.889	**	Yes
District support vs. Personal preparedness	0.822	<.001*	Yes
Other factors vs. Personal preparedness	0.794	<.002*	Yes

*Note.*  $n = 12$ ; \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .0001$ .

Data were organized from the most statistically significant to the least statistically significant. The most statistically significant variable, with also the highest level of strength, was administrative preparation program,  $r(12) = 0.889$ ,  $p < .0001$ . There was a statistically significant difference and strong, positive correlation between respondents' self-perception of preparedness and district support in preparing principals to support diversity and address inequity issues,  $r(12) = .822$ ,  $p < .001$ . There was also a statistical significance and strong, positive correlation between respondents' self-perception of preparedness and other factors, such as life experiences, principal's background, or informal learning, in preparing principals  $r(12) = .794$ ,  $p < .002$ .

The results demonstrated that while respondents rated their administrative preparation program lowest in preparing them to address racial, cultural, ethnic, and/or linguistic diversity and inequity issues at their school ( $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = 2.44$ ), administrative preparation programs was the most statistically significant variable,  $r(12) = 0.889$ ,  $p < .0001$ , that positively correlated with respondents' self-perception of preparedness. Conversely, while respondents rated other factors, such as life experiences, background, or learning experiences, highest at preparing them

to address diversity and inequity issues ( $M=5.25$ ,  $SD=1.65$ ), they were the least statistically significant variable,  $r(12) = .794$ ,  $p < .002$ , that positively correlated with respondents' self-perception of preparedness.

Every principal indicated that they received some form of formal trainings on how to address racial, cultural, ethnic, and/or linguistic diversity and inequity. Respondents were asked to select all that applied in the question: Where did you receive formal training, if any, on how to address racial, cultural, ethnic, and/or linguistic diversity and inequity as an educational leader? There were five options, including university professional preparation program, administrative credential examination, district-provided professional development, other (please specify), and no formal training. Out of 12 responses, 7 selected district-provided professional development, 4 selected university professional preparation program, and one respondent indicated that they sought out their own trainings.

When asked in an open-ended question what other preparations, trainings, or life experiences might have supported them in addressing diversity and equity, responses were coded into two distinct categories, formal professional trainings or experiences and life experiences. Formal experiences appeared 9 times while life experiences appeared 8 times. Life experiences included "living in different countries", having "diverse friends", "extensive reading", and having family background with experiences of "intolerance first hand". Though the open-ended question was designed to capture other preparations, trainings, and experiences excluding district-provided professional development, formal experiences coded included formal professional development that the school districts provided such as on implicit-bias trainings and Restorative Justice. Other formal experiences included participation in Teach for America program, serving on the "district cultural proficiency team", and a "Jesuit education focused on

equity and service”. Qualitative responses reinforced quantitative results indicating that formal trainings were more important than informal life experiences in preparing principals to support racial, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity and address equity issues.

### **Correlation Between Principal’s Preparedness and Responses**

Additionally, quantitative analysis was used to find that principal’s self-perception of being prepared to support diversity and to address inequity issues was positively and strongly correlated with schools’ responses to racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity and inequity issues. This analysis indirectly addressed two of the research questions:

- How do elementary principals respond to increasing racial, ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic diversity in their practices?
- To what extent do different factors, such as principal preparation programs, district support, and/or life experiences, background, and informal learning experiences, help principals feel prepared to address issues of racial, ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic diversity?

Respondents rated their school’s current policies, programs, and efforts in supporting diversity and efforts in addressing inequity using a Likert-type scale where 1 represented “Not at all” and 7 represented “Absolutely”. The responses were analyzed by comparing the means of each question.

**Table 18. 1***Principals' Perceptions of School's Responses*

Principal Responses <i>n</i> =12	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
How would you rate your own personal preparedness in addressing racial, cultural, ethnic, and/or linguistic diversity and inequity issues at your school?	4.58	2.08
How would you rate your school's current policies, programs, and efforts in supporting diversity, either racially, culturally, ethnically, and/or linguistically?	4.33	2.06
How would you rate your school's current policies, programs, and efforts in addressing inequity?	4.16	2.15

Respondents rated their school's current policies, programs, and efforts to support diversity ( $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = 2.06$ ) similarly to their school's current efforts in addressing inequity ( $M=4.16$ ,  $SD=2.15$ ). Respondents rated their school's response to diversity and inequity slightly less than their self-perception of being prepared ( $M=4.58$ ,  $SD=2.08$ ) to address diversity and inequity issues.

**Table 19. 1**

*Pearson's Linear Correlation, Self-Perception of Personal Preparedness Compared to Ratings for School's Policies, Programs, and Efforts (*n*=12)*

	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	Significant Result
School's policies, programs, and efforts to support diversity vs. Personal preparedness	0.731	.006	Yes
School's policies, programs, and efforts to address inequity vs. Personal preparedness	0.808	.001	Yes

*Note.*  $n = 12$ ;  $p < .05$ .

Pearson's linear correlation was used to determine the strength of the correlation, if any, between respondent's self-perception of being prepared to support diversity efforts and address inequity compared to how respondents rated their school's policies, programs, and efforts to support diversity and to address inequity issues, whether racial, cultural, ethnic, and/or linguistic. In this analysis, respondents' self-perceptions of being prepared was used as the independent variable while the respondents' ratings for school policies, programs, and efforts were dependent variables. The results demonstrated there were statistically significant correlations.

The most statistically significant variable was the ratings for school's policies, programs, and efforts to address inequity,  $r(12) = 0.808, p < .05$ . They were positively and strongly correlated with respondents' self-perceptions of being prepared to address racial, ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic inequity issues. There was also a statistically significant difference and strong, positive correlation between respondents' self-perception of preparedness and ratings for school's policies, programs, and efforts to support diversity,  $r(12) = .731, p < .05$ .

To summarize, qualitative and quantitative data analysis revealed several key findings and emergent themes. Findings include a statistically significant correlation between principals' self-perception of being prepared to support diversity and address inequity and where they received trainings, whether through an administrative preparation program, district professional development, or through life experiences. Findings also include a statistically significant correlation between principals' self-perception of being prepared with their school's response to racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity and inequity. Using Critical Discourse Analysis and open-coding, qualitative analysis revealed several important emergent themes, including deficit perspective, systems thinking, ownership of responsibility, and racism as a systemic issue or a personal issue.

### Multiple-Case Study

The original design of the mixed-methods study called for a multiple-case study comparing data across two suburban school districts. Due to the limited number of survey responses, analysis shifted and focused on individual principals. The four principals were highlighted to provide deeper insight into the phenomenon of principals grappling with diversity and equity issues in suburban school districts as well as provide a holistic view into their conceptualizations of racial, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. The principals were also highlighted with consideration for maintaining anonymity as some characteristics, such as having a doctorate, might be sufficient to identify them.

***Principal F. J.*** Principal F.J. was an English-only, White-identifying principal. She considered herself a first-generation college graduate who came from a middle-class background. Her current household income was over \$200,000/year. She had three years of experience as a principal. She described her elementary school as having a “Beautiful blend! We have a wonderful diverse campus” though she did not share the demographics of her school. On a Likert-type scale of 1 to 7, where 1 indicated “Not at all” and 7 indicated “Absolutely”, she agreed, with a rating of 5, that her student population would be described as currently diverse and indeed, with a rating of 6, she would describe her school as changing in demographics and becoming more diverse.

Principal F.J. rated her school well, with a rating of 5, for supporting diversity through policies, programs, and efforts. She listed programs such as Armenian Parent Club, Korean Parent Club, and inclusion committees. In contrast, when asked to rate her school’s current policies, programs, and efforts to address inequity, she rated her school a 2. She conceptualized a clear distinction between diversity and inequity, either racial, cultural, ethnic, or linguistic.

When asked about being prepared to support diversity or address inequity, she rated her district's support low with a rating of 2. She later shared that her school was working with outside consultants to address issues stemming from racial, cultural, ethnic, and/or linguistic diversity and inequity. She did not list district-provided supports. She also rated her administrative preparation program low with a rating of 2. She rated her own personal sense of preparedness low with a rating of 3.

When asked to share a racially-charged incident and whether her reaction to the incident would change, Principal F.J. wrote, "Two groups of students from different cultures got into a horrible fight. I would not change my reaction. I had built deep connections with these kids and was able to talk them through. Relationships are the key!"

**Principal D.Z.** Principal D.Z. was a Latino-identifying principal. English was her first language and she was also fluent in Spanish. She came from a lower, middle-income family. She was not a first-generation college graduate. With only one complete year as a principal, she was the least experienced of the respondents. When asked about her school's student demographics, she shared specific racial/ethnic data.

On a Likert-type scale of 1 to 7, where 1 indicated "Not at all" and 7 indicated "Absolutely", she rated her own personal preparedness in addressing diversity and inequity issues a 3. She rated her administrative program in preparing her a 1 and her district's support in preparing her low at a 2, though she noted that the only formal training she received on addressing racial, ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic diversity and inequity came from district-provided professional development. She rated other factors, such as life experiences, as helping to prepare her better to support diversity and address inequity with a rating of 3. She later shared that she joined a book and podcast club that addressed equity issues.

Principal D.Z. rated her school's current policies and programs to support diversity a 2 and her school's current policies and programs in addressing inequity also a 2. She listed her current school policies to be restorative justice or alternatives to suspensions and heterogeneous grouping during class formation. When asked to consider recent racial protests and what she might do differently, Principal D.Z. listed providing staff development on culturally responsive teaching, engaging all staff in consistent conversations about race, and engaging all staff in examination of current school practices through the lens of equity for all.

Principal D.Z. shared a personal story when asked to share a racially-charged incident and what she might do differently. Principal D.Z. wrote, "A comment was made in terms of me being Latina and having a young child but yet was able to make it in life. I was an Assistant Principal at that time. At that moment, I didn't know how to react. It was the first day of me meeting this male teacher. If it happened today, I would hope that I could let them know that was racially charged."

***Principal L.N.*** Principal L.N. identified as Asian/Pacific Islander. She had 6 years of experience as a principal. Though English was not her first language, it became her only language. She noted that she was "No longer fluent in my first language". She came from a middle-income family background and was not a first-generation college graduate.

When asked about her school's current student demographics, she wrote "40% caucasian 40% asian 20% other". Caucasian was not a racial/ethnic group listed in student demographics information by the California Department of Education (California Department of Education, 2021a). When asked about her school's current policies, programs and efforts to support diversity, she listed culturally responsive teaching, restorative justice or other alternative to suspensions, and heterogeneous grouping during class formation. When asked to consider recent



racial protests and what might she do differently as a principal, Principal L.N. listed that she would provide staff development on culturally responsive teaching and/or culturally relevant pedagogy and that she would engage all staff in examination of current school practices through the lens of equity for all. Notably, she did not list having consistent conversations about race.

Principal L.N. rated her own personal preparedness to address diversity and inequity issues a 5. She rated her administrative preparation program a 4 for preparing her. She rated her district support the highest at a 7. She rated other factors, such as life experiences, at a 7 as well. Yet, when asked to share a past racially-charged incident and what she might do differently, Principal L.N. wrote, “Yes, disagreements among students. I would use RJ practices today to mend the relationship between students.” Her response indicated conceptualized racial conflicts as a personal matter.

***Principal A.G.*** Principal A.G. was a White-identifying principal. English was the only language she knew. She came from a low-income family and was a first-generation college graduate. She was a veteran principal with seven years of experience.

When asked about her school’s current student demographics, Principal A.G. listed specific racial/ethnic demographics data down to “1% American Indian and Hawaiian”. She rated her personal sense of preparedness to support diversity and address inequity issues a 3 on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 was the lowest and 7 was the highest rating. She rated her administrative preparation program a 2 in supporting her. She rated her district’s support in preparing her a 2 as well. She rated other life factors, such as life experiences, higher with a rating of 4.

Principal A.G. rated her school’s current policies, programs, and efforts to support diversity a low 2. She rated her school’s efforts to address inequity issues a low 2 as well. She clarified in a later question, “This year, we have district and site goals that specifically address

Equity, Access, and Inclusion. We have provided two strategic Staff Development sessions on this topic and have more planned as the year progresses.”

When asked to consider recent racial protests and what she might do differently, Principal A.G. wrote, “We are working on understanding ourselves first so that we can recognize our own biases and acknowledge the practices that harm students, consciously and/or unconsciously.” Of the changes in policies, she added that she would engage all staff in consistent conversations about race and that she would engage all staff in examination of current school practices through the lens of equity for all. Principal A.G. indicated her commitment to using conversations about race in again in a later open-ended question.

When asked to recall a racially-charged incident and what she might do differently, Principal A.G. wrote in detail. She discussed how the student was Black and racial biases affected the situation. She also wrote how she would address the situation differently, “...I would likely go the route of conscious conversations with specific staff members to spur on-going conversations within teams and smaller cohorts of staff members about the situation, its factual causes, misplaced bias, and attempt to debunk rumors or myths to create a better understanding and acceptance of the student.”

The four profiles of principals shared illustrated the complexity of their experiences as principals grapple with diversity and equity issues in suburban school districts. A detailed discussion of their conceptualizations of and responses to racial, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity and inequity will be in Chapter 5.

### **Summary**

This study used quantitative survey responses from 12 participants, principals from suburban elementary schools, to answer the research question: To what extent do different

factors, such as principal preparation programs, district support, and/or life experiences, background, and informal learning experiences, help principals feel prepared to address issues of racial, ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic diversity? Quantitative analysis demonstrated a statistically significant and strong, positive correlation between respondent's self-perception of preparedness with respondents' administrative preparation program, district support, and other factors such as life experiences. Analysis also indicated a statistically significant and strong, positive correlation between respondent's self-perception of preparedness with schools' responses to diversity and inequity issues.

The study used two multiple selection questions to examine changes in principals' school policies, programs, and efforts in response to racial protests. Data showed that principals were considering several important changes including increasing staff development on culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy, increasing conversations about race, and engaging all staff in examination of school practices through the lens of equity.

Principal's conceptualizations of racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity were analyzed through qualitative data using open coding and critical discourse analysis. Data were collected from the survey instrument using open-ended questions. Several themes emerged, including color-muteness, deficit thinking vs. systems thinking, racism as systemic issue vs. personal issue, and ownership of responsibility.

Qualitative data were collected that added more perspectives to the quantitative question concerning policies, programs and efforts currently in place at respondents' schools to support diversity efforts or address inequity issues. The majority of reported programs and policies were either state or district mandated programs or policies. Four principal profiles were shared as part of a multiple-case study to help understand the complexities of their conceptualizations and

responses. Each principal's story was highlighted to illustrate common experiences or responses or to highlight a unique case.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

### Overview

The purpose of the mixed-methods study was to understand how public school principals conceptualize racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity and how they respond to changing demographics in suburban elementary schools. Understanding how principals conceptualize and respond to diverse student groups can help us understand how principals reproduce or disrupt educational inequity. Chapter 5 summarizes the mixed-methods, multiple-case research study. Findings and analysis are presented and compared to the literature to find meaning and answer the research questions.

The research questions for this study are:

5. How do elementary principals in suburban public schools conceptualize increasing racial, ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic diversity within their schools?
6. How do elementary principals respond to increasing racial, ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic diversity in their practices?
7. What practices do principals engage in that support racially equitable education for all students?
8. To what extent do different factors, such as principal preparation programs, district support, and/or life experiences, background, and informal learning experiences, help principals feel prepared to address issues of racial, ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic diversity?

The analysis of findings is framed by the theoretical framework, Critical Race Theory (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004). Particular focus was paid to two CRT tenets, racism as normal and intersectionality of identities. In the realist view, racism is normal, persistent, pervasive, and

systemic (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The realist view of racism acknowledges how systems and hierarchical structures govern who gets privileges and benefits and who are denied. On the contrary, the idealist view explains racism as a matter of beliefs and mindsets which can be changed (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Intersectionality look at the ways that different identities and status categories may interact to produce one person's experience (Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2013). Both quantitative data and qualitative data were analyzed through the lens of race to look for meaning in respondents' words.

Transformative leadership is used as the conceptual framework to examine the leadership practices that principals use to address equity in their schools. Transformative leadership centers social justice and self-empowerment (Bader et al., 2010; Shields, 2018; Tierney, 1989) in order to change systems of inequity (Shields, 2018; Weiner, 2003). In this study, transformative leadership behaviors such as critical self-reflection and deconstructing deficit thinking (Boske, 2015; Liou & Hermanns, 2017; Shields, 2018) are used to examine principals' leadership practices.

### **Discussion of Findings and Analysis**

The study employed a mixed-method approach incorporating qualitative and quantitative data designed to understand suburban principals' conceptualizations of diversity and response to inequity. The researcher integrated both data types to fully understand the phenomenon of suburban principals supporting diversity and addressing inequity in diverse, White-dominated elementary schools.

#### **Suburban School Districts**

Districts A and B reflected the realities of diversifying suburban school districts as described in the literature and reported in Chapter 4. Districts A and B were both undergoing

demographic changes as racially, ethnically, socioeconomically, and linguistic diverse suburban school districts (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012a; Frasure-Yokley, 2012). District A was becoming less White-dominated (Frey, 2015; Lacy, 2016; M. Orfield & Luce, 2013). While District B was becoming more White-dominated, District B was also increasing in socioeconomically disadvantaged students, reflecting the “suburbanization of poverty” (Lacy, 2016, p. 370). Both school districts had enrollments that were disproportionately White as compared with the surrounding counties, raising the specter of resegregation (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012a). Both Districts A and B were high-performing school districts as reported in the California School Dashboard (California Department of Education, 2021a), but their aggregate scores for “All Students” obfuscate the racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and linguistic disparities in academic outcomes for diverse students (Noguera et al., 2011). However, high aggregate scores do not erase the need to address systemic inequities and eliminate disparities within suburban school districts (Noguera et al., 2011; M. Pollock, 2009).

### **Research Question 1: Principals’ Conceptualizations**

Integrated data analysis and quantitative findings using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) revealed several emergent themes in how principals conceptualize racial, cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic, and linguistic diversity and equity: colormuteness vs. talking about race, deficit perspectives vs. systems thinking, and lack of ownership of responsibility vs. ownership of responsibility. Analysis of the emergent themes revealed one overarching theme, racism as systemic issue vs. racism as a personal issue.

In CRT, the realist view of racism is that racism is normal in American society and that it is systemic in nature (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The opposite of that is the view that racism is a matter of beliefs and mindsets (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The findings in this study revealed

that principals conceptualized race and racism as either systemic issues or as personal issues, which is aligned with the realist view and the idealist view of racism, respectively.

The emergent themes are envisioned, not as binary constructs, but as along a continuum of conceptualizations. See Figure 3. 1 below.

**Figure 3. 1**

*Continuum of Conceptualizations*

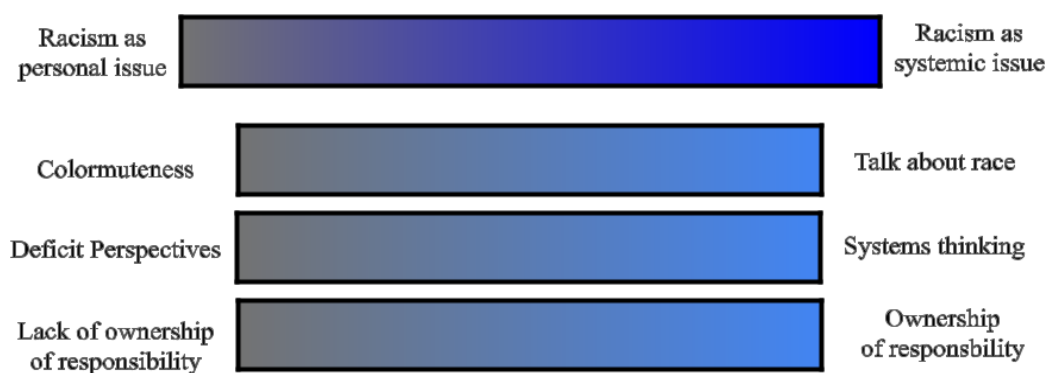


Figure 1. 1 shows conceptualizations of “racism as a personal issue” on the left and “racism as a systemic issue” on the right. Emergent themes such as “colormutenes”, “deficit perspectives”, and “lack of ownership of responsibility” are visualized on the left underneath the concept of “racism as a personal issue”. Contrasting those are emergent themes such as “talk about race”, “systems thinking”, and “ownership of responsibility” on the right. The shading from left to right are gray to blue, where gray represents conceptualizations that are “more” of emergent themes on the left and blue represents conceptualizations that are “more” of emergent themes on the right. Intermediary conceptualizations exist along the continuum such as being able to name a racial group in demographics data, but unable or unwilling to name race as an integral part of a racially-charged incident.



### ***Racism as a Systemic Issue***

CRT hold that “racism is pervasive, systemic, and deeply ingrained” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 91). Indeed, CRT counters the idea that racism is individualistic; rather, it is multi-layered system of oppression (Chapman, 2013a). Freire wrote of a peasant leader saying, “They used to say we were unproductive because we were lazy and drunkards. All lies. Now that we are respected as men, we’re going to show every-one that we were never drunkards or lazy. We were exploited!” (Freire et al., 2018, p. 63). This quote illustrates the journey from blaming the individual, a form of oppression, to recognizing the systemic nature of the problem that being addressed.

In one open-ended question, principals were prompted to recall a racially-charged incident and share how they would react differently. Eight out of 12 respondents indicated that they conceptualized racial conflicts, and by extension, race and racism, as a personal, individualistic problem. One respondent wrote that “I had built deep connections with these kids and was able to talk them though”, indicating that the respondent conceptualized racial-conflict as being between individuals and the solution was to support the individuals involved. On the other hand, two respondents indicated that they wanted to “spur on-going conversations” and “provide PD for all staff”, thus addressing the issue as a school, systemically, rather individually. The theme of racism as a systemic issue to be solved vs. an individualistic problem reverberated throughout the study (Aleman, 2009; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Pollack & Zirkel, 2013; Subedi, 2013).

### ***Talk about Race***

Being able to talk about race is critical to addressing racial equality and racial equity in schools (P. L. Carter et al., 2017; Chapman, 2013b; Garrett, 2009; E. L. Palmer & Louis, 2017;

M. Pollock, 2009; Wormeli, 2016). Colormuteness is defined in this study as actively suppressing the use of race words and racial categories. When asked about student demographics, responses ranged from using “de-raced words” (M. Pollock, 2009, p. 74), or colormuteness, to its opposite, with respondents able to name racial groups. Five principals shared racial/ethnic data by naming the racial groups. On the other hand, three principals shared both socioeconomic data and EL data, but did not share racial/ethnic data. Instead, one respondent wrote, “Beautiful blend!” and others wrote, “We are a melting pot”, “have a diverse population”, and “Caucasian” when describing student demographics. Such words, like “Beautiful blend”, “melting pot”, and “diverse population”, are de-raced words (M. Pollock, 2009) which may be interpreted to mean racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity, but does not explicitly name the racial, cultural, or ethnic groups. In the open-ended question about racially-charged conflicts, respondents used terms like “majority population” and “different cultures”, without specifying which racial groups were involved in the conflicts. Conversely, other respondents were able to name “color of his skin”, “Black”, and “Latina” when sharing stories of racially-charged conflicts. The findings parallel Tyler’s (2016) study where educators and administrators conceptualized race in colormute terms and avoided directly talking about race. Knowing silences..are themselves actions with racializing consequences: actively deleting race words from everyday talk can serve to increase the perceived relevance of race as much as to actively ignore race’s relevance” (M. Pollock, 2009, p. 174). Colormute terms like “melting pot” can be as damaging as ignoring racial groups because colormute terms prevent the ability to hold discussions that focus on explicit ways to make learning equitable for different racial, cultural, and ethnic groups. (M. Pollock, 2009, p. 74)

When asked to think about recent racial protests and what changes respondents were

considering in their role as principals, focus on consistent conversations about race increased from 4 to 10 respondents, indicating a growing awareness of the importance of talking about race in the school settings. Yet, when asked to recount a racially-charged incident and what they would change, only two respondents indicated that they would engage the staff or the involved individuals in conversations about race. While awareness of the importance of conversations about race might be growing, the ability to translate awareness to action might be lacking, what Freire (2018) termed “praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (p. 51).

### ***Systems Thinking***

Another theme that emerged was the continuum from deficit perspectives to systems thinking. Deficit thinking, or deficit perspectives, is the belief that marginalized people carry personal or family inadequacies that results in academic, economic, or life failures (Valencia, 2010). It is a very individualistic perspective of success and failures that blames the students and families rather than analyzing how systemic inequities have failed the students (Burciaga, 2015). In this study, deficit perspective was identified in 7 out of 12 responses. When principals were asked what they believe were challenges that might stem from racial, cultural, ethnic or linguistic diversity, one response was “groups that prefer to self isolate”, which might have placed the blame on groups self-isolating.

In contrast, a different response was “We have not found a way to reach all our families yet”, which indicated that the principal conceptualized the challenge as solvable at the school-level. Systems thinking is an approach to solving challenging problems by looking at the whole system and the interrelationships of its many components (Senge et al., 2012; Shaked & Schechter, 2013). Principals with systems thinking are able to tackle complex challenges at the

systems-level (Shaked & Schechter, 2013). As racism is a systemic issue (Chapman, 2013a; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Subedi, 2013), principals who are able to conceptualize challenges at the school-level or systems-level can effectively address inequity issues whereas principals with deficit perspectives would perpetuate inequities (Tyler, 2016).

### ***Ownership of Responsibility***

Ownership of responsibility was a theme that developed from principals' conceptualizations of challenges stemming from racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity. Principals' responses ranged from "blaming the victim" (Valencia, 2010, p. 7), such as in the response "groups that prefer to self isolate", to "blaming" others, such as in the responses "lack of urgency on the part of staff" and "lack of conversations on this topic with staff and students", to taking responsibility for the situation, as in the response "We have not found a way to reach all our families yet". Who is responsible implicates who can solve a problem (Valencia, 2010).

Strong instructional leadership is a critical feature of school success (Fullan, 2014; Trujillo, 2013). It is the principal's responsibility to work with their staff to create a culture of high expectations to ensure that all students receive a high quality education (Lezotte & Snyder, 2011). Thematically, ownership of responsibility overlaps with deficit thinking, systems thinking, and is part of conceptualizing racism as a systemic issue, not an individualistic issue. When an instructional leader is able to see an equity issue as a systemic issue, the leader can solve the problem at the school-level. The reverse is also true; when an instructional leader is only able to conceive an inequity issue as a student or family failing (Behnke & Kelly, 2011; Burciaga, 2015; Burciaga, Perez Huber, & Solorzano, 2010), then only a surface-level, technical solution may be used (Nelson & Guerra, 2014) that perpetuates inequity (Diem et al., 2016; Tyler, 2016).

### **Research Questions 2 and 3: Principals' Responses and Racially Equitable Practices**

Both quantitative and qualitative data were used to find how suburban elementary principals respond to increasing racial, ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic diversity as well as whether practices they engage in support racially equitable education. School's policies, programs, and efforts were used to represent part of principals' responses and practices.

Findings indicated that principals used racially equitable practices when they were state or district mandated programs. The most commonly used programs to address diversity and/or inequity were state or district mandated programs such as Restorative Justice (RJ) and Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) programs. Restorative practices have been shown to reduce racial disparities in school discipline, though successful implementation of RJ requires participants to address biases, advocate for change and social justice, be inclusive, and engage in systemic change (Kline, 2016; Sandwick, Hahn, & Hassoun Ayoub, 2019; Vaandering, 2014). Similarly, PBIS have been shown to successfully reduce racial disparities in discipline data, though its impact is enhanced in a culturally response and equity-focused environment (Bal, Kozleski, Schrader, Rodriguez, & Pelton, 2014; Clayton, Robertson, & Sotomayor, 2020; Swain-Bradway, Gulbrandson, Galston, McIntosh, & Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019).

Several respondents indicated that they were engaging their staff in cultural proficiency and anti-bias staff development opportunities. Open-ended responses indicated that cultural proficiency and anti-bias staff development were district-mandated initiatives. Cultural proficiency is awareness of and respect for differences in cultures, values, and beliefs (Ballenger & Kemp-Graham, 2014; Barakat, 2014; Spiess & Cooper, 2020; Terrell, Terrell, Lindsey, & Lindsey, 2018). Yet, cultural proficiency alone is not a racially equitable practice as it can hide

systemic causes of inequality and inequity and disregard racial biases and discrimination in favor of “the notion that cultural misunderstanding is a primary source of racial disparities” (Malat, 2013, p. 605). Anti-bias trainings, along with diversity trainings, seek to reduce the effect of biases in an organization, but vary greatly in their effectiveness, particularly if the anti-bias trainings are relying on the individual’s “goodwill alone to change the culture” (E. R. Carter, Onyeador, & Lewis, 2020, p. 60).

Consistent conversations about race were not mandated by the state or the school district. Four respondents indicated that they used consistent conversations about race at their school, though 10 respondents indicated they were considering using consistent conversations about race after the nationwide racial protests of 2020. Conversations about race is an important prerequisite to confronting racial inequity and the effects of racism (Benson & Fiarman, 2020; P. L. Carter et al., 2017; Wormeli, 2016). Yet, there was limited evidence that talking about racism was happening in schools (Mansfield & Jean-Marie, 2015), as was corroborated in this study’s findings. Though 10 out of 12 principals indicated that they were considering holding conversations about race, only 4 had done so at the commencement of data collection for this study in the fall of 2020.

The majority of respondents ( $n = 9$ ) indicated that their schools currently use culturally responsive teaching and/or culturally relevant pedagogy. Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) and culturally relevant pedagogy are asset-based approaches that affirm student cultural identities, focus on academic rigor, confront deficit thinking that limits student opportunity, and help students to develop critical perspectives to challenge equity issues (Gay, 2018; Hollie, 2018; Jackson, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014). However, there were several open-ended responses that suggested that culturally responsive teaching and culturally

relevant pedagogy might be conflated with “cultural proficiency”, “celebrating our cultural background”, “Armenian Parent Club”, and “family events”. As Hollie (2019) questioned, “is it just in name only?” (p. 37). CRT is not simply an acknowledgement of cultural differences or a celebration of different cultures. While it can take on many forms, it has a theoretical basis and is tied to specific student outcomes (Hollie, 2019).

How principals respond to racially-charged situations correlated with how they conceptualized racism (Frasure-Yokley, 2012; Wang, 2015). Principals responded to racially-charged incidents at the school-level through staff development showed evidence of viewing racial, cultural, and ethnic differences as systemic issues and not individual or family issues. Principals who addressed racially-charged situations at the individualistic level tended to lean on relationship-building strategies and data suggested that they conceived racial, cultural, and ethnic differences as personal problems (Diem et al., 2016; Frasure-Yokley, 2012; Holme et al., 2014).

#### **Research Question 4: Principals’ Preparedness**

Several studies suggested that principal preparation programs and district support were inadequately preparing principals to effectively address challenges arising from racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students (Ballenger & Kemp-Graham, 2014; Evans, 2007; Gooden & O’Doherty, 2014; Milligan & Howley, 2015). A Likert-type scale was used to gather quantitative data on principals’ self-perception of being prepared to address racial, cultural, ethnic, and/or linguistic diversity and inequity issues and to what extent factors such as principal preparation programs, district support, and life experiences affect their sense of being prepared. Pearson’s linear correlation was performed and revealed strong, positive correlations between respondents’ self-perception of being prepared and all three variables, principal preparation programs, district support, and life experiences. However, while respondents rated their life

experiences highest at preparing them to address diversity and inequity issues, life experiences were the least significantly correlated with principals' self-perception of preparedness. The most statistically significant variable was principal preparation programs, followed by district support.

Qualitative responses also reinforced quantitative results indicating that formal trainings were more important than life experiences or personal background in preparing principals to support diversity and address equity issues. This finding is important because quantitative analysis also found that principals' self-perception of being prepared was positively and strongly correlated with how principals rated their schools' policies, programs, and efforts to support diversity and address inequity (Evans, 2007; Gooden & O'Doherty, 2014; Milligan & Howley, 2015). This finding is aligned with research showing strong instructional leaders ready to disrupt inequitable practices is critical to ensuring an equitable, excellent, and inclusive education for all students (Aleman, 2009; Kemp-Graham, 2015; Shields, 2018; Theoharis, 2007).

### **A Multiple-Case Study: Principal's Racial Identities and Leadership Responses**

A multiple-case study afforded the researcher with the opportunity to examine how principals' racial identities correlated with their conceptualizations and experiences as school leaders. While not directly addressing the four research questions, the multiple case provides a holistic look at all four research questions through the stories of each individual case in order to "explore an issue or problem using the case as a specific illustration" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 190). Multiple case studies can provide deeper insight into the how and why of a central phenomenon across several cases (Yin, 2018). The phenomenon in this study is the experiences of principals in suburban elementary schools where the student populations were becoming more racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse.

In CRT, intersectionality look at the ways that different identities may interact to produce



one person's experience (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2013). The findings in this study was limited by the questions on the surveys, which allowed only racial and ethnic identifications, but the discussions below provided some insights into how a principal's race might interact with their leadership role as illustrated by four cases.

***Principal F.J.***

Non-Hispanic, White made up 66.1% of California principals in 2017-2018 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017) while student enrollment for 2017-2018 showed that White students made up only 23.8% of enrollment (California Department of Education, 2021b). Principal F.J., like the other 7 out of 12 respondents in this study, was a White principal of a diverse elementary school. She used a colormute term ("Beautiful blend! We have a wonderful diverse campus") to describe her student demographics, a problematic practice that perpetuates racial inequity (P. L. Carter et al., 2017; M. Pollock, 2009; Swanson & Welton, 2019; Tyler, 2016). She did not feel prepared by her administration preparation program nor her district to address inequity, so much so that her school hired an outside consultant to help her address issues stemming from racial, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. Principal F.J. echoed other studies that suggested that principal preparation programs and district support were inadequately preparing principals (Ballenger & Kemp-Graham, 2014; Evans, 2007; Gooden & O'Doherty, 2014; Milligan & Howley, 2015). White principals, disproportionately represented in school leadership, have an oversized influence on the educational opportunities for historically oppressed and marginalized students (Swanson & Welton, 2019), thus their ability and readiness to support racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic diversity and to address inequity cannot be overlooked.

### ***Principal D.Z.***

Latino/as made up 22.5% of California principals in 2017-2018 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017) while student enrollment for 2017-2018 showed that Latino students made up only 55.6% of enrollment (California Department of Education, 2021b). This disparity reinforced the need to recruit and retain Latino/a principals (Crawford & Fuller, 2017; Fernandez, Bustamante, Combs, & Martinez-Garcia, 2015). Principal D.Z., as a Latina in a position of authority, expressed doubt that she would be able to face acts of racial biases. When asked to share a racially-charged incident, she wrote, “A comment was made in terms of me being Latina and having a young child but yet was able to make it in life. I was an Assistant Principal at that time.” This comment was an example of a racial prejudice or biases, an identified barrier for Latino/a principals (Aleman, 2009; Méndez-Morse, Murakami, Byrne-Jiménez, & Hernandez, 2015; Murakami, Hernandez, Mendez-Morse, & Byrne-Jimenez, 2016). Principal D.Z. went on to write, “If it happened today, I would hope that I could let them know that was racially charged.” This was an indication that Principal D.Z. felt uncertain about her ability to confront biases even in her current role as a principal.

### ***Principal L.N.***

Principal L.N. was a principal who identified as Asian/Pacific Islander. When asked to share her school’s demographics data, she wrote “40% caucasion 40% Asian 20% other”. Principal L.N.’s use of the term “caucasian” was startling as it was a term that was not used in either California’s enrollment data (California Department of Education, 2021b, 2021a) nor in the federal Census database in reference to student enrollment (Bureau, n.d.). Her school programs, efforts, and possible future actions included a range of practices including culturally responsive teaching, Restorative Justice, and heterogeneous groupings, but notably did not

include consistent conversations about race. Data indicated that she conceptualized racial conflicts as an individualistic issue, not a systemic issue. Asian American school administrators are under-researched and included only one published study that found that female Asian American principals resisted racism due to a strong sense of social justice leadership (Liang & Liou, 2018a).

***Principal A.G.***

Principal A.G. was a veteran, White principal with seven years of experience. She demonstrated willingness to discuss race and racism in several ways, including stating that the “color of his skin” was a contributing factor to a Black student’s teacher-student conflict. She showed willingness in her plans to address racial inequity. Principal A.G. wrote “We are working on understanding ourselves first so that we can recognize our own biases and acknowledge the practices that harm students, consciously and/or unconsciously.” She shared in several open-ended responses that she would engage her staff in conversations about race to address racial inequity. Most tellingly, she shared that when it came to parent involvement, she was responsible for reaching out to all the families and had not found a way yet.

Principal A.G. exhibited several characteristics of transformative leadership and social justice leadership (Irby et al., 2019; Shields, 2018). She sought an “equitable change” (Shields, 2018, p. 20) and worked to deconstruct deficit perspectives through conversations about racial issues, two characteristics Shields (2018) identified as components of transformative leadership. Principal A.G. indicated that she was working on changing her own mindset as well her staff’s mindset (Irby et al., 2019), thereby enacting social justice through both external actions and internal beliefs (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2019).

The multiple-cases illustrated how specific principals of different racial-identification

conceptualized race and racism and how they responded to diversity and equity in their leadership position. Principal F.J., a White principal, exhibited color muteness and conceptualized racism as an individualistic issue. Principal D.Z., a Latina principal, shared that she was a victim of racial biases and felt unprepared by her administrative preparation program and her school district. Principal L.N., an Asian/Pacific Islander principal, conceptualized race and racism as an individualistic issue and indicated a reluctance to talk about race. Principal A.G., a White principal, indicated that she was engaging in several practices to shift her own and her staff's internal beliefs and external actions. Principal A.G. illustrated several practices indicative of a transformative leader working through critical self-reflection and conversations about race to deconstruct deficit perspective and enact school-wide change to ensure racial equity (Irby et al., 2019; Shields, 2018; Weiner, 2003)

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

The study was conducted in the fall of 2020 after gaining site authorizations from two school districts (Appendix D and E). Convenience sampling was used to select the two suburban school districts. A digital survey instrument was disseminated to all elementary principals at the two school districts as part of the recruitment email. The end of the survey contained an invitation to continue with the interview portion of the study. The original design of the study called for semi-structured interviews with principals, followed by interviews with teachers and classified staff. Only one principal consented to the interview and then subsequently withdrew consent. This significantly changed the methodology from using semi-structured interviews to strictly using the principal's survey. Principals who consented to the interviews would have provided access to the school, teachers, and instructional assistants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Without principal consent, the study did not gain access to teacher and instructional

assistants interviews, limiting data collection to the principal's survey.

### **COVID-19 and the Racial Protests of 2020**

The following section provide a discussion on possible reasons for the lack of consent for interviews that necessitated a change in methodology. One of the significances of this study was that it was uniquely positioned to capture the conceptualizations, experiences, and responses of suburban principals in the midst of two significant American historical events, the COVID-19 pandemic and the world-wide racial protests of 2020. However, the unique nature of the time period might have contributed to principals' lack of interests to participate in interviews.

During the data collection time period in the fall of 2020, the coronavirus pandemic continued to disrupt American schools (Maxouris & Yu, 2020; Reilly, 2020). Principals became the "other first responders" (Osmond-Johnson, Campbell, & Pollock, 2020) responsible for managing a health crisis, an educational crisis, and the social and emotional well-being of staff, students, and families (Anderson, Hayes, & Carpenter, 2020; Kaul, VanGronigen, & Simon, 2020). Simultaneously, while grappling with what a safe school looked like, they were planning for the future of schooling post-pandemic as well as becoming digital instructional leaders (K. Pollock, 2020). Principals experienced heightened stress and burn-out during school closures, school reopening, and emergency remote learning, working long hours at home and on weekends (Anderson et al., 2020). Heightened stress, burn-out, and long work hours might have resulted in little interest in participating in research interviews.

The killing of George Floyd set off months-long protests against police brutality in every states (Cave et al., 2020) and engendered conversations about racial justice (Harmon et al., 2020). Yet, there was great reluctance to talk about race. The term "colormute" encapsulated the active reluctance to name race in conversations about race (M. Pollock, 2009). Authors and

researchers urged that educators and educational leaders talk about race and racism (Benson & Fiarman, 2020; P. L. Carter et al., 2017; Wormeli, 2016). Singleton's Courageous Conversations framework provided explicit guidance on how to have conversations about race (Singleton, 2014). Yet, there was limited research that talking about racism was happening in the school context among leaders (Mansfield & Jean-Marie, 2015). Furthermore, White people were very reluctant to talk about race and racism (Benson & Fiarman, 2020; DiAngelo, 2019). Heightened focus on racial justice might have increased reluctance on the part of principals to discuss racial issues, thus reducing interest in interviews where racial issues would be discussed.

### **Analysis and Validation**

The change in methodology necessitated a commensurate change in analysis and in validation. The semi-structured interviews with principals would have provided more qualitative data, including an opportunity to capture more nuanced responses that might have provided deeper insight into the phenomenon under study. Instead, only data from the initial survey was used, limiting analysis to the quantitative responses and qualitative data from the open-ended questions. As the semi-structured interview questions provided an opportunity for the researcher to follow-up on topics and stories already raised in the open-ended questions, eliminating the interviews did not eliminate responses needed to address the four research questions. It did limit the opportunity to capture nuanced responses that could have provided deeper insight than what was available in the written responses.

Additionally, validation of the study was intended to be through triangulation of data using interviews with parents and teachers from the respondents' school sites (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation was the process of using several different sources of information, methods, investigations, and theories to provide corroborating evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The

perspectives of diverse people were crucial in racial and cultural research so as not to misrepresent the perspectives and experiences of people of color (Milner, 2007). Without the ability to member-check, ensuring that respondents' perspectives were not misrepresented was limited. In response, data were reviewed repeatedly to ensure that analysis stayed true to what was written. With the change in methodology, validation was shifted to comparing quantitative responses to qualitative responses as well as using district data from the California School Dashboard as an additional source of information to gain additional perspectives on principals' practices and responses.

### **Implications for Practice**

Findings in this study have several implications for administrator preparation. There was a clear correlation between principal preparation and principals' self-perception of being prepared to support diversity and address inequity at the school level. While principals might feel that their personal life experiences outside of formal trainings better prepared them, formal trainings had a higher impact. The findings of this study suggest that administrative preparation programs and district-provided administrative professional development explicitly focus on supporting racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic diversity and on addressing inequity to better prepare principals. Trainings for administrators should include a critical race lens in order to help administrators conceptualize racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic disparities as systemic issues, be able to address racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and linguistic inequity, as well as inequality, at a system-level, and address practices that stem from deficit perspectives (Burciaga, 2015; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Gooden & O'Doherty, 2014; Kemp-Graham, 2015; Liou & Hermanns, 2017; Milligan & Howley, 2015). Administrator preparation should also include developing principals' capacities to enact equitable practices

(Furman, 2012; Shields, 2018) such as holding difficult conversations centered on race and racism (Singleton, 2014).

Findings of this study also has implications for state and district policies. The majority of the policies and practices that suburban principals engage in were state or district mandated. Though principals might feel that some racially-equitable practices, such as consistent conversations about race, might be beneficial, they might hesitate to engage in these practices without clear directives from the state or school district. Therefore, states and school districts should clearly and explicitly adopt racially-equitable practices and policies to ensure their widespread implementation.

A corollary to this recommendation is that school districts should continue looking for policies that directly address racial disparities. While cultural proficiency trainings and anti-bias trainings play important roles in creating an inclusive learning environment, they don't directly confront the racism inherent in the educational system. Initiatives that support cultural proficiency and uncover unconscious biases might not go far enough to create a racially/ethnically equitable learning environment.

Finally, the findings in this study echo the call from many researchers and studies for suburban school districts to urgently address the racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic inequities that produce disparities within their school districts (Diem et al., 2016; Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012b; Frasure-Yokley, 2012; Noguera et al., 2011; Tefera et al., 2011). Disproportionately White suburban school districts cannot ignore the injustice of disparate student outcomes hidden behind high academic achievement, but must attack all inequities with fervor and conviction for justice is the right of all students (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2019; Freire et al., 2018; Gil, 2013; Young, 2011)



### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings of this study suggest potential future research areas. While there was a growing body of literature on White principals and Latino principals, there was only one published research on Asian principals. More research is needed on Asian principals' conceptualizations of race and racism and the intersection of their identities and their role as anti-racist leaders.

Further research is needed to connect suburban school district's principal support with principals' practices at the school level. More information is needed on what form of support districts are providing and whether or not principals are putting them into practice to make a measurable difference to student outcomes at the school level. Further research is needed on how principal's racially equitable practices might translate to teacher practices and, subsequently, to student outcomes. Such research can help suburban school districts implement policies that directly address racial inequity.

Similarly, further research is needed to connect administrative preparation programs with principals' racially equitable practices at the school level. More information is needed on what form of trainings administration preparation programs are providing that is racially equitable and whether or not principals are putting them into practice. Such research can inform administrative preparation programs to be more explicitly supportive of racial equity in a manner that translates to principal practices.

### **Conclusion**

This study used a mixed-methods design to examine how elementary school principals conceptualize and respond to increasing racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic diversity and whether such responses reproduce or disrupt educational inequity. School

principals are critical figures tasked with supporting the success of all students (Fullan, 2014). The study contributes to our understand of how suburban principals conceptualize race and racism in the suburban school setting and adds to our understanding what supports principals need in order to disrupt inequitable practices and ensure an equitable and just education for all students.

The findings of this study suggest principals need a critical race lens in order to conceptualize racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic disparities as systemic issues and be able to address racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and linguistic inequity at a system-level. There was a clear correlation between principal preparation and principals feeling prepared to support diversity and address inequity at the school level. The findings of this study suggest that principals need administrative preparation programs and district support to explicitly focus on supporting racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic diversity and on addressing inequity in order to better prepare principals for the challenges of diverse schools. The majority of the policies and practices that suburban principals engage in were state or district mandated. Principals might be able to enact racially-equitable practices more if states and school districts clearly and explicitly adopt racially-equitable practices and policies.

Finally, this researcher urges suburban school districts to address the racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic inequities that produce disparities within their school districts. Suburban school districts, too comfortable with their high-performance, cannot ignore the injustice of disparate student outcomes for historically oppressed and marginalized students (Noguera et al., 2011). School districts must support their principals with anti-racist trainings and policies (Ayscue, 2016) that equip school leaders with the practical skills needed to directly confront systemic racism within their schools (Holme et al., 2014).

Any educational system with even the smallest margin of disparity, no matter how high-performing, is an unjust system that denies diverse students their right to an equitable and excellent education. This researcher calls upon all educational systems to vigorously and urgently ensure that all students of different racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, ability and linguistic backgrounds receive a just education, an equitable education, an education equal to the greatness every child is born with.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Principal's Preparedness and Response to Increasing Diversity Survey

The survey will be administered through Survey Monkey.

Demographics Questions

Gender

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ Decline to state

What is your age?

- ☐ Less than 30
- ☐ 30-39
- ☐ 40-49
- ☐ 50-59
- ☐ 60 and above

What is your race and/or ethnicity. Please check all that applies.

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Latino
- ☐ Hispanic
- ☐ Native American, American Indian, or Indigenous American
- ☐ Asian/Pacific Islander
- ☐ Other (please specify)\_\_\_\_\_

What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed? If you're currently enrolled in school, please indicate the highest degree you have received.

- ☐ Bachelor's degree (e.g. BA, BS)
- ☐ Master's degree (e.g. MA, MS, MEd)
- ☐ Doctorate (e.g. PhD, EdD)
- ☐ Other (please specify):\_\_\_\_\_

How did you receive your school administrative training or credentialing? Please check all that applies.

- ☐ University professional preparation program
- ☐ Through an administrative credential examination
- ☐ District-provided leadership training program or intern program
- ☐ Other (please specify):\_\_\_\_\_

Principal's Background

Is English your first language? Yes, no

What other languages are you fluent in? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you consider yourself a first-generation college graduate? Yes, no

How would you describe your family's economic situation growing up?

- ☐ Low income
- ☐ Lower middle income
- ☐ Middle income
- ☐ Upper middle income
- ☐ Upper income

What is your family's current combined annual income?

- ☐ Less than \$71,001
- ☐ \$71,001 - \$101,000
- ☐ \$101,001 - \$200,000
- ☐ Over \$200,001

Current Position

Are you a school principal?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (Ends the survey)

How many of years of experience do you have as a school principal? \_\_\_\_\_

How would you categorize your school?

- ☐ Urban, usually associated with cities and densely populated metropolitan areas
- ☐ Suburban, usually associated with areas outside of cities
- ☐ Exurb, usually associated with the area between suburban and rural places
- ☐ Rural, usually associated with sparsely populated areas
- ☐ Other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

How would you describe your school?

- ☐ Elementary school
- ☐ Middle school
- ☐ High school
- ☐ Other (please describe)

What is your school's current student demographics? Please describe briefly.

\_\_\_\_\_

### Quantitative (Likert 7)

Directions: Read each statement thoroughly. Select a number that best describes your opinions. You may only select one number for each question.

Not at all.....Absolutely

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Questions	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Would you describe your school's student population as currently diverse, either racially, culturally, ethnically, and/or linguistically?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Thinking about the last 5-10 years, would you describe your school as changing in student demographics to becoming more diverse, either racially, culturally, ethnically, and/or linguistically?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
How would you rate your school's current policies, programs, and efforts in supporting diversity, either racially, culturally, ethnically, and/or linguistically?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
How would you rate your school's current policies, programs, and efforts in addressing inequity, either racial, cultural, ethnic, and/or linguistic?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
How would you rate your district's support in preparing you to address racial, cultural, ethnic, and/or linguistic diversity and inequity issues at your school?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
How would you rate your administrative preparation program in preparing you to address racial, cultural, ethnic, and/or linguistic diversity and inequity issues at your school?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
How would you rate your own personal preparedness in addressing racial, cultural, ethnic, and/or linguistic diversity and inequity issues at your school?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
How would you rate other factors, such as life experiences, your background, or informal learning experiences, in preparing you to address racial, cultural, ethnic, and/or linguistic diversity and inequity issues at your school?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

What are some policies, programs, and efforts your school currently have in place that support diversity, either racially, culturally, ethnically, and/or linguistically? Check all that applies.

- ☐ Culturally responsive teaching
- ☐ Culturally relevant pedagogy
- ☐ Consistent conversations about race
- ☐ Restorative justice or other alternative to suspensions
- ☐ Heterogeneous grouping during class formation
- ☐ Teaching staff demographics that reflect student demographics
- ☐ Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_

Where did you receive formal training, if any, on how to address racial, cultural, ethnic, and/or linguistic diversity and inequity as an educational leader?

- ☐ University professional preparation program
- ☐ Administrative credential examination
- ☐ District-provided professional development
- ☐ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Have not received formal training



Consider that recent racial protests have brought national attention to systemic racism and inequity, what are some things you will do as a principal or might do differently? Check all that applies.

- ☐ Provide staff development on culturally responsive teaching and/or culturally relevant pedagogy
- ☐ Engage all staff in consistent conversations about race
- ☐ Provide staff development on restorative justice or other alternative to suspensions
- ☐ Engage all staff in examination of current school practices through the lens of equity for all
- ☐ Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_

### Qualitative (Open Ended)

What do you believe are some issues or challenges at your school, if any, that stem from racial, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity? (For example, parent participation)

What are some specific programs or protocols that you use to address issues at your school that stem from racial, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity and/or inequity?

What are some specific programs, professional development, or procedures that your school district is using to support you in addressing issues stemming from racial, cultural, ethnic, and/or linguistic diversity and inequity at your school?

What other preparation, training, or life experiences have supported you in addressing issues concerning racial, cultural, ethnic, and/or linguistic diversity and inequity at your school?

During your career as an administrator, can you recall a situation or incident in the past that may have been racially charged? If so, what happened? If that happened today, how would you react?

Would you be interested in participating in an online interview to help provide a deeper understand your responses and point of view? The interview will be conducted one-on-one using Zoom. The interview is estimate to take forty-five (45) minutes. Only the audio portion of the interview will be recorded in order to be transcribed and later analyzed. All efforts will be made in order to ensure your confidentiality and protect your privacy. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may discontinue participation at any time.

- ☐ Yes, I am interested in participating in the online interview portion of the study.  
☐ No

If yes, please provide your contact information so that the researcher can arrange an interview.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol with Questions and Probes

### Interview Questions for Principals

Please expand on your responses to .. (scenarios or open-ended questions in the principal survey).

Can you tell me more about...( scenarios or open-ended questions in the principal survey).

What do you mean when you wrote...(quote from survey question responses)?

What else would you like to share about your work as a principal in a diverse school or in a school with increasing diversity?

In this question, you rated it a \_\_\_\_, can you tell me more about....?

### Interview Probes for Principals

Can you tell me more about...?

What do you mean when you say...?

Please illustrate it with a story or example from your experiences.

And what else...?

Can you clarify...?

### Interview Questions for Teachers

How would you describe your principal's leadership?

What do you believe are some issues at your school, if any, that stem from racial, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity?

What are some ways in which your school is addressing issues that stem from racial, cultural, ethnic, and/or linguistic diversity?

What are some ways in which your school is addressing inequity, whether racial, cultural, ethnic, and/or linguistic?

Can you recall a situation or incident in the past that may have been racially charged at your school? What happened? If it happens again, how would you want your principal to act now?

Consider that recent racial protests have brought national attention to systemic racism, what are some things you want your school to do or do differently? (For example, have monthly conversations about race).

What else would you like to share about racial, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity at your school?

### Interview Probes for Teachers

Can you tell me more about...?

What do you mean when you say...?

Please illustrate it with a story or example from your experiences.  
 And what else...?  
 Can you clarify...?

#### Interview Questions for Classified Staff Members

How would you describe your principal?

In your opinion, how does your school treat parents and the community?

How does your school treat the Latino parents? (How does your school treat the Black parents? How does your school treat the White parents?)

What are some things your school is doing to promote diversity?

Can you recall a situation or incident in the past that may have been racially charged at your school? What did your school do? If it happens again, how would you want your school to act now?

Consider that recent racial protests have brought national attention to systemic racism, what are some things you want your school to do or do differently?

What else would you like to share about racial, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity at your school?

#### Interview Probes for Classified Staff Members

Can you tell me more about...?  
 What do you mean when you say...?  
 Please illustrate it with a story or example from your experiences.  
 And what else...?  
 Can you clarify...?

## Appendix C: Teachers and Classified Staff Demographics and Interest Survey

The survey will be administered through Survey Monkey.

### Demographics Questions

Gender

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ Decline to state

What is your age?

- ☐ Less than 30
- ☐ 30-39
- ☐ 40-49
- ☐ 50-59
- ☐ 60 and above

What is your race and/or ethnicity. Please check all that applies.

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Latino
- ☐ Hispanic
- ☐ Native American, American Indian, or Indigenous American
- ☐ Asian/Pacific Islander
- ☐ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

### Current Position

What is your current position at the school?

- ☐ Teacher
- ☐ Classified Staff Member
- ☐ Other

Please provide your contact information so that the researcher can arrange an interview.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D: Signed District Site Authorization Forms

Appendix J



## APPENDIX J: SITE AUTHORIZATION

Title of Study	How Principals Perpetuate or Disrupt Educational Inequality: A Mixed-Methods Study on the Conceptualizations and Responses of Suburban Elementary Principals
Researcher/s	Thuong Horne
Researcher/s' Affiliation with Site	No Affiliation
Researcher/s' Phone Numbers	310-592-7495
Researcher/s' CUI Email (unless not from CUI)	Thuong.horne@eagles.cui.edu
Researcher/s' University Supervisor	Dr. Deborah Collins
Univ. Supervisor's Phone & Email	Deborah.collins@cui.edu/562-370-6912
Location/s where Study will Occur	Glendale Unified School District

**Purpose of Study (1-2 paragraphs)**

Since the 1990s, suburban schools have diversified dramatically with increasing populations of immigrants, Black, and low-socioeconomic students. The purpose of this mixed-methods study is to understand how traditional public school principals conceptualize and respond to increasing racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic diversity in suburban elementary schools and whether such responses reproduce or disrupt educational inequality as viewed through the lens of race and racism. As principals are the primary leader at a school site, how suburban elementary school leaders respond to increasing diversity has implications for the educational opportunities afforded to students of color and other marginalized student groups. Understanding how principals conceptualize and respond to increasing diversity can inform suburban school leadership practices and, potentially, school leadership preparation. Teachers and classified staff interviews are included in the study in order to gain a deeper understanding of the school's context and the principal's leadership.

**Procedures to be Followed**

The researcher is not affiliated with the school district. In the first stage of the study, an introduction email will be sent to a district contact person to be forwarded to all elementary principals in the district. The introduction email will contain the purpose, procedure, potential benefits, assurance of confidentiality, right to withdraw from the study, and includes a digital consent form. The introduction email will also contain a link to the confidential, online initial survey. In the second stage of the study, two principals will be selected from a pool of volunteers established by the initial survey participants. The two selected principals will participate in a semi-structured online interview conducted by the researcher. In order to have diverse perspectives, one White principal and one principal of a different race, ethnicity or culture will be purposefully sampled.

In the third stage of the study, two teachers and two classified staff members at the selected principals' school sites will participate in a voluntary, semi-structured online interview conducted by the researcher. The two selected principals will forward an introduction email to all teachers and classified staff at the school site inviting them to participate in the study. The introduction email will contain the purpose, procedure, potential benefits, assurance of confidentiality, right to withdraw from the study, and includes a digital consent form. The introduction email will also contain a link to the confidential, online survey that only asks demographics questions and for contact information in order to arrange an online interview. Two teachers and two classified staff members from each of the two selected sites will be purposefully chosen to represent as many different race, ethnicity, and/or culture possible based on student demographics and depending on the pool of volunteer participants.

During the online interviews for principals, teachers, and classified staff, the video will be disabled so that only the audio portion of the online interviews will be recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions will be analyzed

## Appendix J



along with the survey results.

**Time and Duration of Study**

Data collection will begin after October 15, 2020 and continue through December 2020. Data analysis, writing, and defense of the findings and discussion chapters of the dissertation are scheduled to be completed by March 2021.

**Benefits of Study**

The potential benefits of this study include increased understanding of how school leaders conceptualize and respond to increasingly diverse student population and how their responses contribute to or disrupt educational inequality. Increased understanding may lead to changes in principal preparation programs and district administrative professional development in order to promote equitable leadership practices in suburban schools.

**Persons who will have access to the records, data, tapes, or other documentation** (see Application Process Step C.3 of Handbook)

Only the researcher will have access to the surveys, audio recordings, and transcriptions which will be under password protection. Confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used.

Date when the records, data, tapes, or other documentation will be destroyed: June 30, 2021

Researcher's Signature [Signature] Date 9/20/2020

**Authorization**

I understand that participation in this study is confidential. Only the researcher, collaborators, and supervising professor will have access to participants' identities and to information that can be associated with their identities. Please check the appropriate box below and sign the form:

☒ **I give permission** for my organization to participate in this project, including the two elementary schools choosing to participate. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form. I have read this form and understand it.

☐ **I do not give permission** for my organization to participate in this project.

Authorized Signature [Signature] Date 10/7/20

Printed Name & Title Kelly King Asst. Superintendent

## Appendix E: Temecula USD Site Authorization

## Appendix J



## APPENDIX J: SITE AUTHORIZATION

Title of Study	<b>How Principals Perpetuate or Disrupt Educational Inequality: A Mixed-Methods Study on the Conceptualizations and Responses of Suburban Elementary Principals</b>
Researcher/s	Thuong Horne
Researcher/s' Affiliation with Site	No Affiliation
Researcher/s' Phone Numbers	310-592-7495
Researcher/s' CUI Email <small>(unless not from CUI)</small>	Thuong.horne@eagles.cui.edu
Researcher/s' University Supervisor	Dr. Deborah Collins
Univ. Supervisor's Phone & Email	Deborah.collins@cui.edu/562-370-6912
Location/s where Study will Occur	Temecula Unified School District

**Purpose of Study (1-2 paragraphs)**

Since the 1990s, suburban schools have diversified dramatically with increasing populations of immigrants, Black, and low-socioeconomic students. The purpose of this mixed-methods study is to understand how traditional public school principals conceptualize and respond to increasing racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic diversity in suburban elementary schools and whether such responses reproduce or disrupt educational inequality as viewed through the lens of race and racism. As principals are the primary leader at a school site, how suburban elementary school leaders respond to increasing diversity has implications for the educational opportunities afforded to students of color and other marginalized student groups. Understanding how principals conceptualize and respond to increasing diversity can inform suburban school leadership practices and, potentially, school leadership preparation. Teachers and classified staff interviews are included in the study in order to gain a deeper understanding of the school's context and the principal's leadership.

**Procedures to be Followed**

The researcher is not affiliated with the school district. In the first stage of the study, an introduction email will be sent to a district contact person to be forwarded to all elementary principals in the district. The introduction email will contain the purpose, procedure, potential benefits, assurance of confidentiality, right to withdraw from the study, and includes a digital consent form. The introduction email will also contain a link to the confidential, online initial survey. In the second stage of the study, two principals will be selected from a pool of volunteers established by the initial survey participants. The two selected principals will participate in a semi-structured online interview conducted by the researcher. In order to have diverse perspectives, one White principal and one principal of a different race, ethnicity or culture will be purposefully sampled.

In the third stage of the study, two teachers and two classified staff members at the selected principals' school sites will participate in a voluntary, semi-structured online interview conducted by the researcher. The two selected principals will forward an introduction email to all teachers and classified staff at the school site inviting them to participate in the study. The introduction email will contain the purpose, procedure, potential benefits, assurance of confidentiality, right to withdraw from the study, and includes a digital consent form. The introduction email will also contain a link to the confidential, online survey that only asks demographics questions and for contact information in order to arrange an online interview. Two teachers and two classified staff members from each of the two selected sites will be purposefully chosen to represent as many different race, ethnicity, and/or culture possible based on student demographics and depending on the pool of volunteer participants.

During the online interviews for principals, teachers, and classified staff, the video will be disabled so that only the audio portion of the online interviews will be recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions will be analyzed



## Appendix J



along with the survey results.

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The potential benefits of this study include increased understanding of how school leaders conceptualize and respond to increasingly diverse student population and how their responses contribute to or disrupt educational inequality. Increased understanding may lead to changes in principal preparation programs and district administrative professional development in order to promote equitable leadership practices in suburban schools.

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Date when the records, data, tapes, or other documentation will be destroyed: June 30, 2021

Researcher's Signature  Date 9/20/2020

**Authorization**

I understand that participation in this study is confidential. Only the researcher, collaborators, and supervising professor will have access to participants' identities and to information that can be associated with their identities. Please check the appropriate box below and sign the form:

☒ **I give permission** for my organization to participate in this project, including the two elementary schools choosing to participate. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form. I have read this form and understand it.

☐ **I do not give permission** for my organization to participate in this project.

Authorized Signature  Date 9/24/20

Printed Name & Title Jodi McClay, Superintendent TVUSD