Leadership for Inclusive Practices: Border Crossing for Refugee Students

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BOSTON COLLEGE

Lynch School of Education

Department of
Educational Leadership and Higher Education

Professional School Administrator Program (PSAP)

LEADERSHIP FOR INCLUSIVE PRACTICES: BORDER CROSSING FOR REFUGEE STUDENTS

Dissertation in Practice by

William Russell Driscoll

with Beth N. Choquette, Elizabeth S. Fitzmaurice, and Jonathan V. Redden,

submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

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LEADERSHIP FOR INCLUSIVE PRACTICES: BORDER CROSSING FOR REFUGEE STUDENTS
by
William Russell Driscoll

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Abstract

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that more than half of the 22.5 million refugees worldwide are children. Among the consequences of fleeing their homes because of violence, war and persecution, families and children face a crisis level of interruption to their educational opportunities. As the United States continues to lead the world in welcoming asylum seekers, educational leaders must prepare for an increasing population of transnational students (Bajaj & Bartlett, 2017).

Public schools in Massachusetts offer a unique perspective to study how leaders build supports for refugee students because of its high national rankings and the adoption of new Multiple-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) for all students (Massachusetts, 2019). This heuristic case study, nested within a group study of inclusive leadership practices in a Massachusetts school district, included interviews with 16 district and school leaders, informal observations of a high school and elementary school with a large population of "newcomer" students, and document review of school websites, newspapers, archives, achievement data, memos, and policy statements. Findings indicated that school leaders use inclusive practices to support the needs of their refugee students by (I) Identifying Barriers to Learning, (II) Aligning Structures with Universal Design for Learning, and (III) Committing to Equitable Access for All. Implications of this case study highlight how leaders might balance equity and access in response to the forced migration of millions of students arriving in their districts.

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Finally, thank you to my family who been supportive, even when my efforts required numerous weekends away from home. I am so thankful for your selfless commitment to my goals and encouraging me even when it meant time away from you.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the three most important women in my life.

First, my wife, Christie Potter Driscoll, has been a partner in my professional life and my work at Boston College in innumerable ways. We have been educators together, pushing each other to always improve practice, and to give selflessly to our students. Additionally, you have been my finest editor and supporter of my doctoral studies. I think of how often your counseling degree was put to the test in helping me get through particularly arduous tasks along the way. I would not have completed this dissertation without you. It is our doctorate, not mine alone. I share this accomplishment equally with you.

Second, my mother, Mary Lucretia Driscoll, was my first teacher and is a legendary educator in the history of our Catholic schools in Massachusetts. She modelled an example for me of how hard work and tireless dedication is the only path in life. She continuously pushed me throughout my life by asking "When are you getting your doctorate?" I am irreversibly Dr. Driscoll.

Finally, my grandmother, Lucretia DiPasquale, who was an immigrant to the United States at the turn of the 20th Century. My study of refugee students is a tribute to her journey and its impact on me. She read to me when I was but an infant, setting goals for me at a young age, always encouraging me to pursue the American Dream, and instilled in my entire family an abiding sense of the importance of education. I am but one of many who completed doctoral studies because of her influence.

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Chapter 1 [1]

Problem Statement

The challenges of educating students have always been complex, but as reducing inequity becomes one of the utmost duties facing schools, educational leaders must grapple with existing concepts of exclusion and inclusion to ensure academic success for all (Dei & James, 2002). An evolving understanding of the impact of difference on experiences in the school setting and educational outcomes heighten these demands (Bar-Yam et al., 2002). The intersection of multiple contrasting identities and the political call to eliminate achievement disparities that exist in American schools because of race, ethnicity, and language demonstrate that current approaches are inadequate to meet the expanding requirements of leading schools (Milner IV, 2015). Equitable access for all provides a rationale for creating an inclusive educational experience for students regardless of disability or special needs (Ainscow, 2005; Frattura & Capper, 2008). Technical demands include the capacity to engage increasingly diverse student populations to prepare them for globalized networks of knowledge, integrate their skills within the context of a local community, and meet the individual needs of students (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Cheng, 2003). Major implications for leadership include the transformation of schools as communities of learning that can overcome the barriers caused by the marginalization of students to advance social justice (Grandi, 2018; Jones et al., 2013; Ryan, 2006).

Just as leadership for inclusive practices necessitates a common understanding and a shared vision, this study applies the same approach. At the outset of this study, we forged a definition of inclusive practices and offered a perspective of leadership for inclusive practices

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[1] This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project: Beth N. Choquette, William R. Driscoll, Elizabeth S. Fitzmaurice, and Jonathan V. Redden.

that are reflective of our experiences and beliefs. Our definition expands beyond special education and includes consideration of all learners.

We define leadership for inclusive practices as a mindset cultivating an opportunity of access for all. Such access, approached with fidelity, requires a relentless pursuit of equity creating structures and perspectives that are socially just, based on respect, and are welcoming to all. Ideally, inclusive practices should respond to continuous efforts to embrace the diversity of learners by promoting a sense of community to establish a safe, supportive culture. Leaders must encourage educators to provide flexible and meaningful learning opportunities as well as make intentional efforts to create a school environment where students are welcome, and their characteristics are valued. This approach necessitates a collaborative atmosphere between educators and families to design structures and implement policies that reinforce inclusive opportunities in schools.

We view persistent incongruities in the equity of educational opportunities available to students in Massachusetts as a call to action as the needs of our students become ever more diverse and the importance of fostering inclusive learning environments continues to grow (Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2016).

Gap Statement

Given the moral imperative to ensure access to education for all learners, this study aimed to explore how district and school leaders support inclusive practices to address the diverse needs of students. Scholars have sketched frameworks for inclusive leadership practices directed towards eliminating injustices (Ryan, 2006; Shields, 2004), creating structures that support learning for all students (McLesky et al., 2014), and shifting perspectives to sustain inclusive cultures and climates (Villa & Thousand, 2017), yet we found limited research at the

district level. Although emerging evidence provides some insights derived from using the school district as a unit of analysis to determine the impact of school change in general (Daly & Finnegan, 2016; Rorrer et al., 2008), scant research has interrogated how leadership for inclusive practices is systemically supported across the district.

Purpose

Educational leadership for inclusive practices supports the common good by promoting beliefs and practices that are inclusive of the individuals served by schools (Shields, 2004). This study was not undertaken to measure accountability or improve test scores. Rather, our focus was to uncover the public good served through robust and genuine leadership for inclusive practices by researching *with*, not on, practitioners who are doing good work in the field with the aim of promoting the belief that education is a basic human right and the foundation of a more just society (Theoharis, 2007).

The intent of this study was to explore how district and school leaders are supporting systems of learning for all students, so they thrive in a nurturing environment that values their unique assets. We studied the “leadership style and practice that facilitates the creation of an inclusive school culture” (Carter & Abawi, 2018, p. 51). The true aspirational goal of our study is to save lives. Students who are refugees may join schools traumatized by their experiences and suffer many types of emotional difficulties, which can lead to suicide or put them at risk of abuse by adults. Students disproportionately disciplined out of school or who suffer trauma are at risk for similar outcomes. Relatedly, outcomes for students with disabilities not offered the opportunity to robust access to content instruction derive social exclusions and lower achievement. An inclusive school is the place in the community where students can feel safe, access educational opportunities and form relationships with community and outside

organizations, resulting in outcomes that enhance the quality of their lives (Dei & James, 2002). There is a public good inherent in inclusive practices.

The approach in this study was influenced by our positionality as researchers and practitioners. We examined how school leaders might promote asset-based, trauma-informed, inclusive practices to benefit a vast array of students, especially through the design of support systems and equitable disciplinary practices, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Leadership for Inclusive Practices: Overview of Group Study

Individual Research Topics	Investigator	Conceptual Framework	Research Questions
Trauma-informed schools	Choquette	MTSS/Social Justice Leadership	*In what ways do district and school leaders support inclusive practices for students who have experienced trauma?*
Leadership practices to support refugee students	Driscoll	MTSS	*In what ways do district and school leaders support inclusive practices for refugee students?*
Leadership decisions about student discipline	Fitzmaurice	MTSS	*In what ways do district and school leaders make discipline decisions that support students' opportunity to learn?*
Inclusive practices for students with disabilities	Redden	Universal Design for Learning	*In what ways do district and school leaders utilize UDL services to support inclusion for students with disabilities in the general education classroom?*

Literature Review

> As the preservation of rights and liberties depend on spreading the opportunities and advantages of education…it shall be the duty of legislatures and magistrates, in all future periods of the Commonwealth, to cherish the interests of literature and the sciences, and all seminaries of them; especially the university at Cambridge, public schools and

grammar schools in the towns. (Part II, c. 5, Section 2, of the Massachusetts Constitution, 1780)

As revealed in the passage above, John Adams conceived of education as a right of all Massachusetts citizens. The tension between the ideal and reality dominates the literature. A fundamental belief that democracy is dependent upon educational access continues to resonate with educational leaders practicing in the Commonwealth, as was evident during recent testimony at the Massachusetts Legislative Joint Session on Education (March, 2019) while they debated that the budgeting process favors the affluent. The interplay between the legal obligations of the profession and a sense of moral duty to provide educational opportunities for all students continue to influence leaders (Pullin, 2008). Skrtic's (1991) immanent critique of public education pointed to the failure of democratic ideals because of exclusive practices within the structures and cultures of schools. The literature on inclusive practices reveals a history of leaders attempting to overcome exclusive structures and mindsets.

As we explored the evolution of thought on inclusive practices, we struggled to discover a shared definition of inclusive practices, primarily because of their origin in special education literature (Billingsley et al., 2018). Conversely, Ekins (2017) argued that the use of "inclusion" as a term has become commonplace in education, policy, and literature which has created a perception of a shared understanding. Dyson and Gallannaugh (2007) warn practitioners to avoid looking for a blueprint or script of inclusive practices as it can only be determined via the school setting itself.

Our intent is not to adhere to a narrow interpretation of inclusive practices. Instead, we point the reader towards a growing focus on cultural diversity, disciplinary practices, trauma-informed schools, Universal Design for Learning, and Multi-Tiered System of Supports. Our

analysis of the literature sheds light on three thematic units that helped guide us through our research question: first, there is an *evolving understanding* of what education leaders mean by inclusive. Second, this expanded meaning focuses on *access*: providing opportunities, designing programs, and implementing structures that are intentionally accessible for all students. Third, we find *leadership perspectives* are crucial to inspiring a shift in teacher beliefs and guiding the development of the school culture and climate necessary to sustain inclusive practices.

Evolving Understanding

Discrimination and exclusion based on gender, race, religion, ethnicity, ability, language, and gender identity are an unfortunate legacy of education that we must confront if we are to realize the kind of pluralism envisioned in the corpus of literature on inclusive practices (Fine, 2018). An inclusive philosophy aimed towards erecting multi-tiered supports extends beyond the needs of students with disabilities to frame a system of accessible instruction, and positive behavior supports that generates positive outcomes for all students (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016). Inclusive practices have not always conveyed this meaning because the term has been viewed exclusively as a strategy for students with special needs (Mittler, 2005).

Misunderstanding about inclusive leadership practices is rooted in the pragmatic approach of school leaders to comply with special education legislation. According to Pullin (2008), legislation about special education, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act, exert tremendous pressure upon educational leaders to design their schools to implement models that comply with these statutes. However, Pullin revealed that even in special education, the interpretation of these laws and models vary across regions of the United States. The variegated

implementation of modes of learning that attempt to create the least restrictive environment lead to the "continued misinterpretation of special education as a specific location, rather than a set of supports and services to be delivered in any location" (Rydnak et al., 2014, p. 67). Ekins (2017) suggested inclusion is not a specific thing, but rather involves a "web of supporting and conflicting values and practices which go together to make up the inclusive practices which support pupils within a school" (p. 7). The vantage point presented by these scholars has prevailed throughout educational leadership circles and we present the progression of a more expansive viewpoint, especially outside of the United States.

According to Bradley-Levine (2019), inclusive leadership practices emerged from the concept of "critical consciousness," developed by the groundbreaking Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. During his work with literacy education in Brazil in the early 1970s, Freire recognized the importance of culturally sustaining practices. He advanced an educational pedagogy of liberation which cautioned leaders that their actions could oppress students when they impose their own decisions, rather than engaging them and the community within the context of their unique realities. Freire envisioned the leader's role as liberating facilitator who must develop a critical consciousness by guiding oppressed learners to fully participate in shaping school decisions that capitalize on the assets of language, ethnicity, and race to overcome the "culture of silence" imposed on them by the dominant culture (2000). This notion was echoed by Shields (2004) who coined the phrase "pathologies of silence" to refer to how schools perpetuate the logic of racism and exclusion. Shields describes:

> the term pathologizing to denote a process of treating differences as deficits, a process that locates the responsibility for school success in the lived experiences of children

(home life, home culture, SES) rather than situating responsibility in the education system itself (p. 112).

Bearing this in mind, interpretations of such thinking suggested that inclusive education cannot seamlessly cross different school contexts but should be determined by localized context to uncover the appropriate practices to address the diversity in a school (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). This understanding is further encouraged by Senge's (1990) proposed framework, "Levers for Change," which promoted the concept of learning organizations, where everyone in a school is a contributor to enhancing knowledge. The framework influenced educational researchers to argue that moves towards inclusion are about the development of schools, rather than solely attempts to integrate vulnerable groups of students into existing arrangements (Ainscow, 2005). Furthermore, "this framework differentiates that in order to move towards inclusion, the focus should be on building the capacity within the school to support the participation and learning of an increasingly diverse range of learners" (p. 112). Similarly, Skrtic's (1991) theory of action involved programs, staff roles, and classrooms devised as flexible entities, in such that school principals lead efforts to customize the overall environment to meet the need of each learner.

At the same time, we identified a historical shift in thought promoted by leaders who feel a duty to advance social justice. Over the past three decades, Ladson-Billings (1995), Theoharis (2007) and Scanlan (2011), integrated concepts of social justice into inclusive practices. Their work demonstrated that leaders could reorganize the curriculum to be reflective of the students enrolled in the school community. They advance that leaders cultivate a school culture that promotes the inherent dignity of all people and embraces the opportunity to overcome the biases,

misconceptions, and fallacies that people hold about others, especially populations that are vulnerable because of emotional, linguistic, cultural, ethnic, racial, and learning differences.

Relatedly, international researchers viewed leadership that facilitated multi-tiered inclusive practices as a possible pathway to meet the complexities of learning within the context of the current educational landscape (Jones & Cureton, 2014; Ainscow et al., 2013). The findings of Dei & James (2002) argue that a shift to inclusive practices offered promise as a discursive framework to promote cultural pride, global awareness, and meaningful connections with a society that overcome exclusionary practices that are institutionalized by schools. Also, the implementation of systems and policy changes has prompted schools to restructure service delivery models to help all students access the general education curriculum and achieve learning outcomes in a more inclusive environment (Turnbull et al., 2010). Beyond structural supports, Ainscow and Sandill's (2010) study focused on the importance of staff relationships in supporting the development of inclusive practices. Relationships between educators underpin the work necessary to creatively and effectively review and continuously develop inclusive practices in schools.

Given the strengths and tensions discussed in this section, we explain that research is now emerging beyond the narrow focus of earlier conceptions of "inclusion" and its special education connotation, confronting existing paradigms that erect barriers to learning, and reimagining inclusive practices as a means to meet a multiplicity of needs (Theoharis, 2007). We traced the genealogy of thought on inclusive practices throughout the years, acknowledging that it extends deep roots in special education, but now branches into a more comprehensive approach to learning. We share the distinction made by Ainscow et al. (2013) between "special education needs" and "non-special education needs" as antiquated. We stake out a position that leaders

view systems of support as a way to benefit *all* learners, not just students with special education needs.

Access (The Opportunity, Programs, Structures)

Integral to the success of leadership for inclusive practices is the provision of access to education and, thus, the opportunity for all students to learn. Research consistently demonstrates that high quality, inclusive environments are associated with positive outcomes for students. Creating heterogeneous classes that mix abilities, academic performance, behavior, and other learning needs, enable the principal to utilize the collaborative time of teachers to engage in learning that expands an educator's differentiation and instructional practices (Villa & Thousand, 2017).

Vision to Support a Unified Approach to Access

A component of ensuring an inclusive environment is for leadership to articulate and share their vision to cultivate a robust climate to support expectations for such structures. Research shows that inclusive schools share a vision of meeting the needs of all students. Hehir's (2012) study of three Boston public elementary schools identified that a shared vision of inclusion within the school is the driving force behind success and sustainability. Educators in these schools did not think of inclusion as a means to engage only students with disabilities. When educators align decision making and resource allocation with a commitment to prioritizing the differences all students bring as individuals, inclusive learning environments flourish.

Waldron et al. (2011) conducted a qualitative study at an elementary school in Florida to identify themes that would help them determine the actions a principal has in designing and sustaining an inclusive school environment. Themes in the data acknowledged that teachers viewed principals as the keepers of the vision due to the principal's ability to communicate a

coherent direction for inclusion in unison with high expectations for all. Observation data consistently showed high quality instruction and collaborative data analysis best informed the practices of teachers in the classroom.

Diverse Populations and Complications to Access

Considerate of the multicultural habitat that is our public schoolhouse, embracing such rich opportunities is essential to the success of leadership for inclusive practices. Carter and Abawi (2018) conducted a six-month case study in Australia that focused on how a principal and director of special education worked to embed practices within a multicultural school. Their conceptual framework of how leaders embed and sustain inclusive practices was influential in shaping our thinking as we explored the literature because of its emphasis on shaping organizational architecture. Their findings, rooted in a social justice perspective, suggested that the deliberate creation of structures aimed at inclusive practices and sustained by cycles of quality assurance were able to achieve high quality educational outcomes for all students.

Existing educational disparities suggest that the education system in the United States systematically denies equal access and opportunity to marginalized populations based on race (National Association of Social Workers, 2015). Fisher et al. (2000) analyzed the structures and support that a principal implemented at a large urban elementary school to integrate students from diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, Fisher's research team found barriers such as principal turnover, cuts to the budget, teacher turnover and a teacher strike. These contributing factors thwarted even the most robust attempts to lead from an inclusive perspective. Principals found the most success when they stayed true to their vision and committed resources to put personnel and services in the classroom to support all student learning.

Structures and School Initiatives

Inclusive leaders put structures in place that support a whole school approach to inclusive practices. Ryan stated that inclusive leadership is educative (as cited in Evans, 1999; Smyth, 1989). He concluded that educating the whole school community about inclusive issues is important because administrators, teachers, students, and parents, particularly those in more diverse settings, generally know too little about each other, about exclusive practices such as racism, and how to approach and implement inclusive practices (as cited in Ryan, 2003). Whole school initiatives require a leader who has a vision and is willing to facilitate discussions to help change the mindset of those who may not share the vision. In order to establish a culture that accepts and engages all learners, regardless of the diversity of their needs, a leader must be prepared to develop a vision that will provide the foundation for this to happen (Sharma & Desai, 2008; Fauske, 2011). Ainscow and Sandill (2010) reviewed international literature about inclusive practices and concluded that it is important for leaders to recognize their role in making structural changes, especially those that alter the behavior of adults, to make it possible for all students to learn.

MTSS Implementation

Utilizing a tiered structure to organize and systematically deliver differentiated supports to students provides for an environment where access to inclusive practices can thrive. In 2015, Sanetti and Collier-Meek (2015) conducted a study in six elementary schools across three suburban districts in Connecticut and Massachusetts. The study focused on classroom management utilizing a tiered approach. Findings supported the importance of faculty coaching and development needed to increase the teachers' individual professional practices. Sanetti and Collier-Meek found that in classrooms where techniques, taught during professional learning and

coaching sessions, were implemented with fidelity, student behavior and access to learning opportunities increased.

Similarly, in a more recent study conducted within an urban elementary school in the southeast, McDaniel et al. (2018) found that systematic decision making specific to the provision of tiered supports was essential to the success of providing an inclusive culture within the school and directly related to more positive student outcomes. This study specifically focused on the provision of social emotional and behavioral tiered supports to measure student outcomes in response to tiered interventions. They attributed the success of a tiered support model in careful assessment and a consistent system where students continue with their Tier I support while participating in Tier II support and continue with Tier I and II support while participating in Tier III support as necessary.

Furthermore, tiered academic supports were the focus of the study conducted by Marshall (2016) in pursuit of her doctorate. She outlined the importance of formal assessment structures within a tiered support model to assess Response to Intervention (RtI) specific to reading in elementary schools. Also, universal screening and the systematic use of existing curriculum-based measures as Tier I strategies proved effective to support middle school reading access in a case study of Michigan middle school reading data (Stevenson, 2017).

The body of literature we examined led us to synthesize tiered supports as most beneficial to student learning when faculty are properly trained, the leadership team maintains a consistent vision and allocates available resources to the endeavor and all school personnel utilize existing assessment data to make good decisions for students. Given this research, providing a systemic structure, which includes MTSS as well as the creative and diverse scope of teaching and learning environments within the school, is paramount to this success. Structures of this type can

support a positive culture, enhance student access to learning and improve alignment with inclusive practices.

Perspectives (Beliefs, Culture, and Climate)

To implement inclusive practices and ensure that all students receive a socially just education, we claim that all leaders and educators must begin with the belief that all students have the right to equal educational opportunities regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, or disability. Fisher et al. (2000) discovered a common theme identified after teacher interviews that involved the belief that successful inclusion is a "fundamental right" of all students. The diversity of the students' learning ability necessitated the need for educators to continuously collaborate about pedagogy and to equitably share resources to better ensure students receive necessary supports. Embracing these beliefs and values establishes a pattern of expectations for all educators to follow. In addition to having strong beliefs surrounding inclusion and inclusive practices, creating a vision that mirrors the beliefs, and creating an environment where these beliefs come to life are the first steps in providing practices that educate all students without discrimination. Inclusive schools or districts require leaders who have a strong belief in inclusion, looking beyond students with disabilities.

To address classroom practices, Villa and Thousand (2017) view students' access to the curriculum as the measure to evaluate successful inclusion. Teachers who are equipped to differentiate when there is evidence that an instructional approach was not successful, possess the necessary skills to utilize students' strengths to address challenges. Leaders who work to better understand the diverse needs of their community realize greater success at putting sustainable policies, systems and structures in place that meet the needs of students (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

Zollers et al. (1999) conducted a study of the culture of an elementary school located in a large northeastern city that successfully implemented and sustained a model of inclusive practices. They attributed this success to “having an inclusive leader with a broad vision of school community and shared language and values which in combination created an inclusive school culture” (p. 157). The principal in this study had a strong belief in inclusive practices and viewed inclusion as a way of thinking about students of color, linguistic differences and social class. For schools to implement successful inclusive practices, a leader must embrace inclusive practices and lead with values and beliefs (Sergiovanni, 1994 as cited in Zollers et al., 1999). Bradley-Levine contends that school leaders must not only identify that injustice exists but work toward eliminating that injustice through action (as cited in McLaren, 1998).

Leaders at the district or school level must have more than just structures in place for inclusive practices to flourish. In 1994, educators at the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs endorsed the idea of special education (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010) and argued that regular schools with an inclusive orientation are ‘‘the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all” (p. 402).This statement influenced the belief that interventions are at the school level, not the individual teacher level. In other words, policies and practices must change mindsets.

In his article*, “*The Special Education Paradox: Equity as a Way to Excellence,*”* Skrtic (1992) analyzed and critiqued the policies, practices, and grounded assumptions of the special education system in the United States. He argued that the very structure of a school could be a barrier to teachers who have students with diverse needs. Expecting one educator to be able to deliver appropriate differentiated support that is ideal for individuals across content areas is not realistic, yet the success of students in many schools is contingent on a single teacher’s ability to

do just that. Continuous professional learning around collaboration, co-teaching and differentiated instruction are how schools operate as problem solving organizations. Skrtic recognized that structures built upon erroneous assumptions are embedded in cultural views that children are defective. He concluded that “the failure of schools, both culturally and structurally, to accommodate diversity, leads to segregation” (p. 155).

Finally, to provide an environment that supports inclusive practices, systematic cultural changes need to take place. Many studies have identified principals and district administrators as the most important people to establish a clear vision and approach to including all students. Villa et al. (1996) conducted the *Heterogeneous Education Teacher Survey and the Regular Education Initiative Teacher Survey* to highlight the importance that perceptions of educators have about their ability to include students successfully. The principal’s role includes identifying the benefits for all learners by establishing equitable learning opportunities for students and engaging educators in a process that enhances the conditions necessary to maximize students’ social and academic growth (Theoharis, 2007). Findings indicated that teachers need the most assistance, as they are on the front lines of providing supports to all students within the inclusive setting. Whole school initiatives focused on increasing meaningful, inclusive policies and practices are an ideal scenario for sustained positive school change (Jones et al., 2013).

Research Question

Our research approach to understanding inclusive leadership practices was guided by the three themes of *evolving understanding, access*, and *perspectives* presented in our literature review. This collective synthesis of the literature helped us to understand how school leaders use an asset-based approach to respond to the needs of students according to our individual studies: trauma-informed practices through a social justice lens, refugee students, students’ opportunity

to learn impacted by discipline, and the learning structures for students with disabilities in schools. Our guiding question at the intersection of these convergent inquiries was: *In what ways do district and school leaders support inclusive practices?*

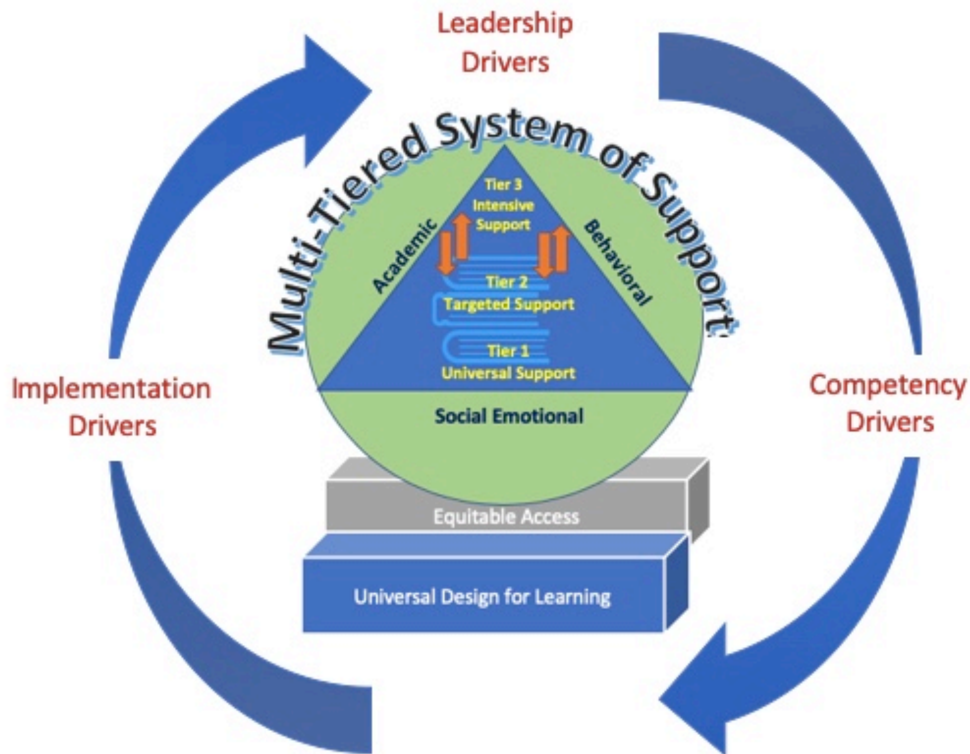
Conceptual Framework

Multi-Tiered System of Support

Our research team utilized the current Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) Framework from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as our conceptual framework for our group case study. Born of the obligation in the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) (2015) for each state to develop a tiered model of intervention considerate of academic, behavioral and social needs, Massachusetts revised their already existing framework. Given the complexities and nuances integral to considering a broader definition of leadership for inclusive practices, this strategic consideration of multiple existing research-based frameworks is essential. Figure 1 illustrates an adaptation of the Massachusetts MTSS framework. In our model, the green circle that encompasses the blue triangle is representative of how MTSS incorporates three focus areas: academic, behavioral, and social emotional learning. The two blocks at the bottom of the figure depict a foundational framework of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) with a focus on Equitable Access. The three tiers of support represented at the center of the figure are universal (Tier I), targeted (Tier II), and intensive (Tier III). It is important to note Tier II supports are supplemental to Tier I. As illustrated by the arrows, Tier III is supplemental to both Tier II and Tier I supports. Tier III is not specific to special education and can be used to support any student with or without disabilities. Critical to a Multi-Tiered System of Support are the system drivers that leaders provide in order for MTSS to be effective. These drivers include leadership, competency, and implementation.

Figure 1

Multi-Tiered System of Support (Adapted from Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019)



Foundation

First designed by Dr. David Rose, Ed.D. of the Harvard School of Education, UDL calls for implementing a curriculum that provides multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression. (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019). Each component of UDL contributes to the "organizing mechanism" of the framework across three learning domains: affective (why), recognition (what) and strategic (how). These components provide students with "multiple means to gain information" for learning through representation, action and expression and engagement (Novak & Rodriguez, 2016, p. 6). The purpose behind UDL is to increase access and engagement by reducing the barriers that can impede upon the

success of students in school. "The three principles of UDL are based on the philosophy that 1) there are multiple ways of representing knowledge, 2) multiple ways students can demonstrate their understanding, and 3) multiple ways of engaging students" (Capp, 2017, p. 793). These UDL principles lend themselves to implementing inclusionary practices in the classroom, including behavioral and social emotional teaching and learning (p. 6). UDL provides MTSS a system-wide decision-making strategy to improve student-learning opportunities (Novak & Rodriguez, 2016; Hehir et al., 2014). Such strategies are best calculated to provide benefit when they are evidence based, that is, supported as effective through research and experience (Harlacher, 2014).

Using the principles of UDL, understanding that there are multiple ways to represent information, demonstrate learning, and engage students, all students have equitable access through tiered supports to academic, behavioral, and social emotional curriculum and instruction. Piper et al. (2006) define access as the ability to obtain a seat in a classroom or access to services, whereas equity is the ability to obtain that seat or service regardless of "ethnicity, language spoken at home, gender, rural or urban location, or regional differences" (p. 2). All students, regardless of disability, English language proficiency status, income, race, or academic performance can receive Tier I, II, and III services (p. 7). For MTSS to be successful, schools must address three focus areas to reduce barriers: Academic, Behavior, and Social Emotional Learning.

Three Focus Areas

There are three focus areas to the MTSS framework in which tiered supports should be applied to best support students.

Academic. Students' opportunity for equal access to all curriculum and standards is integral to inclusive practices. *The Resource Guide to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for Students with Disabilities* (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2018) describes the use of entry points for educators to begin interventions. Careful analysis of such evidence-based universal screenings and curriculum-based measures are calculated to provide a systematic starting point for providing supports (Stevenson, 2017). Also, using the principles of UDL by providing multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression for students to attain their goals makes learning equitable by removing barriers that may be preventing a student from reaching their goals.

Social Emotional. The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), formed in 1994, leads the field in research on Social Emotional Learning (SEL), having developed the most recent structure adopted in ESSA. CASEL's SEL Framework provides five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These components are an organizational strategy that promotes SEL as a school wide initiative that creates a climate and culture conducive to learning (CASEL, 2015). This framework and the related research contribute to MTSS in an instructional vein, articulating the value of instructing social emotional learning skills that support students' understanding of these core competencies with similar instructional pedagogy evident in traditional content instruction with further articulation of the value of embedding such instruction in traditional content areas and the overall life of the school.

Behavioral. Behavior is a vehicle of communication, even undesirable behaviors. These behaviors may communicate a student is not getting what they need to access their education successfully. Schools are poised for successful intervention when they view behavior similar to a

content area, deserving of instruction. Behaviors are learned. Therefore, it is understood when using an MTSS approach to learning, lagging behavioral skills must be explicitly taught, modeled, and positively reinforced (CASEL, 2015). Schools can maximize success for all students when they:

> a) develop tiered behavioral systems that are evidence-based, data-driven and responsive to student needs, b) emphasize that classroom management and positive behavioral supports must be integrated and aligned with effective academic instruction, and c) establish a positive, safe, and supportive school climate (p. 23).

Tiered Supports

Access to education through MTSS (academic, social emotional and behavioral) is accomplished through structured supports. These tiers are both iterative and fluid, ensuring that all students have what they need.

Tier I (Universal). Universal supports are valuable to all school personnel and students alike. Such universal supports, present in all educational settings, create a structure where students have choice and voice in their educational access and teachers have flexibility and creativity with lesson planning and instructional delivery. Additionally, schools utilize universal screenings to identify what structures or options are best to use within their schools and classrooms.

Tier II (Targeted). Targeted supports provide additional interventions to already existing and continued universal Tier I supports. They are a supplemental, preventative option to continually support the opportunity to learn. Such targeted supports may be provided in small group settings or during enrichment times during the day or even before and after school hours.

They are an "opportunity to practice skills necessary for core instruction or strategies for enrichment" (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019, p. 9).

Tier III (Intensive). Students needing more supports to access their education can participate in intensive interventions, designed to occur individually or in very small groups. Individual supports are supplemental to targeted and universal supports available in Tier I & II. Such skill-based and focused opportunities are not synonymous with special education but can include students with disabilities and are typically identified through assessments, careful consideration and collaboration between school and family and provided by specially trained personnel.

System Drivers

MTSS outlines certain conditions and systems to be in place for the framework to be effective. A Multi-Tiered System of Support must be guided by leadership, competency, and implementation drivers to ensure that district resources and efforts are focused on supporting all students, who can and will learn and succeed with our support (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019, p. 2).

Leadership Drivers. Leadership drivers provide for structures that enable collaboration and input from all stakeholders. Leaders address adaptive issues such as consensus building and identifying/removing barriers that interfere with the development of an effective multi-tiered system paired with technical support such as finding time for teachers to collaborate and providing curriculum resources (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019, p. 11). Leadership drivers include shared responsibility and collaboration, resource allocation, and student, family, and community engagement. An effective Multi-Tiered System of Supports includes bringing stakeholders into the decision-making process, prioritizing

resources in such a way that optimizes a tiered system of support, and collaboration between students, families, and community partners (pp. 11-14).

Competency Drivers. Building educator capacity is at the heart of creating positive student outcomes. Leaders are thoughtful in staff recruitment, selection, and onboarding and require a mindset that all students can learn at high levels. (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019, p. 15). Districts create a professional development plan that is sustainable, high-quality, delivers on-going support, and provides coaching both at the individual level and team level (p. 16). Finally, this driver stresses the importance of aligning MTSS with the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework. For effective MTSS to occur with fidelity, leaders need to support educators with feedback that supports implementation that is academic, social emotional and behavioral learning focused (p. 18).

Implementation Drivers. The implementation drivers are organizational systems that leaders create for tiered instruction and interventions to take place (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019, p. 18). These drivers include tiered continuum of evidence-based practices, implementation fidelity, data-based decision making, and high-quality curriculum and instruction (pp. 18-21).

Connection to Purpose

The foundational framework of UDL with a focus on Equitable Access contributes to the overall MTSS framework in a coordinated manner that reflects its purpose of organizing our schools to utilize evidence-based, data-driven decision-making so we can meet the needs of all learners, which supports an expanded view of inclusive practices. A tiered approach, as outlined in MTSS, helps educators identify what types of supports are most beneficial to reduce barriers to education. A framework complete with universal supports, tiered, targeted, or individual, with

systems and structures in place within the school setting can facilitate inclusive practices in the least restrictive environment, thus appropriately supporting our study. Through the lens of the MTSS framework, we endeavored to answer our research question: *In what ways do district and school leaders support inclusive practices?*

Chapter 2 [2]

Methods

Table 2.1

Case Study Methodology

Step	Summary
1. Research Question	*In what ways do district and school leaders support inclusive practices?*
2. Literature Review	We conducted literature reviews of leadership for inclusive practices to discover themes and methods used by previous studies conducted in our areas of interest.
3. Site Selection	The research team considered the recommendations of college professors, district superintendents, and state education officials to identify a K-12 School District in Massachusetts which was: • Nominated by experts as commendable for inclusive practices, especially special education • Provided access to one K-8 (Newcomer school) and High School • Was home to a sizeable population of refugees and students who experience trauma
4. Participants	We interviewed the following district and school leaders and teachers (See Table 2.2): • Superintendent and Assistant Superintendents • Directors of Special Education, School Counseling, Technology & Student Services • One High School and One Elementary School Principal and 6 Assistant Principals; 3 in each school • Six elementary school teachers in a focus group
5. Data Collection	We collected multiple sources of information: • Document review of school enrollment data, school websites, newspapers, archives, memos, and policy statements • Semi-structured Interviews (24 in total) and Teacher Focus Group (6 participants) • Informal Site Observations of District Schools studied
6. Crafting Protocol	Interview questions and observation tools are presented in Appendices F and G
7. Entering the Field	We visited the site during a three-month period using the protocols to survey the district's level of inclusive practices, MTSS supports, and to understand the underlying values and beliefs of the leaders at various levels of the system, both upstream and downstream.
8. Data Analysis	We completed a four-phase approach to analyze the data: • *Phase 1.* As individual interviews and observation data became available, we identified essential elements that we used to define possible emergent themes that related directly to our conceptual frameworks. • *Phase 2*. Following the completion of all of the interviews and observations, we coded for themes according to the components in our conceptual framework. • *Phase 3*. We concluded comparative analysis by reviewing the variation of themes connected across conceptual frameworks and emergent themes discovered through a grounded theory approach. • *Phase 4*. Collaborated and coordinated data impressions from our individual studies to develop common themes across the group case study, relating to the overarching theme of inclusive practices

[2] This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project: Beth N. Choquette, William R. Driscoll, Elizabeth S. Fitzmaurice, and Jonathan V. Redden.

Our conceptual frameworks furnished us with a prism to inform our exploration into the logic and actions of school leaders while they provide supports to promote inclusive practices. Our case study design is presented below as a "reflexive process operating through every stage of [the] project" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 28). We conducted a heuristic case study for our group project, designed to examine how school district leaders utilize support systems to enhance inclusive practices within the school environment. The study received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Boston College before interviews were conducted. Steps 1 (Research Question) and 2 (Literature Review) were discussed previously, but we present an eight-step outline of our case study methodology in Table 2.1 shown above, and then expand upon each step in the paragraphs that follow.

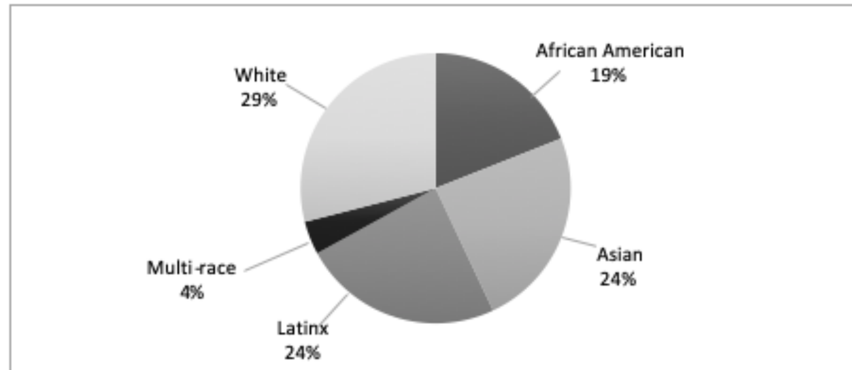
Site Selection

The unit of analysis for this case study is based on Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) definition that case study research is "a focus on a unit of study known as a bounded system" (p. 27). The bounded system in this case included a school district, with a particular focus on the high school and one elementary school in the district. We identify our district and the participating schools through the pseudonyms Northside Public Schools, Northside High School and Southwest Elementary School which is identified as the newcomer school. Additionally, our research was conducted as a team project interrogating how leaders support inclusive practices. In our quest for a district which might utilize tiered supports, we were guided to select the Northside Public School District in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Four prominent state educational leaders provided us with a short list of districts commended for their inclusive leadership practices. As illustrated in Figure 2.1, Northside Public Schools includes a population of approximately 6,500 students consisting of 29% white, 23% African American/Multi-race,

25% Asian, and 25% Latinx students. This distribution, as illustrated in Figure 2.1, makes Northside one of the most ethnically and racially diverse school districts in the Commonwealth (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019).

Figure 2.1

Racial and Ethnic Composition of Students at Northside School District (Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019)



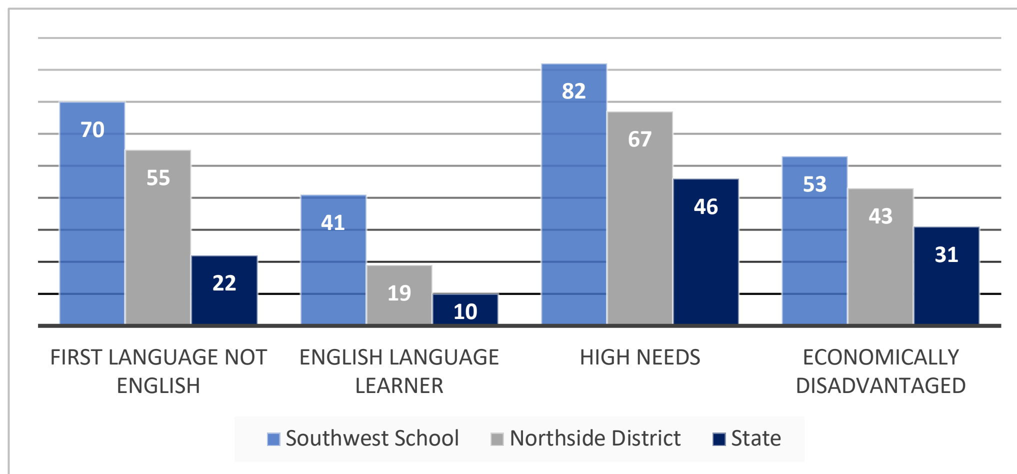
Northside is located in a racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse small urban city that has long attracted immigrants from around the world. Local political leaders have been outspokenly critical of current national policies regarding immigration, asylum-seekers, and refugees. Due to these dynamics, many students and families in the district experience trauma or contend with disabilities. Additionally, the district designated a "newcomers' school" to serve elementary students arriving from multiple countries and speaking more than 60 languages at home.

Document analysis uncovered that the district strategy to send newcomers to one particular elementary school created a distinctive community. As Figure 2.2 shows, the intersectionality of high needs, ELLs and low socio-economic status of students at the "newcomer" school, formally known as Southwest Elementary School, differs from the rest of the district and makes it idiosyncratic from other schools in the Commonwealth. The data further

illuminates why leadership decisions were directed towards increased supports to meet the needs of students.

Figure 2.2

Selected Population Comparison of Southwest Elementary School with District/State; Figures presented in Percentages (Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019)



The district has been recognized by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for inclusive practices specific to students with disabilities and for its efforts to forge creative alternatives to student discipline. The diverse composition of the district provided rich data to explore the phenomenon (Mills & Gay, 2019) we sought to understand through our group research question: *In what ways do district and school leaders support inclusive practices?*

Participants

During the next phase of the study, we applied purposive sampling to identify and enlist study participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This strategy emerged as the result of interviewing district leaders who directed us to visit two schools and to speak to their leaders, as they were responsible for supporting inclusive practices related to our areas of study. Those interviews included principals and other leaders responsible for the design and implementation of academic,

behavioral, and social emotional support structures (See Table 2.2). Finally, the identification of research participants concluded with six white female elementary school teachers from Southwest Elementary School who volunteered to participate in a focus group. We utilized the trauma-specific questions in Appendix F to guide the focus group interview. We favored this purposive case sampling to “yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge” (Patton, 2002, p. 236).

Table 2.2

Participant Data for Northside District: Group Study

Position	Gender	Race	Years in District
District Level			
Superintendent	M	W	3
Assistant Superintendent Student Services	M	W	>2
Assistant Superintendent Curriculum	F	W	2
Director Instructional Technology	F	L	>2
Director of Data and Assessment	M	A	>1
Title I Specialist	M	W	30+
Director of English Language and Title III	F	L	2
Director STEM	M	W	>2
Director Athletics, Health and Wellness	M	W	18
Director Nursing	F	W	20+
Elementary Level (K-8)			
*Principal	F	A	20+
Assistant Principal #1	F	W	20+
Assistant Principal #2	M	AA	>1
Assistant Principal #3	F	W	10
Special Education Manager	F	W	>2
Adjustment Counselor	F	W	20+
High School (9-12)			
*High School Principal	M	W	20+
House Principal #1	M	W	8
House Principal #2	F	W	8
House Principal #3	F	AA	>2
Special Education Manager	F	W	10
Special Education Program Manager	M	W	25+
Special Program Teacher	F	W	7
Social Worker	F	W	15

Note. F= Female; M=Male; A=Asian; AA=African American; L=Latinx; W=White

*Key leaders veteran to their district and new to their roles (>2 years)

We conducted a total of 24 semi-structured interviews with district and school leaders (District, n=10; School, n=14). This sampling of administrators was intended to learn about the implementation and management of inclusive programing (e.g. Superintendent, principals, adjustment counselors, and administrators who worked directly with planning teams, such as EL Director). Table 2.2 further illuminates how the participants varied according to gender (females, n=14, males, n=10), ethnicity (African American, n=2, Asian, n=2, Latinx, n=2, White, n=18), leadership role (District, n=10, School=14), and their longevity in the system (a few months to 30 years). We point to these factors here because the positionality of leaders within the district was discussed at length by the participants themselves.

Questions were designed to probe how district leadership conceptualize and support inclusive practices, while interviews with school leaders were designed to verify reports from district leaders and learn more about how inclusive practices were in their schools (see Appendix F). Each participant was interviewed once. The duration of interviews ranged approximately 45 to 60 minutes.

Figure 2.3, shown below as a comparison of the racial/ethnic composition of teachers and students, illuminates just how much work is needed in the district to attain their stated goal of creating a staff that is reflective of the student body. The district contains a full-time workforce of approximately 450 teachers of which 88 percent are White, while the racial and ethnic composition of the approximately 6,500 students in the district is equally distributed among four major racial groups. Figures 2.4 and 2.5 further illustrate the racial/ethnic composition of students and teachers at both Southwest Elementary School and Northside High School.

Figure 2.3

Racial and Ethnic Composition of Students and Teachers at Northside School District (Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019)

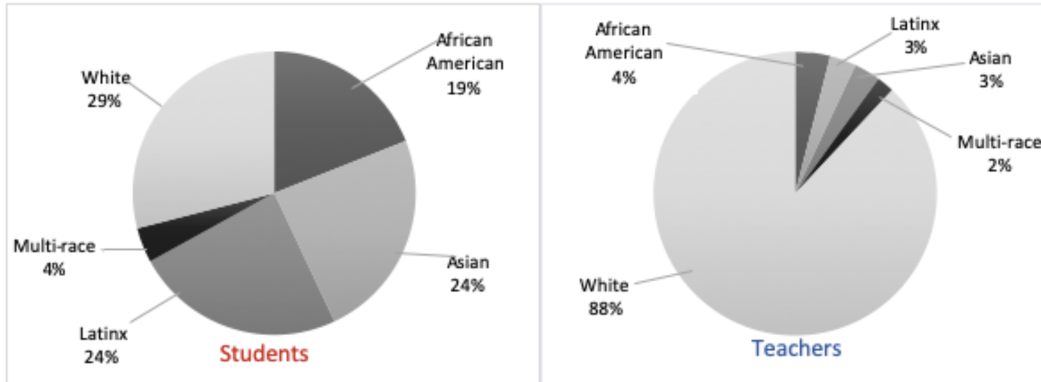


Figure 2.4 *Racial and Ethnic Composition of Students and Teachers at Southwest Elementary School (Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019)*

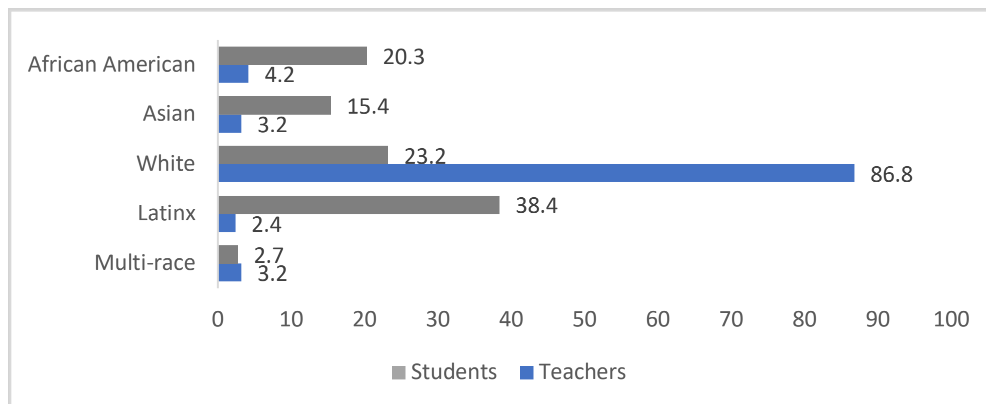
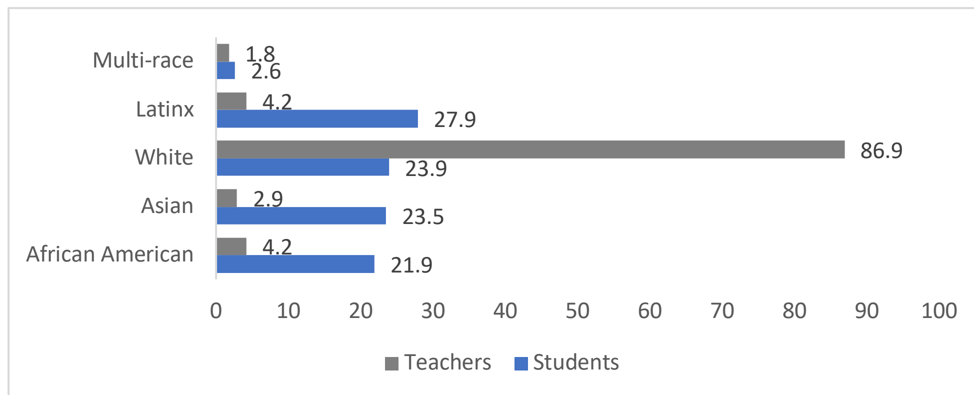


Figure 2.5

Racial and Ethnic Composition of Students and Teachers at Northside High School (Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019)



Data Collection

Yin (2003) suggests six variants of information for research: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations, and physical artifacts. The *first phase* of data collection involved in this study included the collection of publicly available documents which outlined district policies about inclusive practice, culturally sustaining pedagogy, the promotion of linguistic, ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity, professional learning for faculty, interventions for students and families experiencing trauma, the continuum of special education services, and discipline practices. We expand upon documents reviewed below.

The *second phase* consisted of interviewing the participants as described above. Additionally, we conducted informal observations of schools before, during and after typical operational hours in the *third phase* of our study. The purpose of observation was to understand the natural environment as lived by participants, without altering or manipulating it (Mills & Gay, 2019). We documented field notes about our informal observations of school entrances, cafeterias, playgrounds, ballfields, drop-off areas, school hallways, gymnasiums, classes, study halls, and the central office in order to carefully consider the interactions between students, teachers, parents, office staff, and school leaders. Another rationale for these informal observations was the triangulation of data derived from interviews.

Observations of district offices offered little data regarding our research question, but we looked for congruence between professed beliefs with the instructional approaches and grouping practices that were occurring in the schools. The observation protocol in Appendix G was used to record both field notes and reflections on the interactions, support systems and school cultures that we observed.

Document Review

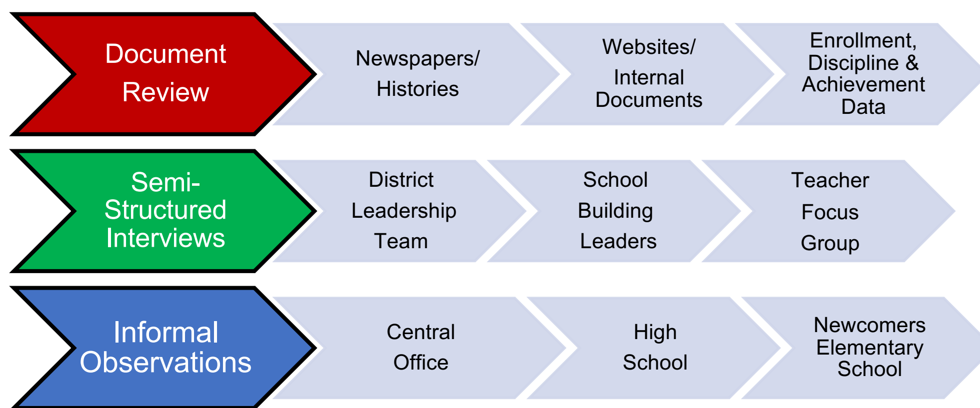
Document review was conducted in three phases. Initially, we collected all publicly available documents which relate to the context of the district with regard to our respective areas of study before we entered the field. We focused on DESE school profiles to determine the size of the district and student and teacher enrollment data by school, to identify demographic trends by race and ethnicity of students and teachers, as well as discipline and achievement data. Newspaper articles helped to gauge community engagement and support, videos produced by the school and the district to promote initiatives and programs, and social media postings about community satisfaction with schools, including a rally about political dissatisfaction with a lack of teachers of color, and public statements on mission, strategy, and beliefs. Our review of documents was aimed specifically towards how leadership viewed inclusive practices and to shape our interview questions.

The second phase of the document review included an analysis of documents provided by district leaders. Documents explored during this phase included electronic slideshows provided to parents at social events and on the school district website, literacy programs, school memos, policy documents, and teacher and principal professional development programs that were available on the websites of local consultants hired by the district. Northeast shared internal professional development documents utilized in the delivery of Restorative Practice and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports opportunities. Southwest Elementary also offered internal discipline tracking documents. Documents outlined services supporting refugee students, students contending with disabilities, students experiencing trauma and discipline and they were embedded in the district-wide approach to ensure equitable access for students.

Third, we searched additional information available through local, state or federal agencies to contextualize how the Commonwealth supports the district's inclusive practices. For example, this included state discipline reporting and information from state refugee centers such as the Office for Refugees and Immigrants (ORI) as well as the federal Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). Figure 2.6 illustrates the multiple variants of data we researched during our field work, listed in the order of importance for our findings. The primary source for our findings were derived directly from the perspectives of the participants themselves revealed during semi-structured interviews.

Figure 2.6

Data Collection Variants During Field Work



Interview Questions

Interview questions (See Appendix F) asked participants to reflect on how district and school leaders support students in an inclusive manner. Questions initially explored the motivation and challenges leaders faced when implementing inclusive practices across the system or in a school. Follow up questions asked participants to examine how these approaches support services for all students within the areas of our individual studies. The interview

transcripts and field notes from observations were reviewed to identify emergent themes using a four-phase analytical process.

Data Analysis

We applied a *four-phase* analysis to make sense of the data we collected, implementing the first three phases individually in our own studies. Individual interview recordings constituted the *first phase* of our analysis. As we reviewed transcripts using artificial intelligence software from *Temi*, identified elements that exposed emergent themes (Patton, 2002) and coded responses for Universal Design for Learning, Equitable Access, Social Emotional, Academic, Behavioral and Tiered Responses. Individual researchers also comparatively analyzed data against complementary frameworks used in their individual studies. Such complementary frameworks were Social Justice Leadership and Opportunity to Learn. As we listened to transcripts, we found this conceptual framework sharpened our focus on how district leaders were enacting inclusive practices and helped us to make sense of the data. Researchers utilized a combination of the coding software *Quirkos* and *Microsoft Office* tools to organize and make sense of our data.

During the *second phase* of analysis, we comparatively analyzed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) themes that emerged across multiple individual responses from all 24 interviews. We traced common responses by calculating how different individuals referenced their approaches to inclusive practices.

Recognizing the limitations of any conceptual framework, we concluded our individual analysis with a *third phase* by applying a quasi-grounded theory approach to make sense of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). We identified emerging themes and considered these nascent

themes in light of our conceptual framework to formulate conclusions that shaped the findings we present in our individual studies.

Finally, the *fourth phase* of our analysis involved a comparative analysis of the themes discussed in our individual studies. We looked for connections across our individual topics that related to inclusive practices in the group study.

Each research team member utilized the above described methods in a similar fashion for their individual study. Chapter 3 features the individual research questions, a literature review related to those questions, and any methods that were unique to the individual study. Additionally, the findings and discussion sections of the individual study are included.

Chapter 3[3]

Individual Study
Border Crossing to Support Refugee Students

I believe that the community's duty to education is, therefore, its paramount moral duty.
John Dewey

The challenges of educating students have always been complex, but as reducing inequity becomes one of the utmost duties facing schools, educational leaders must grapple with existing structures and perspectives that cause the exclusion of students (Dei & James, 2002; Skrtic, 1991). The achievement disparities that exist in American schools because of race, ethnicity, and language demonstrate that current approaches are inadequate to meet the expanding requirements of leading schools (Milner IV, 2015). Such demands include building teacher capacity to engage increasingly diverse student populations and to prepare them for globalized networks of knowledge, integrate their skills within the context of a local community, and meet the individual needs of students (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Cheng, 2003). Major implications for leadership include the transformation of schools as communities of learning that can overcome the barriers caused by the marginalization of students in order to advance social justice (Grandi, 2018; Jones et al., 2013; Ryan, 2006).

Inclusive practices offer a constellation of strategies that are compelling to leaders with a social justice orientation who feel a duty to promote the inherent dignity of all people (Theoharis, 2007). Other scholars emphasize that inclusive practices reorganize curriculum reflective of the students enrolled in the school community, embrace the opportunity to overcome the biases,

[3] Author: William Driscoll

misconceptions, and fallacies that people hold about others, especially populations that are vulnerable because of emotional, linguistic, cultural, ethnic, racial, and learning differences (Ladson Billings, 1995; Scanlan, 2011).

Individual Project

Although education is not a constitutional right, public schools in the United States are legally compelled to educate newcomer students because the 1982 *Plyler v. Doe* Supreme Court decision established that undocumented and immigrant students cannot be denied access to K-12 public education. However, school districts across the United States continue to respond to the arrival of forced migrants with a juxtaposition of exclusionary and inclusionary variability in an environment where institutional practices have historically and systemically marginalized students (Gitlin, et al., 2003; Khalifa & Gooden, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Shields, 2004). Refugee students are especially vulnerable to a myriad of exclusionary practices because of their religious backgrounds (Collet, 2010), being unaccompanied by parents (Pierce, 2015; Tello, et al., 2017), their limited ability to exercise political agency (Hanna, 2013), their interrupted formal education (McBrien, 2005; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012) and the discrimination they experience because of racial, ethnic or linguistic backgrounds (Bonet, 2018; Chavez, 2008). These barriers to learning create chasms of inequity.

In contrast, there is a body of scholarship which underscores that inclusive leadership practices directed towards refugee students can develop an ethical response by building a sense of community (Crawford, 2017), increase parental involvement (Koyama & Bakuza, 2017), develop social capital (Zhou & Kim, 2006), and create inclusive schools for diversity (Riehl, 2000). The purpose of my individual study is to contribute to the existing literature and provide recommendations for school districts with growing refugee populations by exploring how district

and school leaders may draw upon inclusive practices to cultivate inclusive learning environments for refugee students. Findings from my individual study will be grounded in the collective efforts of our team's work in the field to explore inclusive practices for all. Accordingly, this study will be guided by the question: *In what ways do district and school leaders support inclusive practices for refugee students?*

Overview of Chapter 3

Just as the previous chapters presented the collective research efforts of our group project, each one of us states our own inquiries in Chapter 3, following the same format that we outlined in Chapters 1 and 2. Then, in my *review of the literature*, I synthesize current scholarship on how educational leaders are using practices to build academic, emotional and community supports for refugee students. The next section of this study describes a *conceptual framework* to analyze how school leaders respond to support refugee students. Thereafter, I focus on the *methods* I applied during the field research phase of the project. I conclude with *findings* from the field. The *appendices* section includes charts, structured abstracts, interview questions, and observation protocol tools.

Literature Review

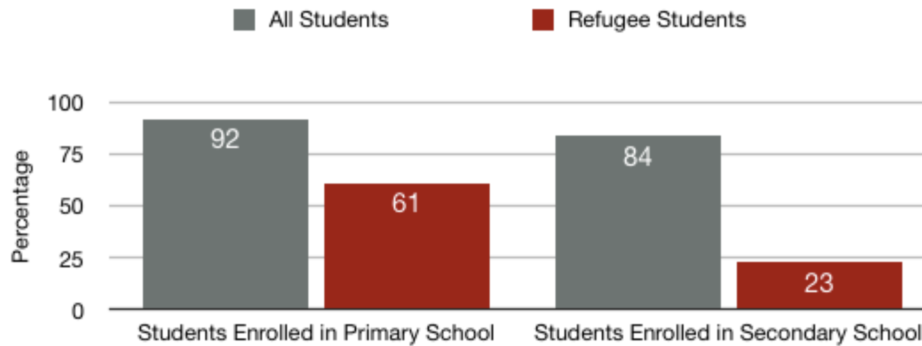
Background

The United Nations' 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees defined a refugee as someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. More than half of the 22.5 million refugees worldwide are children driven from their homes and schools. Their forced relocation produces a crisis level of uncertainty regarding the education of students. This is illustrated in Figure 3.1 when comparing refugee youth with their peers: in 2017, only 61 percent of refugee children were enrolled in primary school, compared to 92

percent of all students globally. At the secondary level, the total was 23 percent of refugee students, compared with a global rate of 84 percent (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2018).

Figure 3.1

Global School Enrollment Comparison for Refugee and All Students, 2018 (United Nations, 2019)



Although the United States was not party to the 1951 UN agreement, it began its official program with the passage of the Refugee Act of 1980 and the establishment of the Office of Refugees and Resettlement (ORR). Resettlement is a process that can take years and requires coordinated efforts with federal, state, local, and private organizations to offer a web of services, including education. As a result of these labors, the United States has welcomed over 3 million refugees and remains the world's largest haven for asylum seekers.

Massachusetts, with a combination of high rankings for education, progressive approaches to inclusive practices, and large number of foreign-born students, constitutes a unique background in which to gather research studying refugee students in the educational context (ORR, 2017; Pierce, 2015). According to the Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants, the nationality of refugees arriving in Massachusetts hail from countries all over the world with the four largest being Haiti, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, and Somalia (2019). The top refugee resettlement cities are Worcester (30%), Springfield and West

Springfield (22%), Boston (12%) and Lowell (10%) due primarily to the high concentration of religious agencies located in those regions (Massachusetts ORI, 2019).

A review of the literature for the group project, as highlighted in Chapter 1, revealed that there is a growing understanding about inclusion, especially in the United States, to expand beyond the logic that it is limited to serving students with disabilities. I seek to clarify for the reader a framing definition for my individual study: inclusive practices describe a philosophy of education that cherishes the diversity of students, seeks to engage all students in learning activities and assessments, and values their knowledge and strengths as assets for the community. It is a social justice mindset that assumes that living and learning together benefits everyone, not just children who are labeled as having a difference (Villa & Thousand, 2017).

The corpus of literature I examined sheds light on how leaders respond to the unprecedented forced migration of millions of refugees arriving in schools across the globe from a wide array of local contexts. I organized my synthesis of the literature according to three thematic units: how inclusive leadership practices for refugee students embody *learning, emotional well-being,* and *external partnerships.*

Supports for Learning

Leadership frames how schools respond to the needs of all students. The first theme of my literature review emerged from articles that centered on systems that build curricular decisions around viewing diversity as a positive, promoting culturally responsive practices, and emphasizing language acquisition programs through an asset-based lens. Evidence points to both promising and cautionary tales of how leaders impact the learning of refugee students.

Bajaj & Bartlett (2017) studied three newcomer schools located in San Francisco, Oakland and Brooklyn. Their 10-year qualitative research project examined the culturally

responsive curricular choices made by the International Network for Public Schools to sustain and reflect the lives of their students. These schools are designed to serve immigrant and refugee EL students. The authors posit four tenets of a critical transnational curriculum with examples of specific school practices: (1) using diversity as a learning opportunity; (2) engaging translanguaging; (3) promoting civic engagement as curriculum; and (4) cultivating multidirectional aspirations. Findings suggest that leaders can apply this innovative approach in traditional settings, in coordination with external partnerships, to deepen the relevance of the curriculum for refugee and immigrant students.

Mendenhall's (2018) qualitative study, conducted in New York City at two international schools, documented promising practices that school leaders can implement in challenging negative, misinformed stereotypes about refugee students. Mendenhall highlights the importance of academic supports, heterogenous grouping, linguistic supports, a welcoming environment, and agency building for students. Refugee students can benefit from a stance that treats students' first language as a resource. Findings from interviews with students emphasized that leadership support of refugee students leads to learning environments that benefit all students.

According to Taylor and Sidhu (2012), an inclusive philosophy underpinned a model of good practice in the education of refugee students at four Catholic schools in Australia. Their case study identified schools with strong leadership, an inclusive approach, supports for student learning needs, and willingness to work with other agencies. Key to their findings was evidence that an inclusive approach to teaching and learning was highly effective "first by providing intensive language and learning support and then by incorporating refugee children into mainstream classrooms as soon as they had acquired basic literacy skills" (p. 50). These schools

promoted positive images of refugee students and leaders viewed them as “a gift, rather than a deficit” (p. 51).

Barriers to Learning

However, public schools, as the primary state institution that many refugees come in contact with, can also erect structures that act as barriers to learning for refugee students. Bonet (2018) explored the “disjuncture” between the aspirations of refugees and the reality they confront when enrolling in American schools. Her year-long, multi-sited ethnographic research centered on Iraqi refugee students in Philadelphia during the implementation stages of a national travel ban on people from selected Muslim countries. She accompanied participants to various institutions, such as public schools, welfare offices, hospitals, and refugee resettlement agencies. Findings revealed that the design of school systems can limit refugee student aspirations, especially because of strict policies regarding ESL programs, the transfer of academic credits, school placement, aging students out of secondary schools, and the effects of educational exclusion.

Unintentional negative consequences can also be traced across the literature. Due to the political realities for refugees, they often rely on agents to exercise political advocacy for them. For example, Hanna (2013) conducted a case study of nine leaders in a Midwest school district to examine how school leaders acted as political “surrogates” when asked to advocate for Burmese refugee students and their families. State and federal policies on English language acquisition forced a powerful incentive for district leaders to view ELL programs as the central need of their refugee students. During her analysis, two central findings emerged: (1) educational leaders’ acts of political surrogate representation are mediated by their own rational agency, and (2) the acts of surrogate representation committed by educational leaders has origin in what those

educational leaders believe about the refugee population, not in what refugee populations themselves have directly communicated as their interests. Thus, refugee voices themselves can be largely absent from decision-making processes of schools (p.155).

Emotional Well Being of Refugee Students

Literature on the psychological well-being of refugee students is wide-ranging, but not surprisingly found primarily in medical and psychological journals. I limited my literature review to articles based on how educational leaders can promote emotional supports for their students. Although there is a scant research that examines how educational leaders influence the emotional well-being of refugee students, some important findings do surface.

Crawford (2015; 2017) demonstrated that schools can be used, unintentionally, as a stage for immigration debates. Her initial case study of 14 elementary school educators in California as they responded to immigration enforcement activity near school property demonstrated the legal and ethical dilemmas educational leaders face. However, her follow-up three years later indicated that school leaders continued to perceive the emotional impact of this incident to consider the constant fear community members felt that they will be deported. Findings pointed to the significance of the ethical grounding of leaders during the deliberate planning of programs to support the psychological well-being of immigrant and refugee students.

McBrien's (2005) literature review surveyed the emotional impact of trauma caused by the previous experiences of refugee students because of the violence and persecution they witnessed and the effects of repressive schools in their home countries. Her review traced the impact of stigmatization and hate crimes from the 1970s through 2005. Findings indicated Vietnamese students during the Vietnam War, and then Muslim students (and students perceived to be Muslim) post- 9/11, were stigmatized and reported being the victims of name-calling,

physical assaults, and hate crimes. Evidence further revealed such incidents isolate refugee children, contributing to a sense of loneliness and lowered self-esteem. McBrien (2005) concluded that schools can be centers of acculturation if they purposefully develop effective programs that reduce environmental burdens that cause emotional harm.

Pierce's (2015) report on the complex and labyrinthine experiences of unaccompanied child migrants in the U.S. outlined the limited resources available to school districts as students arrive with extensive needs. Some of these students have been exposed to gang violence, sexual abuse, loss of parents, extortion, theft, and daunting socioeconomic circumstances. Pierce exposed that the physical and psychological stress placed on these children put them at higher risk for emotional and behavioral consequences, such as depression, low self-esteem, eating and sleeping disorders, and possible psychotic disorders. The challenges to schools were not just limited funds for mental health services, but because the needs of refugee students were unique, culturally competent mental health services were difficult to locate (p. 12).

External Partnerships

Another nascent topic across the literature was the realization that education is a social activity embedded within a larger community. School leaders motivated to support refugee students cannot focus exclusively on learning or emotional supports. They must also consider that identifying and networking with families and outside organizations can fortify efforts to support refugee students.

A case study by Rah et al. (2013) explored how multiple leaders of a religious elementary school in Texas, which unexpectedly received 25 Hmong refugee students, addressed the needs of students and families by cooperating with a community organization. Strategies viewed as useful to the interviewees included: (1) creating a parent liaison position; (2) tapping into

existing community service organizations; (3) and providing parent education programs. However, the researchers cautioned educational leaders to be conscious of the deficit narratives inherent during discourses of “helping” refugee families and that attempts to integrate refugees may simply replicate the current social order (p. 364).

Koyama and Bakuza (2017) reviewed collaborations between refugee parents, schools and community organizations by drawing on 26 months of ethnographic study, conducted between 2011 and 2013, of refugees in a school district located in the Northeastern U.S. Their use of Das Gupta’s conceptual framework of “place taking, space making, identity staking” (p. 317) revealed the difficulties refugee parents face because of cultural and linguistic differences with the dominant culture. Parents faced added uncertainty when they tried to fit into limited roles offered by schools. Furthermore, this study examined how school leaders changed policies and reconfigured their leadership advisory team to better support refugee students and their families. Findings reveal that schools, when able to connect with community organizations, resettlement agencies, and local refugee leaders, can also be important spaces for refugee parents.

Not all efforts at social assimilation are effective, even if school leaders have the best of intentions. Gitlin et al. (2003) employed a year-long qualitative research study of a school district in the midwestern U.S. with the aim of documenting the discourses and structures that shaped the experience of Mexican, Bosnian and Sudanese students in an ESL program. The research concluded through interviews and observations that student relationships with teachers, administrators, other students, and the community were complicated by a contradictory logic that both welcomed and marginalized immigrant students. Gitlin et al. observed inclusive practices

throughout the district and interviewed leaders who stated that diversity was important, yet refugee students remained on the peripheral margins of the school community.

The design and purpose of schools also limit what school leaders can accomplish while building supports for refugee students. This is apparent in Collet's (2010) conceptual analysis of "polyethnic group rights." He revealed that although American public schools provide refugees with opportunity for study without regard to race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion (areas of potential persecution under the 1951 UN Convention Regarding the Status of Refugees), they necessarily put constraints on the degree to which students may exercise their particular cultural identities. This impact was exacerbated by the increased arrival of students with non-Christian backgrounds, and because religion is so important to their identities, the inability of public schools to support religious programming for students slowed integration and resettlement. Collet identified religion as an area where constraints on social integration of refugee students in American schools are most apparent (p. 190).

Arnot and Pinson (2005; 2009) conducted a three-phase research project studying the impact of the national context of asylum seekers and refugee students seeking education in the UK. The study initially analyzed government reports and the researchers conducted interviews with government and NGO officials to determine a sample size of 62 school leaders.

Responses from 58 school leaders during a phone survey led to the classification of six types of leaders: *New Arrivals, English Acquisition Learner, Minority Ethnic Achievement, Race Equality, Vulnerable Children, and Holistic.* Analysis of response and school achievement data concluded that the adoption of holistic practices cultivated highly effective results that viewed refugee students as possessing multiple, complex needs (learning, social and emotional). The

final stage of the study included visits to schools with holistic leaders. Key to these findings were that leaders who used the holistic model valued encouraging parent involvement, establishing links with the community and partnerships with local agencies.

The topography of my literature review further emphasizes the importance of adopting a multi-tiered approach to student supports. Based on their experiences, refugee students have survived and overcome harsh realities that few of us can imagine. Yet, if school leaders can take an asset-based approached that recognizes the resiliency, strength, and aspirations that reside within these communities we can undoubtedly benefit our schools and all students. It is from this perspective that I pursued my individual research project.

Methodology

The conceptual framework of MTSS furnished the group study with a prism to inform our exploration into the logic and actions of school leaders while providing supports to promote inclusive practices. The eight-step case study design presented during the group study was the foundation of my individual research methodology. I duplicated these methods except for the specific areas revealed below to expand upon my individual research question: *In what way do district and school leaders support inclusive practices for refugee students?*

Participants

As outlined in Chapter 2, the team conducted a total of 24 semi-structured interviews with district and school leaders, but I focused on the responses of 16 participants. *Table 3.1* further illuminates the makeup of the participants varied according to gender (females, n=8; males, n=8), race/ethnicity (African American, n=2; Asian, n=2; Latinx=2, White, n=10), leadership role (District, n=9; School, n=7) and longevity in the system (a few months to many years). Questions were designed within the group study (See Appendix F) to probe how district

leadership supports inclusive practices for refugee students, while interviews with school leaders were designed to verify reports from district leaders and learn more about practice.

Table 3

Participant Data for Northside District: Individual Study

Position	Gender	Race	Years in District
District Leaders			
Superintendent	M	W	3
Assistant Superintendent for Student Services	M	W	>2
Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum	F	W	2
Director of Instructional Technology	F	L	>2
Title I Specialist	F	W	30+
Special Education Manager	M	W	25+
Athletic Director	M	W	18
Director of Data and Assessment	M	A	>1
Director of English Language and Title III	F	L	2
School Leaders			
High School Principal	M	W	20+
High School House Principal	F	AA	2
Elementary School Principal	F	A	20+
Elementary School Assistant Principal	M	AA	>1
Adjustment Counselor	F	W	20+
Social Worker	F	W	15
Coordinator of Transition Program	F	W	5

F= Female; M=Male; A=Asian; AA=African American; L=Latinx; W=White

Document Collection and Review

Document collection and review were conducted in four phases similar to the group study. Key points for the individual study focused on the racial/ethnic composition of students and DESE school profiles and video footage of a community rally. Additionally, I expanded my document review to include websites of immigrant support agencies in the city. Agencies included the Office of Refugee Resettlement, the Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants, Catholic Charities, Lutheran Services, Easter Seals, a local immigrant center, and a Brazilian Church.

Findings

This section renders findings that answer the research question by examining how Northside's district and school leaders support the needs of refugee students and families in one

of the most racially/ethnically diverse school districts in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. I present three themes that emerged from the conceptual framework I used to examine my research: the blueprint for Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) recently released by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. I discovered that leaders use inclusive practices to support the needs of their refugee students by (I) Identifying Barriers to Learning, (II) Aligning Structures with Universal Design for Learning, and (III) Shaping Culture for Equitable Access.

As I introduce these three themes, I first elaborate on how leaders viewed the elimination of barriers to learning as pivotal to shaping support systems to educate their students. Next, the exploration of how leaders responded to these challenges guided me to the realization that the district nested its support of refugee students in UDL foundation applied for all students. Finally, I interpret how leaders developed a culture to provide equitable access for all students, including enacting multicultural practices they believed to be important for serving refugee students.

Identifying Barriers to Learning: *"You Don't Know Where They've Been and What They Went Through to Get Here."*

As respondents explained their inclusive leadership practices, they often discussed the complex challenges that refugee students face because they "are traumatized by terrible experiences" such as physical, mental and sexual abuse. Leaders recognized that such experiences mean that refugee students "come to the district with significant gaps in their learning" and require extensive counseling services. Finally, interviews revealed that the structure of the school system itself erected barriers to learning for refugee students, especially limited access to curriculum because of language, and the implicit bias of educators that was perceived to influence "subgroup performance."

Understanding the Refugee Experience

Although I uncovered no formal process to identify students as refugees, or to provide targeted or intensive services designed to address their complex needs, the Superintendent provided context that indicated the school district was distinctively situated in a community that is attractive for refugee families because of the proliferation of religious and government support. He justified the approaches adopted by the district were intended to be responsive to multiple populations, not a single group of refugees.

> We're not seeing just Central American refugees or even, you know, just strictly North African refugees. We're seeing them from Africa. We're seeing them from Asia, South America, Central America, as well.

Consequently, as I directed my interview questions about supports for refugee students, conversation centered around inclusive strategies for *all* students. When pressed about how structural support specifically applied to refugee students, the principal of an elementary school stated that when it comes to newcomers "you don't know where they've been and what they went through to get here." Other educational leaders, such as an assistant principal admitted that, based on the complex experiences of refugee families, it could be challenging.

> The undocumented kids that are here, how can we support them? We don't end up finding out from the kids until they are stressing out so bad that someone's going to court that day and wondering whether or not they're going to, or their family members, are going to be deported or not.

Moreover, the high school principal elaborated on the importance of learning from students and understanding their past in order to better respond to their needs. He explained that

students often revealed experiences that educators were unaware of and forced them to think beyond what is offered in providing a traditional education. Consider this quote:

> We've had students that were assaulted physically and sexually by guerrilla groups in South America. I mean, we have a girl with scars on her, both of her wrists, because she was pulled back as she tried to jump a fence and, and had awful unspeakable things happen to her.

Acculturation Barriers

Before district and school leaders discussed academics, they raised the importance of meeting the basic needs of students because of the difficulty of adjusting to living in a new country. No need was more prominently discussed than access to food. The socioeconomic status of students and families was indicated as a reason district and school leaders intended to be responsive to basic needs of the community, like "using Title I to purchase boots and gloves for students." Finally, the ongoing academic, behavioral, and social emotional needs of students shaped how leaders designed support, including the creation of a "newcomer" school, led by a principal who was a refugee as a child.

Refugee students did not always know where they would be staying or who might be caring for them. The principal of the newcomer school explained how unique this experience was for refugee students. She explained that

> …they don't know their parents, they'd been living in another country with the grandmother, and then, all of a sudden, they're plucked to come here because they were of age now. So, for the last five years, they might have seen this woman, or this man, come and go to visit. But that's not the person who took care of them. Yeah. She's my mom. Yes, he's my dad, but who is he? And I miss home.

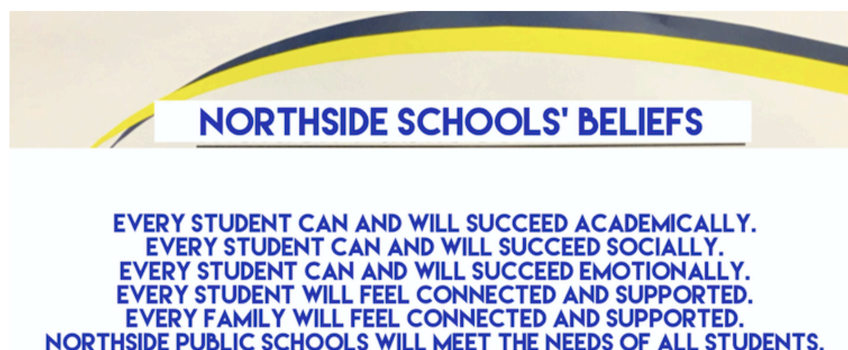
Finally, the academic performance of refugee students, especially as measured by standardized testing and state accountability metrics was expressed repeatedly in terms of deficits. The teacher focus group highlighted this challenge and attributed it to the transience of this subpopulation and gaps due to interrupted education. This concern about the "slippage of subgroups" was best expressed by a district leader concerned about interrupted education that is common for newcomers and especially refugee students:

> I think right now, because I'm not in the classroom, I like to listen to the teachers who take the lead. For example, at the high school I have someone who is a coach, a teacher leader, and I don't have that in the other schools and I see the difference. I see how important that is. She is the pulse of what is going on in the classroom. She can tell me what we really need to do about the SLIFE [Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education]. She will say something about that group or this group and "We have a gap here, we have a gap there." And that's my world.

Aligning Structures with Universal Design for Learning: *"We Don't Do Pullouts Here."*

Figure 3.2

Photo of Northside Public Schools Adopted Beliefs (Same as Figure 4.1).

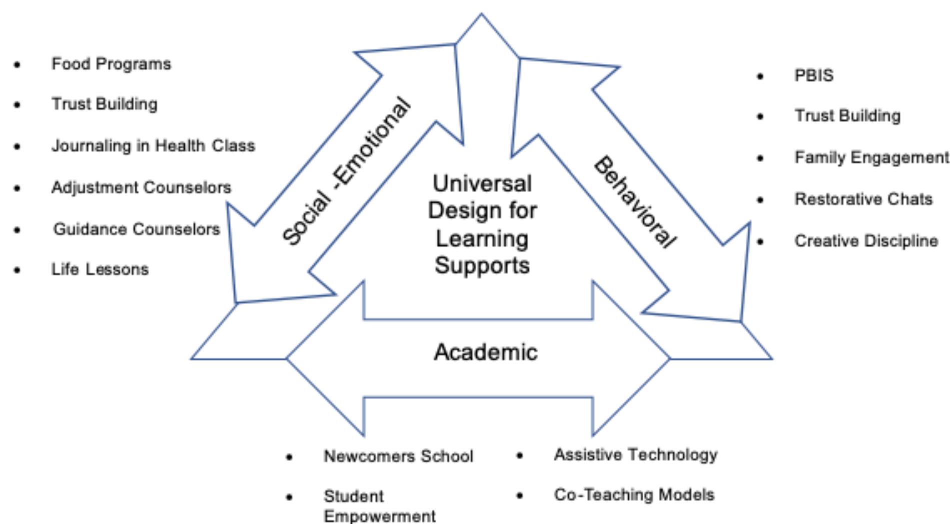


Upon my arrival in the district, I noted that the belief statements presented in Figure 3.2 were prominently displayed on posters found in every district level office, throughout the halls

and classrooms of the high school, and in offices and conference rooms at elementary schools. These professed beliefs, crafted with teachers, administrators, parents, school committee members, students, government officials, and community partners, grounded how district and school leaders understood their roles and informed their approach to designing Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) for all students. The foundational belief that all students should have access to learning provided the rationale for the structures the district put in place, shaped its aim to create a culture to meet the diverse needs of learners, and motivated leaders to reach to outside agencies when they realized their own limitations. Educators framed this inclusive leadership approach as a method of eliminating academic, social and behavioral barriers to learning. I now present evidence of how those same themes were woven into the leadership practices that support refugee students in the same three focus areas. Figure 3.3 provides an overview of how Northside grounded its philosophical belief in UDL to provide structures to support refugee students.

Figure 3.3

Three Focus Area Approach to MTSS Supports for Refugee Students (Adapted from Eagle et al., 2015)



Academic

The district designated one of its five elementary schools as a "Newcomers" school, which created a unique identity as described previously in Chapter 2. District leaders expressed pride in how this school supported students and imparted that they believed its reputation attracted refugees to move to the community. In the estimation of the Assistant Superintendent for Student Services:

> We have a very robust newcomer program for our students located in our largest elementary school. It's also led by a refugee herself, so I think there is a strong sense of leadership and recognition of how to welcome newcomers.

The principal referred to in this quote cherished her longevity in the district and leveraged the relationships she cultivated over twenty years, at both the high school and elementary levels, to build an inclusive platform. Her positionality as a refugee herself guided her to value accessibility as she shared how personal experiences influenced her practice to build SEI programs. She elaborated that her mother "never came to school because language made her feel uncomfortable" and "my sister and I were placed in the wrong grade." She linked the understanding she gained from her childhood to meeting newcomer families outside and engaging them in their home languages. She reported on her own efforts to learn new phrases in "Portuguese, Spanish, French, Creole, and Chinese" with the intent to ensure that she could make new families feel welcome.

Examples of academic structures were discussed multiple times by school and district leaders with the most common response being "we don't do pullouts here." When asked expressly about supporting English Learners (ELs), these leaders immediately pointed to the use of assistive technology and admitted a dependency on translation apps, deemed to be "vital" in a

district serving students speaking over 60 languages. Furthermore, district leaders nested their classroom support of ELs within the UDL framework of teachers providing technological supports for all students through access to Chromebooks, Google Classroom, WiFi Hotspots they could bring home, iPads, iReady, and Classroom Dojo, referring to them "as essential" for working with newcomer families. Leaders emphasized the importance of flexibility, pointing to the use of assistive technology through apps and online translators as the primary UDL approach to communicating with families and engaging them in school events. A principal described these services as "a lifesaver" while another explained "I could spend half a day on translating."

One of the most important academic supports according to both school and district leaders was supporting refugee students through Sheltered English Immersion (SEI). Every district leader discussed the need to communicate effectively with students and their families in their home language. One high school leader revealed that she thought the most effective support was a new shift to include four subjects as sheltered classes offered to newcomer students. This was echoed by a middle school assistant principal who shared this evaluation:

> Our SEI teachers are phenomenal and they differentiate the group and the materials for them. It was a group of students who had no English and another group that was in there with me that could write a five-paragraph essay. Anyway, they were all together. So, it was literally teaching two different books at one time. If that group is improving, then we can move them into a mainstream class as well.

Social Emotional

The importance of building supports to help students overcome social emotional barriers was of critical importance to all of the leaders in the Northside district. In fact, they articulated that building social emotional supports were interwoven with academic supports. The Athletic

Director best outlined this approach when he revealed that what motivated him to build supports was to help kids learn:

> …how to deal with adversity. A lot of our students don't know how to deal with that. When they're talking about stress, most of the time they crumble. That's what they've learned. Their coping mechanism is to, you know, basically turtle, and go inward instead of go forward and face the stressor head on.

Leaders recognized that building social emotional supports for all students rested upon the importance of school professionals. Fourteen of the 16 educational leaders interviewed extolled the district for elevating the hiring of adjustment and guidance counselors as a top priority. The high school principal praised the efforts of the "seven counselors" at his school and the elementary school principal indicated that the "four guidance counselors and four adjustment counselors" were vital in providing support for refugee families. Their importance in connecting refugee students suffering from trauma with local mental health agencies, hospitals and crisis centers was of particular importance. Additionally, school leaders pointed to the role that transition teams and "pathways" programs were designed to support refugee students, "especially those with interrupted education."

Before and after school programing was a central concern of the district level leaders in supporting newcomers, especially because the long hours participants observed refugee parents work to provide for their families. However, supports to address a lack of access to food was the most important program discussed by school leaders. Consider this response from the principal of the "newcomer" school:

> We have before school and after school care and that's huge for our working families. We also have the free breakfast for all of our students, which is huge because some of them

> don't eat. We go one step further with the lunch. We've taught our kids that whatever you didn't open, whatever you didn't eat, we save it. Then we teach the kids at the end of the day to pack it up. Then we also teach them to go outside, of course with staff, to say, 'Hi, we have extra food, would you like some?' It is double fold. One: helping the community, which is ours. And Two: our kids learning about giving and coming back to us years later and saying 'Wow, they were really happy. You taught me and really explained things.'

Behavioral

The district's new implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) was widely discussed in every interview. An elementary school assistant principal was excited that "this year we have adopted the PBIS which seems to be going very well." She explained how the principal rolled the program out and gained the seal of approval from veteran teachers who were "frustrated because there was nothing consistent" under previous administrators. She explained how the school mascot was implemented in designing tickets that were given to students to highlight positive behavior and "has changed our morale this year."

When asked about how this specifically applied to refugee students, she admitted that, based on the previous experiences refugee families might have had with schools in their home countries, it could be challenging: "I think it's because they come from a different background and they're still trying to learn an American educational system." A principal highlighted that some refugee students "don't know how to act in American schools because their schools at home are so different." She went on to outline efforts to engage parents and grandparents in reading days to better interact with families so that when discipline issues arise "they already have a relationship with us." Another school leader stated:

> I set a goal for the staff this year to make 15 connections a week in the hallways, not in classrooms, [but] in the hallways as a school. We're trying to make 450 connections a week, 150 staff times three. And every Sunday when I send my Sunday email: 'Hey, don't forget 450 is our goal.' And the staff is enjoying it. The kids are noticing it.

Educators identified support systems to address the behavioral issues of refugee students were also built in response to the barriers identified earlier: language and personal circumstances. One district leader summarized the district approach in this way:

> When there's difficult situations that occur, when we speak about student discipline, a lot of time we have interpreters which come in, and that's sometimes a barrier because there's no rapport built between the interpreter and the school. Rapport is usually built through the student and trying to create ways where parents feel welcome that they can always come in and, and at least have a conversation, even if it's through an interpreter.

The most advanced and intentional effort of a leader to integrate behavioral support into practice was discovered in the athletic department. The Athletic Director explained with specificity that department goals addressed the importance of understanding family backgrounds and "trying to teach coaches to teach the game but also teach life." He pointed to the use of reflective journals in health class as most helpful in identifying the needs of students, providing them with an outlet to express themselves, articulate frustration in a productive manner, and teach them skills to shape their own mental wellness.

Shaping Culture to Provide Equitable Access: *"Certain Things Are Non-negotiable"*

The inclusive perspectives of leaders underpinned the UDL foundation the district applied to build MTSS supports to provide equitable access for all students. The structural supports that I explored in the previous section were contingent upon the culture that leaders

promoted through a web of beliefs, norms, and values that conveyed to the public what was important. I consistently heard district and school leaders express the shared norms that inclusion was “non-negotiable”, the belief that diversity be seen as an asset, and sketches of leadership strategies that sustained an ethos of caring. These themes were interwoven to create a welcoming culture for refugee students.

Shared Belief in Inclusion

I characterize the strategy that leaders enacted as an “ad hoc” approach to build structures of support because I did not uncover a linear or sequential blueprint that standardized leadership efforts. Instead, leaders adopted iterative responses according to what they learned through relationships with students and families. The same is true of their efforts to provide equitable access. Although leaders did not explicitly state they were developing a culture for refugee students, it was evident that the belief in inclusion for all students informed multicultural strategies. Consider this response from the Athletic Director who explained how his beliefs related to refugee students: “it's vitally important for us to make sure that every single individual feel supported because we understand that each individual and their cultures [because] they have certain things that are nonnegotiable.”

An elementary school assistant principal explained how inclusive beliefs were embedded into the approach of teachers and leaders at the Newcomers school. She reported that “we celebrate all the students' cultures.” For example, she went on to add that “teachers are finding multicultural stories to share in classrooms.” She concluded, “I feel like incorporating that is helping them feel [like] a part of our family.”

The Director of Literacy Services emphasized the district's belief in equitable access. She has been in the district for over 30 years and expressed that her motivation as a leader was connected to her beliefs about inclusion:

> I feel that every child deserves the best education they can get and I think that's really important working across the district. We don't always see things being equitable. I work primarily with K-5 and we try our best to make everything equitable. They may differ based on student need, but I do believe that every child deserves a quality education.

She connected this belief to working with refugee students because "you have to know them as individuals" and find out "what supports they need as they get acclimated." She emphasized that "we work at it so the child gets the best education they can" and we "want their families to feel welcome." Her belief in equitable access was rooted in a heightened sense of purpose because she adopted a daughter who was a refugee from Eastern Europe.

Diversity as an Asset

Although district leaders expressed concern about the disparity between the racial and ethnic composition of students and teachers, the superintendent viewed the diversity of the student body as an asset in his recruiting efforts, "My hope is that because we are the most diverse district that will be a selling point along with making this a more welcoming, inclusive and equitable place." He accentuated the value of the district's hiring efforts and was eager to reveal that "23% of my hires have been people of color, including nine administrators and three principals." He discussed why he reasoned his diversity initiative was important in these terms:

> At the Early Learning Center, early this year they hired a Muslim woman as a paraprofessional. I was having trouble hiring Muslim women. Lo and behold, we had three or four openings and she's had friends and people that she knows apply. And so

> now, all of a sudden, we get like three, or four, Muslim women down there and they've been great. People see that and now those parents are showing up and getting involved in some of the school activities where they otherwise weren't.

Although the perspective of the superintendent was shared by school leaders, many participants imparted vignettes about the challenges of confronting unintentional racial or ethnic bias. A preferred approach to counter bias was to empower students, as five different interviews explicitly revolved around the efforts to increase student enfranchisement around cultural assets, especially language. Leaders pointed to the importance of enlisting peer support in the classroom and beyond because "if the students are allowed to have a voice, you can push things forward." The most instructive tale about student empowerment was woven by the high school principal who discussed intentionally learning languages from his students and relying on their language assets to welcome newcomers to the district.

> This man and his daughter come in on her first day of high school. I walked over to him and asked: 'What's up?' and his English was good. He explained to me that it was his daughter's first week in the country, first day of high school, first day in the city and she didn't speak a word of English. I mean, he was, the weight of the world was on this poor guy. So, I said, Oh, we got this.
>
> I turned around, I just yelled out, I need Brazilian girls. 10 kids came running over, 10 girls came running over. And I explained [the situation] to them. They said 'Oh, we got this.' Off they go speaking in Portuguese, she's laughing. One girl puts her arm around her and they walk off and she's about 10 feet away and she just turns around and waves to her dad with a big smile on her face and the dad has tears coming down his eyes.

Leaders considered the religious needs of students, especially during Ramadan. The primary example of this was how the Athletic Director balanced the expectations of competition by emphasizing that his coaches listen to student voices and honor their cultural traditions. The intentionality of his approach was most evident in his description of how the department considered the religious beliefs of students when they miss practices or athletic events, especially newcomers from Northern Africa.

> We're dealing with certain things where religious services and fasting and going to church. They're non-negotiables with the parents and we understand and respect that fully. They're not going to be disciplined in any way because they're following their religion and religious beliefs. More often than not, it makes them a better person. It makes them more well-rounded where they understand priorities. This is just the game and there's a bigger picture out there.

Ethos of Caring

Leaders valued caring for students in order to create a welcoming atmosphere. Caring was displayed in a combination of small, yet symbolically important ways. The Superintendent wore a pin on his lapel that stated "No Place For Hate" next to a rainbow ribbon to signal support of newcomer and LGBTQ causes. Leaders repeatedly expressed statements that were aligned towards inclusive perspectives, including messaging to students and teachers that "It is all of us working together" and "This is your school, too." Observations at the high school noted that the high school launched a motto titled "You're Not Alone." Staff and students were seen wearing this message printed on t-shirts, signs were displayed in the hallways, and it was showcased just outside the main entrance of the school on a photo of the staff. This perspective was reinforced in practice when one of the district directors shared money from her budget to make sure that

students received what they needed when she learned that the EL Director was out of money because so many newcomers arrived in the district during the school year.

School observations were beneficial in confirming the district's drive to become culturally proficient and more equitable. Hallways were decorated with bulletin boards, posters, paintings, symbols, and slogans deliberately intended to promote an inclusive environment. For example, both the elementary school and the high school principals proudly showed the research team a gallery of flags representing the countries of students enrolled in the schools. The high school principal noted that the flags were hung by students in an annual ceremony each June. The high school recently completed a mural adorned with the word "Welcome" in all languages and dialects of the students in the community. The principal described how "students ran to the wall to find their language" on the first day of school (Photo presented in Chapter 4).

Leaders described their multicultural practices as "creating a sense of family." This warmth was palpable as I observed the interactions between staff and families, especially before school. Parents communicated with each other in a symphony of multiple languages while teachers and administrators smiled and welcomed students by grade level each morning. At the high school with an enrollment of over 1,600 students, office managers were responsive to the needs of students and knew them by name. Leaders repeatedly emphasized the importance of establishing relationships with students and engaging parents. An assistant principal captured the ethos of caring that leaders felt was paramount in their efforts to make their schools accessible to all.

> I think first and foremost is to build that relationship with the kids because that way you get to know them and get to know exactly what they need. Loud and clear. Yeah, it goes a long way. I go to the kids' basketball games or something on the weekends. If they see,

even if it's five minutes, they see. So building that, really find that way to build a relationship with the kids and then they'll be able to explain more to you of what they need.

Discussion and Conclusion

The comprehensive study conducted by Arnot and Pinson (2005) in the UK surveyed the responses of local educational leaders to learn how they supported refugee students in the absence of a national policy. McLesky et al. (2014) investigated a highly effective elementary school in Florida to highlight inclusive leadership practices. This case study is analogous to these studies: multicultural leadership practices that build upon a multi-tiered system of support intersect with inclusive leadership practices that support a highly vulnerable student population. Investigating an inclusive school district recommended as utilizing inclusive practices in the backdrop of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, I found district leaders at Northside responding to the needs of a growing population of newcomers by applying their knowledge of tiered supports for students with disabilities. The evidence presented in this chapter demonstrates how the bifocal lens of MTSS and Arnot and Pinson's Holistic model can illuminate the opportunities and challenges of inclusive leadership practices. I pose three questions to center discussion around *implications for leadership practice* and *social inferences*.

Question 1: Does the creation of a "newcomers' school contradict the inclusive beliefs of school leaders?

Educators may view this case study as too narrow to have any significant impact upon their own practice. However, these findings have implications as the forced migration of millions of people impacts educational access on a global scale and debate between equity and equality is often played out in American schools. Educational leaders must carefully balance the tension

between creating schools that specialize in meeting the complex needs of refugee students while isolating them from their peers.

As McBrien (2015) pointed out in his review of the literature, educational leaders draw upon a constellation of responses to support refugee students, or newcomers, who move to their district. This case reveals a multitude of approaches and assumptions about refugee students within the district. This was most explicitly clear in the creation of a newcomers' school designed to specialize in the complex needs of this targeted population. Theoharis (2007) warns educational leaders about the unintended exclusionary results of schools that specialize in students with disabilities. One wonders how the creation of a "special needs" school in this district would be viewed by the same educators who were hailing the benefits of a "newcomers" school. In contrast, the Office of Refugees and Resettlement points to the importance of refugee students interacting with peers to acquire English and build friendships. The welcoming environment of this school cannot be denied (Mendenhall, 2018), yet school leaders and the teacher focus group expressed concern about the difficulty students experienced during their transition to the high school. Document review of state data indicates that the racial composition of the school is disproportionately populated with students of color and disability. Additionally, their academic performance does not match district or state outcomes (DESE, 2019). This is consistent with findings in Gitlin et al. (2003) that such practices marginalize students and Dryden-Peterson and Reddick's (2017) study that demonstrated "the negative relationship between educational segregation and newcomers' opportunities."

Question 2: Are educational leaders aware of their own implicit bias, especially as they advocate for refugee students?

The responses of the educational leaders in the Northside District can be charted on multiple points along the continuum outlined by Arnot and Pinson's six models of leadership for refugee students. The quotes presented in this study reveal that leaders focused on the enrollment of refugees in school, improving test scores, addressing racial bias, meeting EL needs, and protecting students because their experiences create vulnerability. Leaders often advocated for with what they believed was most important to refugee students; i.e. the Director of EL advocated for language acquisition, the Director of Literacy argued for improved structures to promote literacy. Most often, leaders responded to questions based upon how they defined the needs of the refugee population (Hanna, 2013) and did not necessarily incorporate the voices of refugee students or their parents into the decision-making processes of what was best for them. However, leaders also looked beyond academic need as the majority of respondents (14 of 16) unknowingly adopted the holistic leadership model by emphasizing the importance of establishing relationships with students and parents to create "a family" so that inclusive practices could be effectively applied to learn about each student's unique needs (Theoharis, 2007; Koyama & Bakuza, 2017; Crawford, 2015, 2017).

Arnot and Pinson describe the holistic approach as one that considers the complex needs of students, including the deeper religious and cultural values that enrich the lives of the refugee community. Collet (2010) emphasized religion because of its "particular importance to refugees in their resettlement and integration processes at the individual and communal levels." This was apparent in multiple ways at Northside from creating prayer rooms, working with students to design hijabs for athletic uniforms, and partnering with religious groups to provide for the socioeconomic needs of the community.

In contrast, the examples in this case study reveal that district leaders did not always employ a continuous or sequential response to the needs of the newcomers in their community. Instead, they iteratively applied solutions that built upon the inclusive perspectives of the district leaders and informed a multicultural ethos to provide access to education. The participants demonstrated a high level of commitment to inclusive practices and their conversations revealed how those perspectives were made manifest in the structures of learning, behavioral and social emotional supports. One crucial area that warrants further interrogation is whether targeted services designed specifically for selected refugee populations are more beneficial than the district's attempt to treat all students with similar instructional approaches. Taylor & Sidhu (2012) emphasize the role leaders take in promoting positive images of refugee students, which was apparent by Northside's efforts to promote multiculturalism through instructional tools such as posters, paintings and social events. However, as recognized by leaders in the district, the superficiality of these leadership practices did not penetrate deep enough to alter the bias that is inherent in the American educational system.

Question 3: How might educational leaders consider the wider political and religious context of their community? Northside is resource rich in welcoming new families to the United States. The *social implications* are woven into the topography of the organizations willing to work with the Northside district leaders to create a web of resources. District leaders were creative in reaching out to enhance the experience of their students. Okilwa (2018) points to the complexity of educating refugee students and that "as student diversity in schools increases, so does the multidimensionality of student needs. Schools do not have the capacity to serve all the needs singlehandedly" (Okilwa, in print). Schools represent the community in which they are situated and the success of the leaders at Northside in collaborative partnerships is not limited to

educational gains. Partnerships with local agencies can enrich the efforts of school leaders to overcome "parental factors of misunderstanding, conflicting cultural beliefs, and language difficulties" (McBrien, 2005, p. 352). The efforts of education leaders to engage business, medical, political, and religious organizations create an enormous impact on the community at large. As the city has emerged as a desirable location for immigrants, including refugee families most in need of community support, schools are uniquely positioned as entry points to the community for both students and parents (Bajaj & Bartlett, 2017; Crawford, 2017).

Limitations

Limitations described in Chapter 4 are applicable to the individual study. The nature of the group study limited the amount of questions that I could ask about the inclusive leadership practices for refugee students. Next, by focusing on leadership, valuable studies remain to be completed. Future studies could examine the influence of teacher practices, ESL programs, and psychological supports for refugee students to address the trauma they endured. Future studies may also focus on learning about student perspectives to understand how their voices are being included in the development of supports for their learning. Another compelling research project might examine the positionality of the principal of the newcomers school as a refugee and how her personal experience might differ from other leaders. Finally, due to my limitations in understanding only one language, I was unable to fully engage parents and external partnerships in interviews about school experiences. Despite these limitations, I hope the findings uncovered in my research will inform educators as they attempt to improve the academic, emotional and behavioral development of refugee students.

Chapter 4[4]

Discussion and Conclusion

Universal Perspectives

The Northside Public School district was recommended by state educational leaders for their inclusive practices. Through our case study research, we discovered that the perspectives of leaders were underpinned by universal perspectives designed to provide equitable access for all students (Theoharis, 2007). Our findings rest upon our interpretation of the practices that district and school leaders shared with us as they did not refer directly to these practices in the language of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS). In our research we consistently heard district and school leaders express shared beliefs that inclusion was a “non-negotiable,” relationships were paramount in creating access to learning, and that resources needed to be designated for staffing and hiring practices that enhanced opportunity for all. We elaborate on how leaders created the MTSS systems drivers (i.e. leadership, implementation, and competency) that supported these beliefs in the sections that follow.

First, we introduce the themes of *willingness to accommodate all students*, *consistent understanding of inclusion*, *relationships*, *external partnerships*, and *resources and human capital*. We further explain how leaders advanced universal perspectives to learning as pivotal to shaping and designing support systems to educate their students (Riehl, 2000). Next, the analysis of these themes led us to the realization that the district nested its support of students with trauma, refugee students, and students with behavioral needs in the same inclusive approaches they employed to support students with disabilities. We argue that the MTSS System Drivers

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[4] This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project: Beth N. Choquette, William R. Driscoll, Elizabeth S. Fitzmaurice, and Jonathan V. Redden.

(i.e. leadership, implementation, and competency) are integral to leadership effectiveness. This supports the implementation of an informal tiered framework within a district or school to meet the needs of all learners. Finally, we suggest choices made to invest in human capital development and staffing that further support our claim that universal perspectives guided leadership practices.

Tiered Supports

The professed beliefs articulated in Northside's mission statement grounded how district and school leaders understood their roles and informed their approach to inclusive practices, including the design of what we refer to as an "ad-hoc" Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) for all students. District and school leadership in Northside adopted universal approaches to academic, behavioral and social emotional learning that were nested in an evolved understanding that universal perspectives about learning were applicable outside of special education. Moreover, we emphasize the term "ad-hoc" because we did not uncover a sequential or explicit process that unfolded because of an adopted framework. Instead, their structural supports were contingent upon an inclusive culture that leaders promoted through a web of beliefs, norms, and values that conveyed to the public what was important (Carter & Abawi, 2018). When reviewing the supports available for all students at Northside, many fell into tiered supports as outlined in MTSS, however, the district did not explicitly label them as such. Table 4.1 outlines examples of supports provided to students in Northside. This table is not an exhaustive list but intended to illustrate the continuum of services available for students.

Table 4.1

Examples of Northside Multi-Tiered System of Support

Component	Tier I (Universal/All Students)	Tier II (Targeted / Small Group)	Tier III (Intensive/Individualized)
Academic	Summer Enrichment, literacy programs, & backpack school supplies Chromebook 1:1 MS and HS Counselors review grades to see who is progressing and who isn't Co-Teaching 9th Grade Academy with common planning time Data meetings & turnaround plan addresses Asian performance in math Newcomer school	Interpreter services – in person and technology-based WiFi hotspots for student use Girls Who Code Student Support Teams Small-group special education pull-out supports iPads for special education including communication Newcomer school	Summer School BRYT Program Pathways Program Newcomer school Revised approach to vaping IEP Team reconvene as needed
Social-Emotional	Breaks, cool-down spots, flexible seating Building trusting relationships Support students emotionally, educationally, and physically in order for them to be fully present Journaling in health class Newcomer school Food and clothing distribution Responsiveness to the diversity of religious backgrounds Leadership respect for student voice	School-based counselors looking at absenteeism-meeting with students to make sure it isn't getting in the way of their education Teach/provide lessons in life skills, social pragmatics, and self-reflection Newcomer school Interpreter services – in person and technology-based Food and clothing distribution	Outside counselors work with students in school School-based counselors looking at absenteeism-meeting with students to make sure it isn't getting in the way of their education Provide food-hunger having a traumatizing effect on students Individual counseling Teach/provide lessons in life skills and self-reflection BRYT Program Newcomer school Revised approach to vaping
Behavioral	Counselors look to see if students have behaviors in class Conversations with students whose behavior is declining Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Restorative Practices (RP) Newcomer school District practices in hiring for diversity New leadership positionality	PBIS & RP Newcomer school Interpreter services – in person and technology-based Check-in / Check-out (CICO) Small-group special education pull-out supports	In-School Suspension (ISS)-students can leave ISS if needed to take a test Access to a device for testing only if in ISS & self-reflection activities PBIS & RP Safety & Support Plans Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBA) Pathways & BRYT Program Newcomer school Creative, individualized discipline practices including a revised approach to vaping

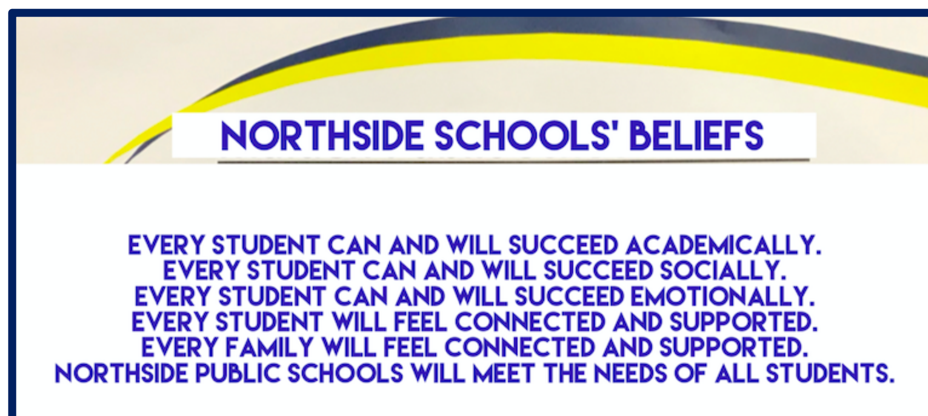
Willingness to Accommodate *All* Students

As described in our individual studies, leadership for inclusive practices enacted at Northside was oriented around relationships, culture and beliefs. Having a leader with a vision to create a culture of acceptance and engagement for all learners regardless of the diversity of their needs (Sharma & Desai, 2008; Fauske, 2011) is essential in promoting access and opportunity to learn for all students which is at the core of MTSS. Although district leaders in Northside Public Schools set a vision for inclusive practices, school leaders were primarily responsible for the implementation of systems that support teachers in creating learning access for students in schools. This is transformative given the leadership turnover and indicative of an iterative process.

The professed beliefs articulated in Northside's mission statement grounded how district and school leaders understood their roles and informed their approach to inclusive practices. Figure 4.1 reveals that the Northside Public Schools proudly post their beliefs for all students, faculty and staff, and families to see. We observed this in multiple locations in both schools and district offices.

Figure 4.1

Photo of Northside Public Schools Beliefs



The belief that all students should have access to learning provided the foundation for the structures the district set in place, shaped its aim to establish a culture that accentuated the importance of forging relationships with students and families, and motivated them to reach out to community agencies when they realized their own limitations (Arnot & Pinson, 2005). Educators framed this inclusive leadership approach as a method of eliminating potential academic, social and behavioral barriers to learning to meet the needs of diverse learners. A district leader illuminated the approach in this way:

> The supports you can put into place, if you pay attention to what you're doing, if you pay attention to the results, you can make adjustments and you can do things each day differently to make sure that your child is going to be more successful than they were the day before.

For education, UDL's purpose is to undergird inclusive environments measured by the ability of all students to access to equitable learning opportunities. The commitment to meet the needs of all students was a general theme shared by all the participants who were interviewed, including the teacher focus group. Leaders in the district emphasized their organizational structures as the primary approach to ensure access.

Our conclusion was not the result of finding an explicitly expressed or written strategy of the district uncovered through data analysis or document review. In fact, we could not locate any process that revealed that the district classified students as refugees, screened students with trauma, or discussed quantifiable data about the discipline of high school students, beyond the Student Safety Discipline Report (SSDR). Rather, we noticed that when we pressed participants about how they support the learning of students, they reflexively responded by describing UDL

structures that value classroom accommodations, teacher creativity and classroom flexibility (Novack & Rodriguez, 2016).

Consistent Understanding of Inclusion

Inclusion is an ongoing practice and the leaders recognized that efforts to build a culture of belonging was at its foundation. Chapter 1 discusses the evolution of the understanding of inclusion and how from the onset, inclusion was only thought of as a strategy for students with disabilities (Mittler, 2005). As stated in Chapter 1, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and our research makes clear that an inclusive philosophy that builds a Multi-Tiered System of Support goes beyond the needs of students with disabilities (2016). Rather, leaders should frame a system that provides access to instruction and positive behavior support for all students.

Our findings indicate that the adage that “we don’t do pull outs here” was central to the belief system that Northside leaders used to inform the implementation of MTSS. A district leader was descriptive of the shared norms around beliefs in inclusion when he characterized a collective motivation to provide opportunities for all students:

> I do think we have an amazing belief system of inclusion here. Almost to the extreme, you know, we believe in inclusion, everybody goes into inclusion…when they work and everybody is on board, it's really amazing to watch. Yeah, it really is. To see kids and hear kids advance and see the success that they're having. It really just has a magical feeling to it.

Another district leader summarized the district belief to creatively find solutions for students because “a one size fits all approach is ineffective.” This same belief in inclusion was

echoed by multiple educators, especially when discussing discipline. For instance, the Superintendent widely shared his perspective; “we differentiate instruction, why not discipline?”

Northside High School was proactively engaging their students to intentionally create a culture of inclusiveness. Figure 4.2 reveals photos of inclusive practices that were observed while in the field, including a gallery of flags representing the home countries of students enrolled in the school and a mural painted with the word welcome in the languages represented in the community. Leaders expressed this as an effort to create a welcoming environment.

Figure 4.2

Photos of Inclusive Practices Observed at the High School. (L, Welcome Mural; R, International Flags Which Represent Students’ Home Countries)

Further, the engagement with student voice was a significant factor in shaping inclusive leadership practices at the high school. Leaders referred to student advocacy as the vehicle which drove the formation of most of the high school clubs and activities illustrated in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Student Clubs and Activities at Northside High School

American Red Cross	Animation and Cartooning	Asian Culture
ACC Lion Dancing	Badminton Club	Band
Biology Club	Black Culture	Newspaper
Book Club	Captain's Council	Chemistry Club
Chess Club	Choral Arts	Computer Club
Craft Club	Crew	Culture Connection
Debate	Feminism Club	Figure Skating
Fine Arts Club	Gay Straight Alliance	Greenroom Dramatic Society
Guitar Club	Haitian Club	Henna Club
Interact (Rotary)	Key Club (Kiwanis)	Life Club
Literary Society	Math Team	Mock Trial Team
Model UN	Multicultural Club	Music Club
National Honor Society	Northside's Workshop	Northside Against Cancer
Northside Yearbook	Philosophy Club	Ping Pong Club
Psychology Club	Recycling Club	Relay for Life
Robotics	Science National Honor Society	Social Activism Club
Southeast Asian Club	Step Team	Students of the Fells
Swim Clinic	Techno-vision Club	Tornado Travelers Club
Unified Sports	Visual Arts Society	YMCA Leaders Corp
Youth Leadership and Mentoring		

Findings from Wang (2018) reveal that using student voice to redress marginalization, inequity, and divisive action in schools can have a positive impact on creating a culture of inclusivity. Our research discovered that the use of student voice was used to empower students. Leaders can provide opportunities for students on how they can contribute to change as actors and leaders by promoting student voice in changing policies and practices that perpetuate injustices in schools (Wang, 2018).

Although leaders did not explicitly screen for refugee students or students with trauma, it was evident that the belief in inclusion for all students informed their strategies for vulnerable students. District and school leaders often expressed the mantra of "assume trauma, treat all with gentleness," and the adage "you are not alone." Consider this response from a district leader who explained how his beliefs related to his practice: "it's vitally important for us to make sure that every single individual feels supported because we understand that each individual and their cultures … have certain things that are non-negotiable."

Relationships

Another significant theme that emerged across our findings was the importance of fostering relationships. Ainscow and Sandill (2010) reveal the importance of staff relationships in supporting the development of inclusive practices. Inclusive leaders build trust and forge relationships with families and educators by promoting a shared vision in creating a culture that is inclusive for all. Both of the schools in our study expressed that vision as a belief that "all students belong." Leaders with an expansive vision of school community shared language and values to generate an inclusive school culture (Zollers et al., 1999). The leaders in our study sought to create an inclusive school culture by not only promoting a shared vision of inclusive practices, but by expanding relationship building with multiple stakeholders. MTSS focuses on shared responsibility and collaboration through its *leadership* driver. The leaders at Northside articulated a vision for inclusive practices and spoke about meeting the needs of all learners and fostering positive relationships amongst all contributors.

Leaders created cultures of inclusivity by thinking creatively to engage students in their learning and support students to make better choices and providing them with alternatives to punitive discipline. Leaders recognized that relationships provided the underpinning to structures for students with disabilities such as the co-teaching model, offered supports for students who have experienced trauma by shaping a transition program that supports their academic and social emotional needs, ensured non-discriminatory discipline practices, or constructed a welcoming and supportive environment for refugee students. Sparks (2016) stresses the importance of prioritizing relationships when creating discipline policies. The integration of Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) and Restorative Practices (RP) at the elementary school as well as the use of RP to repair damages and preserve relationships at the high school are intentional

tiered relationship building initiatives at Northside. Further, community service within the school or in the greater external community connect student learning in the social emotional and behavioral realm in a functional and meaningful way.

Our study, conducted in one of the most diverse districts in the Commonwealth, uncovered that fostering relationships is key to creating an environment that is welcoming and provides equal access and opportunity to learn for all students. For example, teaching coping skills and social emotional learning strategies to students who have experienced trauma to help overcome the resistance and fear they have in building relationships with peers and adults is central in order to not jeopardize positive development and success in life (CDC, 2013).

External Partnerships

An inclusive school is the place in the community where students can feel safe, access educational opportunities and form links to community and outside organizations, resulting in outcomes that enhance the quality of their lives (Dei & James, 2002). The district engaged in an ongoing process to provide supports for all students by reaching out to community partners to meet the needs of students as they learned about problems and responded with the supports they deemed best in the moment. The alacrity that the district demonstrated in building partnerships with community agencies to deliver services is rooted in the identification that the multifarious barriers facing refugee children extend beyond what can be addressed by educators because of lack of resources and lack of expertise.

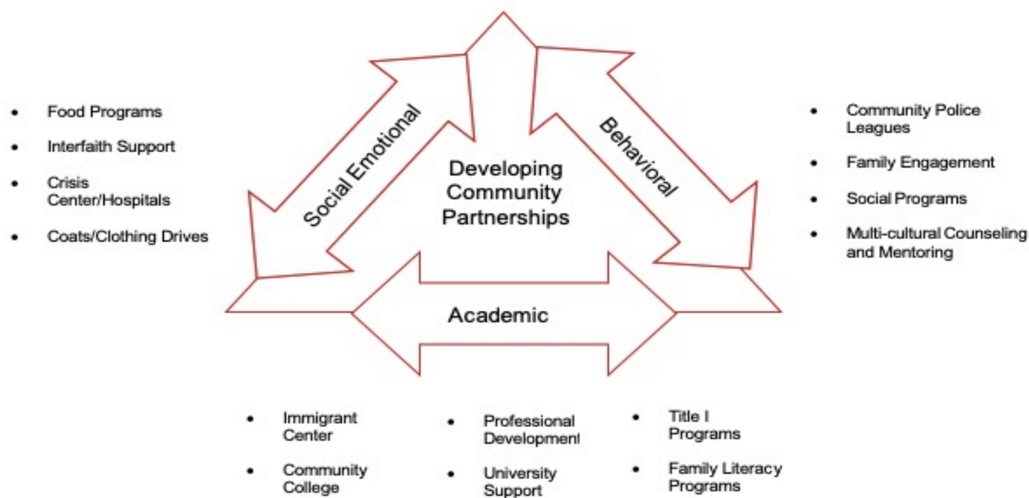
An overwhelming strength of the Northside district is the interconnectedness it forged with local agencies, including religious, mental health institutions, government, homeless advocacy groups, universities, and immigrant organizations to meet social emotional, behavioral, and academic needs. One leader expressed their approach as "resource rich" as he described a

myriad of “stakeholder involvement, including academic supports, such as a dual enrollment program with a local community college,” social emotional support from a crisis center, mental health partnerships with hospitals and therapists, behavioral supports provided by the mayor’s office, police and fire departments, grants from the state and local foundations, churches, an immigrant center “run by a survivor of the Holocaust who is exceptional at advocating for families,” Title I Literacy Programs, and a professional development initiative with Harvard University.

The narratives participants shared began to weave a tapestry that illustrated that the high level of supports being provided for students were dependent upon external relationships. School leaders exercised their own social capital to connect with outside agencies as both building principals shared vignettes about how they formed networks based on relationships with families. See Figure 4.3 for evidence of how school and district leaders interwove their beliefs about MTSS with their outreach to the community to address the academic, social emotional, and behavioral needs of their students.

Figure 4.3

Three Focus Area Approach to Developing Community Supports for Students (adapted from Eagle et al., 2015)



Resources and Human Capital

Effective cultivation of beliefs in inclusion and relationships within the school community and the community at large requires careful allocation of resources. Resources defined as financial, human and structural, reflective of the System Drivers of MTSS, provide for intentional decisions which can be made to support said allocation (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019). Further, a process where data can be collected and analyzed as part of a feedback and evaluation mechanism ensures continued effectiveness of allocations in all areas.

Finance

The Northside Public School district leadership made intentional decisions to use their resources in an effort to meet the needs of all learners. Fisher et al. (2000) found principals had the most success when they stayed true to their vision and committed resources to put personnel and services in the classroom to support all student learning. Northside's decisions are resultant of careful examination of multiple contributing factors. As a small urban district with meager resources, they purposefully steered allocations toward the building level and invested in the social emotional and mental health needs of their students by providing robust counseling supports. This caused lean operation management at the central office and required each district leader to be responsible for multiple areas, thus limiting their feeling of effectiveness. Further, while the decision to route immigrant students to the Southwest Elementary School, thus creating a "newcomer school" superficially appears to be a decision contrary to the espoused belief in inclusive practices, it may be a fiduciary decision allowing the district to concentrate specialized services for this vulnerable population.

The district invests in professional learning in a variety of topics, including cultural responsiveness, restorative practices, positive behavior interventions and supports as well as many curricular areas. However, teacher focus group feedback illuminated a concern about the efficacy of professional learning opportunities in the district and the effectiveness of sustainable implementation, largely due to leadership turnover.

Staffing and Hiring

The superintendent discussed the recruitment, hiring and retention of faculty of color with intention and as a goal of the district. This hiring is more beneficial and sustainable if done with intentionality, and embedded with effective onboarding. Despite this focus on hiring for diversity and social emotional learning needs at Northside, we question whether hiring for the purpose of implementing MTSS is occurring. Paulo Freire (2000) discussed the leader's role as one who must guide oppressed learners to fully participate helping to make decisions that build on the assets of language, ethnicity, and race. Northside Public Schools are home to a racially balanced student body, but cultural disproportionality exists with the faculty (See Chapter 2, Figure 2.3). District and school leaders discussed the need to hire faculty with the skills and background necessary to meet the needs of their students. They recognize this inadequacy and are attempting to address it through new district initiatives.

Further, at the elementary school, building leaders have increased the number of counselors to support the social emotional needs of their students and some counselors are also licensed social workers. Hiring more counselors was based on the need of its students, but not with MTSS in the forefront. The hiring of licensed and trained counselors gave us an opportunity to examine if the Northside District conceptualized these staff members as Tier II and Tier III intervention structures essential for students who struggle with behaviors and social emotional

challenges. A proactive staffing design and intentional deployment to support the needs of students is just as critical. We found the district leadership may have sacrificed the staffing at the central office (i.e. no human resources officer) in order to meet the needs of its students because that was their priority.

In 2019, Northside Public Schools endured a 75% turnover amongst their principals. Both of the schools we studied were amongst the schools with newer leadership. Due to the high turnover rate of principals, it was challenging for teachers to invest in a relational culture. Skrtic (1991) found that school principals lead efforts to customize the overall environment to meet the needs of each learner. Our research revealed that the customization of individual learning is compromised when educational leaders are not in place long enough to establish deep connections with students, families, or community organizations. The mindset and belief that all students can learn at high levels is in place, in accordance with the *Competency* Driver in MTSS, and the leaders are continuing their ongoing effort to hire more diversely so as to effectively meet the needs of all students. If leaders purposefully recruit and hire staff who have a shared belief and vision that all students can learn, are providing high quality, sustainable professional learning and are imparting quality feedback and evaluation to educators, it contributes to the implementation success of MTSS (MA DESE, 2019). These conditions create a system of trust, support, and ownership that meets the needs the students, faculty and staff (McLeskey, 2014).

Structures

Staffing design and deployment to support the needs of students is just as critical. Northside enacted extensive Title I programming (especially at the Newcomers school), co-teaching models for students with disabilities, licensed social workers as counselors, a program for students who have experienced trauma, a behavior program, and the specialized autism

program. Senge's *Levers for Change* (1990) shares that in order to move towards inclusion, leaders need to focus on building capacity with the school, which is also part of the competency driver. Our study examined the Northside High School and Southwest Elementary School known as the "newcomer" school. At this school they expanded their resources. However, by having all "newcomers" attend this school, the district is not building capacity to meet the needs of refugee students at its other K-8 schools. When focus group participants were asked if there had been any discussion about building capacity for other schools, one teacher responded with, "there has been no discussion about it." Even when tension was divulged, district and school leaders described the success of existing structures of co-teaching models with general and special educators sharing classrooms, including built-in time to discuss what is working for students. Study participants focused on defining educational structures that were developed to increase learning for *all* students, not specific subgroup populations.

The Southwest Elementary School saw the elimination of their extended day in the last contract negotiations. Leaders articulated contradictory perspectives with concern that it limited their continuum of services to students and yet allows more opportunity for faculty consultation and training. Further, examination of the effectiveness of policies and procedures as they become obvious is essential to effective leadership for inclusive practices. Representative of this obligation is the intentional and iterative process of pursuing a wholesale review and revision of the Student Handbook into a comprehensive Code of Conduct. From Hehir (2012) who espouses "special education as a service and not a destination," to Sugai & Horner (2002) and Skiba (2013) who discuss the value of preserving the sanctity of the classroom through tiered supports, we can see the value of intentional utilization of resources to create proactive structures calculated to meet the needs of all students.

Recommended Action for Leaders

Based on our research of the Northside Public Schools, we offer a number of recommendations to inform both policy research and the development of professional practice. Northside operates from an ethos of care that animates their leadership practices. Although professionals in school district did not articulate their inclusive approach in clinical sophistication or in academic nomenclature, this is not to be interpreted as a lack of care or dedication to effective educational service. Individuals within the school district advocated strongly for the needs of students. A more intentional approach to intervention, inclusive of purposeful student voice and choice may result in a more effective systematic approach to universal supports for all students. Resultantly, theory and practice are not seamlessly aligned for this district. The district realizes it is not evolved in this area, however, there is a dedication to working toward inclusive practices. Northside is an urban district that struggles with meager resources yet makes selfless decisions to staff buildings with adequate personnel in order to support students' needs. This leaves little for district staffing, resulting in an exhausting dynamic where each district leader carries multiple duties.

The findings in this study lead to the following recommendations:

1. **Create data collection and reporting obligations for students experiencing trauma, including a screening requirement**

Districts prioritize English Language Arts and Mathematics instruction over non-tested content areas likely due to the public accountability associated with such data. Special education is not lacking in compliance monitoring standards and, relatedly, discipline law reform and the inception of School Safety Discipline Reporting (SSDR) creates an environment ripe for data driven efforts to overcome discipline disparities. This circumstance invites a recommendation

that state-wide data collection and reporting for identification of students who experience trauma and who are refugees will sharpen a focus on these at-risk populations.

Beyond data reporting, the use of universal screeners for trauma, similar to other mental health/social emotional screening initiatives within schools, can help identify student need and shape policy poised to provide resources and guidance on servicing this vulnerable student group. Screening could potentially be conducted biannually. Our research highlights significant connections amongst our target study populations of refugee students, students who experience trauma and disproportionate discipline, and students with disabilities. Screening, ongoing assessment and data reporting can help facilitate integrated approaches to serve all of these populations.

2. **Create a systemic manner of tracking refugee students to support more effective access to education**

Our legislators would serve our refugee population well by examining how the Commonwealth tracks refugee students and families, thus positioning schools to be more well prepared to anticipate and meet their needs. Such reporting can accelerate the efforts district leaders, like those at Northside, are taking to build supportive environments that are responsive to the academic, behavioral and social emotional needs of newcomers. Community efforts to identify refugee students can help district and school leaders implement newcomer centers or programs that connect students with other members of their cultural and ethnic communities, develop social friendships, and strengthen the bonds of religious identity. Furthermore, state-wide tracking of transience may provide schools with motivation to create stronger entry point programs with teachers trained in cross-cultural communication and lead to deeper engagement across districts to determine why students are leaving to find other communities. Such efforts

could foster relationships with like-districts to realize coordinated efforts to assist refugee students to remain within schools to reduce the number of Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) across the state. It may also help district leaders identify and address practices of implicit bias that may drive students away from host schools or communities. Northside should examine its practice of operating a newcomer school to determine if it best meets the needs of students. These researchers recognize the importance of marshalling limited resources to establish enduring support systems, but we question how this practice aligns with the strong belief in inclusion across the system.

3. **Require professional learning obligations in the area of trauma-sensitive practices and mental-health services for licensure requirements**

A focus on strong professional learning provisions is essential. One-time workshops and events not supported with leadership attention are ineffective. Currently Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education requires faculty to engage in a certain number of professional learning hours for Special Education and Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) to remain eligible for re-licensure. Expanding that to require professional learning hours in mental health, trauma-sensitive practices and/or tiered supports provides more systemic access to information that can support inclusive practices at the classroom level.

In addition to a re-licensure requirement, the district is encouraged to consider replicating the success of the professional learning of PBIS and RP. A brain-science approach which cultivates teacher leaders and ongoing coaching to support implementation of training is calculated to be more beneficial than event-style single lectures or presentations. Further, consideration for providing specific training on connecting Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) will deeply enrich the implementation of any

professional learning experiences. An example of possible benefits of such a provision may be a purposeful opportunity to address the racial disproportion in the district's discipline data. Resource allocation to schedule co-planning for faculty to work together from an integration perspective would help ensure the success of this professional learning.

4. **Integrate tiered supports and services in a culturally responsive and systematic manner**

Further policy considerations include a careful articulation of inclusive practices, expanding beyond the current prevailing belief that inclusion is either a destination to be realized or a title reserved to describe education for students with disabilities (Hehir, 2010). UDL sees difference as an asset and sanctions an integrated approach which overcomes department siloes with discreet roles and missions. A UDL approach to policy development and guidance on implementation avoids alienating, excluding or restricting access to certain populations and furthers integrating approaches, ensuring that research-based methods are considerate of a culturally responsive perspective. For example, PBIS and RP are both research-based approaches calculated to provide benefit, yet they are race-neutral. When delivered as a whole school initiative, where there is likely a disproportion between the race of the students and faculty, integrating a culturally responsive lens to these interventions may enhance their effectiveness. A closer connection between learning and data may be realized with a deeper analysis of current needs and learning opportunities which connect inclusive practices and culturally responsive teaching. District leaders are encouraged to partner with building leaders to continue the deep work of integrating culturally responsive professional learning and tiered supports for the vulnerable populations studied.

5. **Cultivate a comprehensive leadership team, resourced to unite in a common vision for inclusive practices and implementation of MTSS**

Jones et al. (2013) indicate whole school initiatives focused on increasing meaningful, inclusive policies and practices are an ideal scenario for sustained positive school change. An integrated approach where the leadership team is united in communicating their vision will facilitate discussions necessary to change the mindset of those who did not share their vision. The current district and building leaders we interviewed are relatively new and apparently coalescing as a leadership team. We noted a commendable vision and positive beliefs about students' access to learning. Working together to channel this positive energy into a systemic MTSS structure which capitalizes on current provisions will provide for a more effective system of supports.

6. **Create an integrated approach to support the district vision of inclusiveness**

Cultivating a culture of inclusiveness requires sustained effort in an environment where all voices are heard and all contribute to the model. Northside provides many tiered supports, within their school buildings, on an ad hoc basis. They may be well served to create a systemic tiered framework to guide the intentionality of their interventions. A nested tiered structure within special education to complement the tiered structure for the entire building or district will be poised to make more intentional, and least restrictive decisions for students. With UDL as foundational to all educational structures and practices (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019), research-based professional learning focused on integration must be an ongoing endeavor. An integrated approach is not a checklist or recipe. It is a toolbox approach and an intentionally planned initiative with input from all stakeholders.

In summary, Northside's leaders at the building level make tiered (albeit ad hoc) decisions to provide co-taught class experiences for general education students who struggle but are not eligible for special education. Additionally, Title I provides services in creative, family friendly ways which are reported to connect families to their child's educational experience through literature and literary skill development. Finally, a single-minded commitment to fostering relationships with families, students and amongst faculty is considered pivotal to supporting more effective access to the educational setting. This context may or may not provide structures or approaches valuable to implementing MTSS. While these practices are not an exemplar, checklist or recipe (Dyson and Gallannaugh, 2007), they frame considerations for other districts to develop their own integrated approach to achieving inclusive practices which are robust enough to result in improved educational experiences for students.

Areas for Further Study

Future studies may focus on learning about Northside's student and teacher perspectives on inclusive practices and providing them with a voice in the research. Such studies could examine the influence of teacher practices, specialized programs, and psychological supports for the student populations which were the foci of our individual studies. Finally, many questions remain with regard to this study informing leadership practices:

1. While Northside characterizes themselves as "a work in progress," key leaders are new in their roles and have a vision for inclusive practices in the future. True systemic change in a school district as large as Northside does not occur in a mere year or two, it takes time. Early evidence shows this leadership team coalescing. Will data show increased inclusive practices over time if this team continues to work together for years to come?

2. How might the district faculty benefit from ongoing, integrated professional learning in the specific areas of this study?
3. Does the creation of a newcomer school which pools resources for refugees contradict a voiced leadership commitment to inclusive practices?

Limitations

As with any study, this study is not without limitations that impact its validity. Case study research provides for many strengths, however, there are also weaknesses. One weakness that we encountered was the reliance on the "researcher [as] the primary instrument of data collection and analysis" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 52). As a research team, we carefully explored our bias and experiences about inclusive practices.

Further, we conducted only informal observations of the two schools in the district where we conducted our research. Such informal observations could lead to more subjective interpretations that inform the group's conclusions. The duration of our study was limited to the semester allotted for this work as part of our doctoral studies. Time constraints limited how deeply we were able to explore the impact of district efforts to implement MTSS approaches in multiple schools. Long-term studies may better measure the quantitative benefits or shortcomings of inclusive practices. Given the significant turnover and emergent coalescence of the current leadership team, an ethnographic type study might illuminate the sustainability of many of the promising practices we learned about.

During a short period of time, we conducted 24 interviews and one focus group over the span of five days. We reserved 45 minutes for each interview, with some exceeding an hour. As a research team, we interviewed in pairs and asked questions from a pre-planned compilation of questions spanning all aspects of our individual studies. Imbedded in this time saving measure is

the limitation in being able to ask organic follow up questions in our area of interest. Given the time constraints, the ability to conduct follow up inquiries was limited. Further, the focus group was not comfortable providing permission to record the session, so the researchers relied on personal memory notes of the session. Finally, Massachusetts, historically a progressive Commonwealth, can contribute to outcomes that may differ dramatically from other areas of the country.

Despite these limitations, we hope the findings uncovered in our research inform leaders, educators and researchers alike, as they attempt to improve supports and inclusive educational experiences that contribute to the academic and emotional development of all students.

Conclusion

True systemic change related to positive inclusive practices can take many years to accomplish and many districts in the Commonwealth are just beginning to respond to research and initiate these processes. The leadership turnover experienced in our study district may slow any progress. Leaders refer to this turnover as “turbulence in positions” and, in using such language, expose the stress they feel to meet the needs of students and build collegial relationships at the same time. Given the significant turnover and emergent coalescence of the current leadership team, an ethnographic type study might illuminate the sustainability of many of the promising practices we learned about in subsequent years. We wonder; if the district enjoyed some leadership stability and we were to return in three years, what we would find. By conducting this asset-based study, we have hope that our findings illuminate some high leverage inclusive practices suitable for implementation within districts committed to the relentless pursuit of equity of all students.

Each of our study areas illuminates significant factors contributing to our overarching study. Discipline data is comparable to state averages. Given that demographics are not comparable; this is not considered an indictment of the district's discipline practices. Additionally, the partnering of alternative practices and the districts' cultural responsiveness work may support longer-term integrated success. The district is to be commended for welcoming newcomers and supporting their learning, while the practice of galvanizing limited resources in one school should be examined in favor of building capacity across the district. Given that the district does not have a formal way to screen for students who have experienced trauma, the amount of social, emotional, and behavioral support that they provide for their students, both within the school and outside, is laudable.

As collaborating colleagues, we integrated findings from our individual studies to tell a more complete story as many students are represented in more than one of the foci represented by each of our individual studies. Such coordination can also inform policy that supports creating environments where schools provide all students equitable access to education. The true aspirational goal of our study is to save lives by providing guidance to facilitate districts' learning from one another to support *all* students.

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Appendix A

Table of Individual Studies

Leadership for Inclusive Practices: Overview of Group Study

Individual Research Topics	Investigator	Conceptual Framework	Research Questions
Trauma-informed schools	Choquette	MTSS/Social Justice Leadership	*In what ways do district and school leaders support inclusive practices for students who have experienced trauma?*
Leadership practices to support refugee students	Driscoll	MTSS	*In what ways do district and school leaders support inclusive practices for refugee students?*
Leadership decisions about student discipline	Fitzmaurice	MTSS	*In what ways do district and school leaders make discipline decisions that support students' opportunity to learn?*
Inclusive practices for students with disabilities	Redden	Universal Design for Learning	*In what ways do district and school leaders utilize UDL services to support inclusion for students with disabilities in the general education classroom?*

Appendix B

Structured Abstract for Beth N. Choquette
Leadership for Inclusive Practices:
Supporting Students Who Have Experienced Trauma

Background
According to the American Psychiatric Association (2013), trauma is defined as exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence in one or more of four ways: (a) directly experiencing the event; (b) witnessing, in person, the event occurring to others; (c) learning that such an event happened to a close family member or friend; and (d) experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of such events, such as with first responders (Jones et al., Cureton, 2019). Public schools are seeing increased populations of students who have experienced trauma. Leaders need to help foster a shared vision for inclusive practices, create structures that can support the needs of students, and provide teachers with the support and training they need to support all students.

Purpose and Research Questions
The purpose of this study was to focus on district and school practices used to support an inclusive environment for students who have experienced trauma. The research question for this study was, *in what ways do district and school leaders support inclusive practices for students who have experienced trauma?* Using an integrated framework of MTSS and Social Justice Leadership, I examined how leaders support inclusive practices in supporting students' academic, behavior, and social emotional needs while at the same time encouraging leaders to look at trauma through a social justice lens.

Methods
This research was conducted using a case study design in a Massachusetts school district. District and school leaders were interviewed through the semi-structured interview process and a teacher focus group was conducted. Informal observations helped to gain insight of the school culture and climate, as well as a document review concerning policies, discipline data and academic achievement.

Findings
The findings revealed two themes as strengths for this district, creating community and providing services for students and families. The third theme, professional development, was an area of weakness for this district. Leaders are on their way in providing inclusive practices for students who have experienced trauma, especially in the areas of social emotional learning and behaviors. If Northside strives to develop a shared understanding of trauma and provides ongoing professional development in trauma-sensitive practices as well as a systematic approach to MTSS through the lens of Social Justice Leadership, they will ensure appropriate tiered interventions for this population of students while at the same time providing them with a socially just inclusive education.

Appendix C

Structured Abstract for William Russell Driscoll

Leadership for Inclusive Practices:
Border Crossing for Refugee Students

Background

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that more than half of the 22.5 million refugees worldwide are children. Among the consequences of fleeing their homes because of violence, war and persecution, families and children face a crisis level of interruption to their educational opportunities. As the United States continues to lead the world in welcoming asylum seekers, educational leaders must prepare for an increasing population of transnational students (Bajaj & Bartlett, 2017).

Purpose

The urgency of studying inclusive practices is intensified when one considers that refugee students in America face acculturation challenges that include the reversal of parent-child relationships, (Koyama & Bakuza, 2017), being unaccompanied by parents (Tello, et al., 2017), racial discrimination (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012, Roxas & Roy, 2012) and educational barriers (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Research Question

The guiding question to this research is: *In what way do district and school leaders support inclusive practices for refugee students?*

Methods

Methods for this heuristic case study, nested within the group study, are designed to examine the dynamics that influence school district and school leaders and how they construct support systems to meet the diverse needs of their students. Methods include 16 semi-structed interviews of district leadership teams and school principals, observations of schools, and document review of school, district and state websites, newspapers, archives, achievement data, memos, and policy statements.

Findings

A Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) approach for inclusive practices offers leaders a framework to meet the needs of diverse leaders by focusing on strategies that support academic, social emotional well-being, and partnerships with community organizations. Leaders use inclusive practices to support the needs of their refugee students by (I) Identifying Barriers to Learning, (II) Aligning Structures with Universal Design for Learning, and (III) Shaping Culture for Equitable Access. Implications of this case study highlight how leaders might balance equity and access in response to the forced migration of millions of students arriving in their districts.

Appendix D

Structured Abstract for Elizabeth S. Fitzmaurice
Leadership for Inclusive Practices:
Discipline Decisions that Support Students' Opportunity to Learn

Background
Student discipline practices evolved significantly in recent decades, yet pervasive use of out of school suspension persists. Such exclusionary discipline practice negatively influences students' opportunity to learn and restricts inclusion within the school environment. There is wide belief and extensive research speaking to the benefit of alternative practices yet a gap in research remains specific to what leadership practices influence such practices.

Purpose
This study closely examined this gap in research, providing an overview of the importance of alternative discipline practices, in lieu of out of school suspension (OSS), and explore leadership practices and decision-making about discipline situations and the effect on Opportunity to Learn.

Research Question
This study was guided by the following question: In what ways, if at all, do leaders make decisions about discipline that supports students' opportunity to learn?

Methods
To address this research question, I conducted a qualitative case study in a district within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts where the schools' purport utilization of alternative to OSS methods of discipline and the district focus includes leadership for inclusive practices. I conducted semi-structured interviews of district and building leaders to gain information about leadership perspectives on their student discipline decision-making practices. In addition, I examined archival data such as available Office of Civil Rights (OCR) discipline data, Massachusetts School Safety Discipline Reports (SSDR), and locally provided discipline data. Informal observations contributed to assessment of the overall inclusive culture of the school environments.

Findings
Findings indicated that fostering relationships between school, student, family and community members is integral to inclusive practices as a whole, specifically when related to discipline situations and integral to effective implementation of alternatives to suspensions, such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports and Restorative Practices. Recommendations include intentional systems development and implementation of instructional interventions as alternative to exclusionary discipline through a culturally responsive perspective.

Appendix E

Structured Abstract for Jonathan V. Redden

Leadership for Inclusive Practices:
Supporting Special Education Needs of Students in the General Education Classroom

Background

Despite many studies and a general belief that students should not be excluded from learning with their peers, there is no consensus on a definition of inclusion. Leaders' conceptual understanding of inclusion drive their visions and practices. Lacking a standard definition creates a void naming universal practices that ensure effective and inclusive schools (Ainscow et al., 2006). Since IDEA laws, an increasing number of students with disabilities are being educated in the general education classroom. Clarity around specific practices leaders take based on their district's context will help guide educators to design, structure and sustain schools where inclusion is a schoolwide reality.

Purpose

This study will start examined the policies, structures and practices that directly impact students on an IEP who are placed in the general education classroom. I studied the ways leaders support removing social and academic barriers to maximize the achievement potential of students in the general education classrooms.

Research Question

In what ways do district and school leaders utilize UDL practices to support inclusion for students with disabilities in the general education classroom?

Methods

The research was conducted through a qualitative case study that relied on interviews, informal observations and document analysis. I utilized the responses from 17 individual leaders in a Massachusetts school district and responses from a focus group of six teachers. I also used publicly released state assessment and school demographic information to help determine the impact specific practices had on the student achievement of students with disabilities.

Findings

Inclusion as a concept started with embracing diversity. Barriers to learning were not seen as being inherent in the capacities of students. Leaders felt responsible for sustaining learning environments where providing academic accommodations or modifications were not viewed as extra but rather viewed as the work of educators. Next steps involve using staff and technology resources effectively to drive student achievement based on academic measures.

Appendix F

Interview Protocol

Overarching Questions:

- What motivates you to work to provide opportunities for all students?
- What so you find most challenging about your position?
- As you think about helping every student learn, what types of things do you do? What Types of programs are beneficial to that end?
    - -probe for tiered supports
    - -probe for family and community engagement

Questions about Trauma:

1. There are so many ways to describe trauma, how do you describe trauma in your school?
2. Can you tell about how your school is supporting these students? What services do you provide?
    a. Probe for tiered supports (Academic, Social Emotional, Behavior)
    b. Probe for mental health care
    c. Probe for wrap around services
3. When it comes to supporting students who experienced trauma and their families, what supports do you need?
    a. Probe for training
    b. Probe for resources

Questions about Refugees:

1. Just like trauma, there are many ways to define multi-cultural practices. How do teachers reach students from different cultures?
2. Being from one of the most diverse districts in The Commonwealth, how do you go about serving students from so many different cultures?
    a. Probe for speaking so many languages
3. How did you come up with this approach and why did you do it?
    a. Probe for origin of approach – Internal? External?
4. What types of things are happening to help your refugee students?
5. To what extent do you rely on partnering with outside agencies to support students?

Questions about Student Discipline:

1. We've been talking a lot about the kinds of things that help kids make the most of their education, can you talk to us about school discipline and how it fits into that? How do you, as a leader, decide what to do about student discipline?

2. I hear you say you want to make sure every kid gets the most out of school, tell me how the Student Handbook/Code of Conduct factors into that. Can you share a story about why you are feeling that way?
3. Tell me about how the school uses creative solutions for student discipline. Do you find these successful?
4. Do you ever do anything that is not suspension? If so, what? How does it work?
    a. Probe for tiered support, alternatives to discipline i.e. PBIS, Peer Mediation, Restorative Practices etc…
5. We came here because of your district's reputation around inclusive practices, including discipline practices. Is it real? What is working and what is not?
6. Given what you shared about your philosophy and practice around student discipline, how do you support faculty to adopt your philosophy?

Questions about Structures for Students with Disabilities:

1. We've been talking about making sure every kid does well in school. How do educators in the school define and support inclusion?
2. What does inclusion mean to you?
    a. Probe for any particular strategies?
    b. Probe for any particular training?
3. Are there school-based systems of supports?
4. How are educators supported to stay current on 'best practices' and the latest policies specifically for successfully including students with disabilities.
5. Can you tell me about the collaborative / co-teaching structures you have in place that support inclusion?
    a. Probe for what the interviewee sees as next steps
6. What, if any instructional and assistive technology are being used for students with disabilities and other special needs by educators in the classroom?
7. When it comes to allocating resources for students with disabilities, what is the process?
    a. Probe for how make sure every student does well.
    b. Probe for resource allocation to support inclusive practices.

Closing Questions:

1. If you were to provide advice to another district, what might you offer?
    a. Probe for collaboration, mentoring, support groups.
2. Is there anything that we did not ask that would be helpful to our study?

Appendix G

Observation Protocol

Observation Notes

Setting: ____

Observer: ____

Date of Observation: ____

Time & Duration of Observation: ____________________________

	Observations	**Thoughts/Reflections**
Physical Setting		
Participants		
Activities & Interactions		
Conversations		
Subtle Factors		
Observers' Contributions		

Diagram of Classroom/School: