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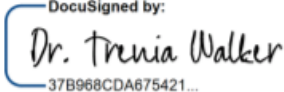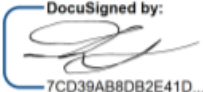
AN EQUITY AUDIT

BY

JENAI CHOI, BRITNEY D. HOLMES, AND TODD MARTINEZ-SIMMONS

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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Approval Signatures:

Dr. Trenia Walker	*Dr. Trenia Walker*	6/13/2020
Committee Chair		Date
Dr. Colette Taylor	*Dr. Colette Taylor*	6/12/2020
Committee Member		Date
Mr. Shomari Jones		6/13/2020
Committee Member		Date

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Todd Martinez-Simmons

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DEDICATION

We dedicate this work to all students, everywhere.

We may not know each and every one of you,

but we know you deserve an

equitable education.

ABSTRACT

REPAYING THE EDUCATION DEBT THROUGH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: AN

EQUITY AUDIT

CHOI, Jenai., HOLMES, Britney D., MARTINEZ-SIMMONS, Todd, Ed.D. Seattle University, 2020. 114pp.
Chair: Dr. Trenia Walker, Ed.D.

Dr. Ladson-Billings has reframed the commonly understood achievement gap as an education debt that is owed to all students, especially Black and Brown students. Research suggests the difference in achievement as measured by assessment, attendance, and graduation is marked by racial lines. One-way school districts have tried to address race-based injustices is by providing equity-focused professional development (PD) for district employees. This is a qualitative critical case study focused on understanding how a school district located in Western, Washington is working toward creating a more equitable education for all students. The research team used components of an equity audit to analyze the alignment of the current recommendations outlined in three of the District's public documents to *Courageous Conversations About Race*—a source of equity PD the District is currently implementing. The research team collected and analyzed data from public documents using a combination of document analysis methods. The research team triangulated the findings to identify recommendations for the District in implementing PD that will help it to meet its goal in providing equitable education for all students, especially those who are currently furthest from educational justice.

Keywords: education debt, achievement gap, professional development, equity, equity audit, document analysis, partnership

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), students of color are receiving a vastly different educational experience than their White peers. This phenomenon, known as the achievement gap, continues to happen in both public and private institutions (Dixon, Griffin, & Teoh, 2019). One popular solution to combating the achievement gap has been the use of professional development (PD) (Meissel, Parr, & Timperley, 2016). The use of PD is an attempt to solve an adaptive problem with a technical solution. Adaptive problems push on an individual's core values, beliefs, and approaches and often require change across boundaries, while a technical solution offers a quick fix (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). Therefore, any PD implemented by schools needs to create an experience for educators where their core values, beliefs, and the efficacy of their pedagogical methods are challenged; the PD should not merely provide new teaching tricks. A school district located in Western Washington has been a pioneer in its work to serve each and every student (personal communication, Director of Equity and Strategic Engagement, July 19, 2019). Though appearing to move at a snail's pace, the District has made essential changes to support its mission and vision: provide all students with an exemplary college preparatory education, so they are able to succeed in college, career, and life (District Publication, 2019). An initiative to further the mission includes the current partnership with Seattle University in order to support the fruition of equitable education for each and every student in the District[1]. Three doctoral students in the Educational Leadership program at Seattle University partnered with the District to conduct a qualitative critical case study. The focus of the study is to determine the extent to which the District is providing an equitable education for

students, as described in *Courageous Conversations About Race*. Additionally, the research team is exploring how PD can be used to ensure all students are provided with an equitable education. The team provides recommendations to support the District as it continues to work on repaying the education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006) —prioritizing students furthest from educational justice.

The rationale for conducting this study includes not only a district need, but also a national need for effective PD models that target the root cause of the education debt and work to eliminate it. The research team set out to partner with the District to support changing the narrative for students of color by evaluating the effectiveness of current practices prior to providing recommendations based on research-supported best practices. The original goal was to focus on supporting the Department of Equity and Strategic Engagement (DESE) in their implementation of PD and explore ways to change the narrative for students of color by evaluating the effectiveness of current practices and providing recommendations aligned with best practices within the District context. The research team hoped to help the District's employees understand their actual impact on initiating the changes mandated by its new Equity and Accountability Policy (see Appendix A for District Equity and Accountability Policy). Unfortunately, the swift onset of Covid-19 caused the research team to complete a fraction of the original proposal, which is detailed in the subsequent chapters.

Statement of the Problem

A persistent problem that continues to challenge educators is the achievement gap, which is the difference in student achievement based on race and socioeconomic status (Braun, Wang, Jenkins & Weinbaum, 2006; Gardner, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lee, 2002; Robertson, 2008). Despite on-going efforts to close the achievement gap, students of color, specifically

many Black and Brown students are not achieving at the same levels as their White and Asian peers, as measured by assessment scores, attendance and graduation rates (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). The research team will use the term education debt from this point on to refer to the compounded problem the achievement gap has created and to further put the ownership onto the inequitable structures rather than on Black and Brown students.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) explains race as a social construct developed by social thinking (Delgado, Stefancic, & Liendo, 2012). As racial lines mark this disproportionality, it is impossible to ignore the impact of race. The problem of racism, most notably, impacts historically marginalized populations, though negatively impacts everyone (Baldwin, 1963). Therefore, although the education debt describes the disparity students of color and students who are impacted by poverty face, this qualitative critical case study focuses on isolating race.

One-way school districts have tried to address disproportionality is by targeting the systemic issue of racism in schools through PD. PD is defined as "structured professional learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvement in student learning outcomes" (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, Gardner & Espinoza, 2017, p. 5). While the student population continues to grow more diverse, the teaching profession still consists of approximately 80% White teachers (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, 2016). The difference in race between student and teacher impacts student learning. Research suggests students connect better and achieve at higher levels when their race matches that of their teacher's (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, 2016). Although one initiative is to employ more teachers of color, school districts have focused their efforts on providing PD that develops current teachers to

better support students. One goal of equity-focused PD is to create the conditions for district

employees to identify, understand, and address bias and racist tendencies, thus providing tools

for staff to create a more equitable classroom (Consuegra & Engels, 2016; Kennedy

& Laurillard, 2019; Rodriguez, Mantle-Bromley, Bailey & Paccione, 2003).

Nevertheless, the consistent gap in achievement between students of color and White

students suggests a need to study the effectiveness of equity-focused PD. Districts in general, are

making investments averaging $18,000 per teacher per year, and many teachers are not

improving substantially from year to year (The New Teacher Project, 2015). To support the

District in achieving educational equity, the research team explored best practices around PD to

provide the District with recommendations.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative critical case study focuses on a district working toward creating a more

equitable environment for all students. In this effort, the District's DESE has spent six years

developing a plan to support all staff in their ability to build and sustain equitable schools.

According to the DESE webpage, the department is responsible for developing professional

development for district staff, advise regarding district policies and procedures, supporting

leadership within student groups, and building family connections. While the DESE develops

and facilitates some of the PD internally, the District has also contracted with Pacific

Educational Group (PEG) to provide an optional, monthly training called "Beyond Diversity."

According to the Courageous Conversations website, PEG works to support educators in

addressing racial disparities through partnerships with educational organizations that seek to

transform beliefs, behaviors, and results to best support all students. The PD offered by PEG is in

line with adaptive solutions because the PD focuses on challenging and shifting core beliefs and

values (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017; Singleton, 2015). Any employee in the District can opt into

taking the "Beyond Diversity I" training, and approximately 33% of district employees have

completed it. Currently, there are no incentives for attending the training. However, it is part of

the culture of some buildings to encourage staff to attend (personal communication, Director of

Equity and Strategic Engagement, November 20, 2019). The leadership of the DESE has

implemented many initiatives to address the education debt. After many arduous discussions

with the community, the District passed an Equity and Accountability Policy on June 11th, 2019.

The policy focuses on holding the District accountable for ensuring all students are "equitably

accessing learning opportunities in our District to ensure they all thrive" (see Appendix A).

Despite efforts to address the education debt with PD, the data shows that racial

disproportionality in student achievement within the District still exists. According to the Office

of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), there is a disproportionality of student

achievement data on the state English Language Arts Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA),

Math SBA, and Washington Comprehensive Assessment of Science (WCAS) between students

of color and their peers. This disproportionality exists even with the implementation of PD and

equity work in the District (personal communication, Director of Equity and Strategic

Engagement, July 19, 2019).

The purpose of this qualitative critical case study is to analyze how the District defines

equitable education through careful examination of District documents that are focused on equity

work and open to the public. This information allowed the research team to determine the

District's alignment with its goal to mirror an equitable education as described in *Courageous*

Conversations About Race, which supported a deeper understanding of how the intervention of

PD has impacted student achievement data. Before looking at other components of the work the

DESE is doing, it is critical to look closely at the current intervention to determine if there are any issues related to race and equity. The research team conducted a comprehensive qualitative analysis of the documents of the current Equity and Accountability Policy, Critical Criteria, Strategic Plan and *Courageous Conversations About Race*. This information, aligned to what research says is effective PD, should support the District in identifying if its current intervention is appropriate to its purpose to create equitable classrooms for all students.

Research Questions

To support the District as they seek to provide all students with an equitable education, the research team explored the following:

1. To what extent do the recommendations for an equitable education outlined in District documents align to what is described as an equitable education in *Courageous Conversations About Race*?

2. In what ways can research supported best practices for the development and presentation of professional development be used to support the fruition of an equitable education in this district?

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the foundational framework for this case study. The incorporation of CRT in this case study provides a lens with which to analyze the District's documents and *Courageous Conversations About Race*, which, in turn, informs the findings and recommendations. Although there are many tenets of CRT, this research study will focus on (a) permanence of racism; (b) interest convergence; (c) whiteness as property; (d) counter-storytelling (Delgado et al., 2012) as they relate specifically to the focus of this study. The literature review will delineate each tenet.

Woven into each of these tenets are the foundational pillars of this study. The case study is grounded in using the steps from an equity audit to help the District determine if their equitable practices exist system-wide (Skrla et al., 2004). The research team conducted an abridged version of the equity audit, which included document analysis of the District Policy, Strategic Plan, Critical Criteria, and *Courageous Conversations About Race*. The research team also explored best practices for the development and presentation of effective PD to support the District in bringing equitable education to life. For this process to be effective, it was essential for a strong partnership between the university and the school district to be maintained (Giannakaki, McMillan, & Karamichas, 2018; Patel, 2016). Moreover, using CRT as the framework in understanding inequitable systems will ensure that the District is working toward repaying the education debt that is owed to historically marginalized populations of students (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Context of the Study

The District is located in an urban city in Western Washington. Before the adoption of the new Equity and Accountability Policy, the District held town meetings led by the Director of the Department Equity and Strategic Engagement (DESE). These meetings were met with protests and were, at times, contentious (personal communication, Director of Equity and Strategic Engagement, July 19, 2019). The Washington Asians for Equality (WAE) frequently attended board meetings asking for both the "disbandment" of the DESE, while opposing the proposed Equity and Accountability Policy (Santos, 2019). The previous example shows the tumultuous environment in which the DESE must operate. The board passed this policy on June 11th of 2019 (Santos, 2019).

OSPI Data for the District.

To help further understand the District, the following public data are provided. This data is from the 2018-2019 school year, the most current data provided by the OSPI.

Demographics. The District enrollment was 21,745 students. The gender breakdown was as follows: Female 47.7%; Male 52.3%; Non-binary was not reported. The student demographic breakdown by race/ethnicity was as follows: American Indian/Alaskan Native 0.3%; Asian 40.8%; Black/African American 3.2%; Hispanic/Latinos of any race(s) 12.8%; Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander 0.2%; Two or more races 8.9%; White 33.9%.

Classroom data. On average, there are 24 students per classroom. The percentage of students who graduated in four years was 92.7%. The District spent $13,657 per-pupil for expenditures.

There were 1,161 classroom teachers. 66% of these teachers held a master's degree or higher. The average years of teaching experience were 10.7 years. 74.8% of the teachers were female and 25.2% were male. 81.9% of teachers were White. 10% were Asian. 5.2% were Hispanic/Latino of any race(s). 1% were Black/African American. 0.7% were Two or more Races. 0.3% were Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander. 0.3% were American Indian/Alaskan Native. 0.5% were not provided.

Demographics by Gender
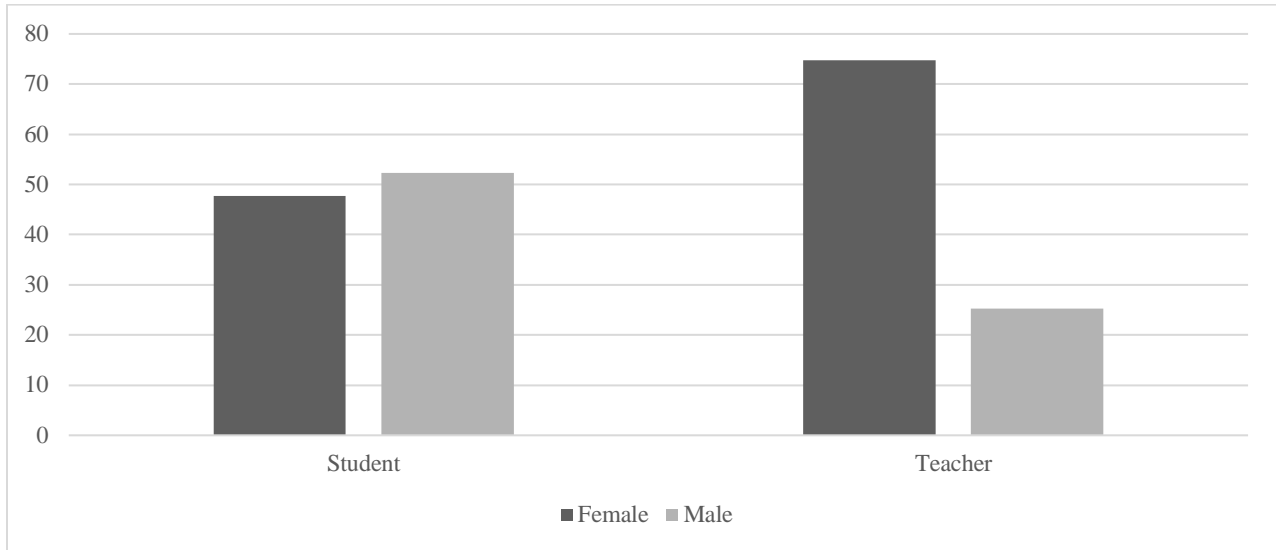
Figure 1. Percentage of students and teachers in District organized by gender. Data collected

from OSPI for the 2018-2019 academic year.

Demographics by Race/ Ethnicity

Figure 2. Percentage of students and teachers in the District organized by race and ethnicity.

Data collected from OSPI for the 2018-2019 academic year.

Student programs and characteristics. There are 4,096 students (18.7%) within the District listed as "low-income" by OSPI. 225 students (1%) in the District are listed as being "homeless." Regarding the state, standardized testing, 2,001 students reported as "low-income" were expected to take the ELA, math, and science tests. 44.3% of these students passed the ELA test. 32.9% of these students passed the math test. 34.1% of these students passed the science test. Regarding the students listed as homeless, 90 students were expected to take these tests. 26.7% of these students passed the ELA test. 17.2% passed the math test. 19.4% passed the science test.

Student Programs and Characteristics
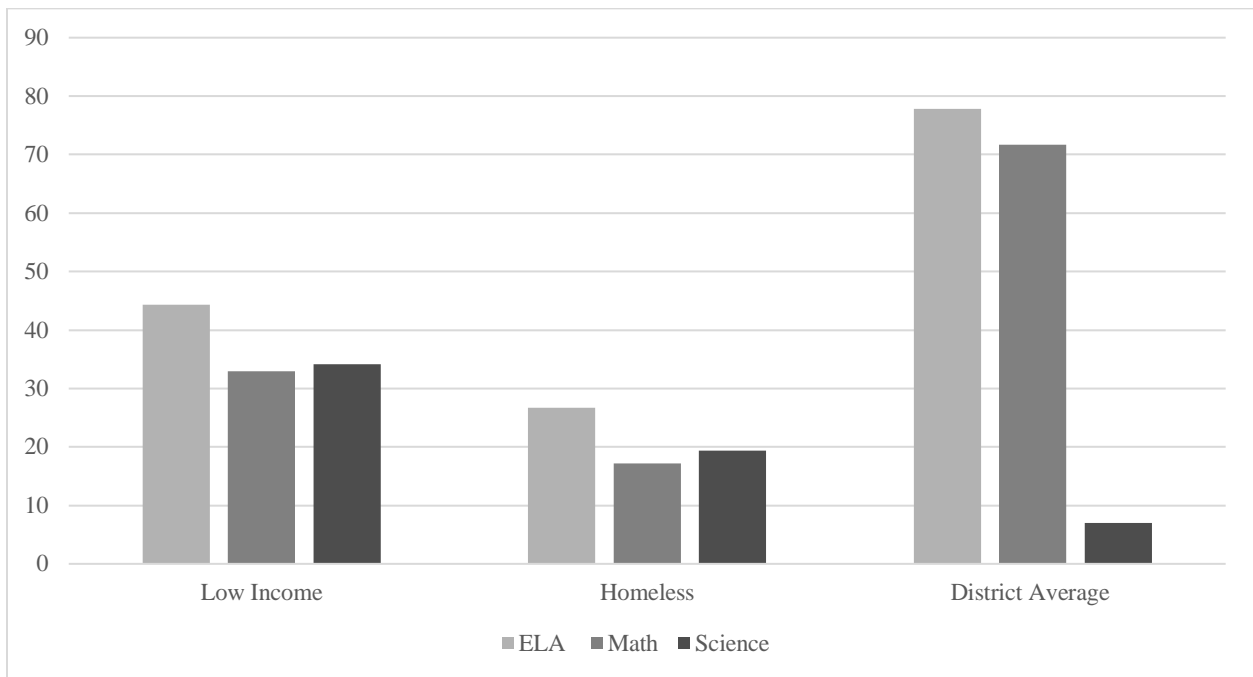
Figure 3. Percentage of students passing state assessments in ELA, Math and Science organized by student programs and characteristics. These categories include students who qualify as low income and/or homeless. The figure shows the district average for comparison. Data was collected from OPSI for the 2018-2019 academic year.

Attendance. During the 2019 school year, of the 20,898 students in the District, 91.4%

of them had fewer than two absences a month. The demographic breakdown by students with

fewer than two absences a month is as follows: American Indian/Alaskan Native 85.4%; Asian

94.7%; Black/African American 88.3%; Hispanic/Latinos of any race(s) 82.7%; Native

Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander 87.9%; Two or more races 91.7%; White 91%.

Attendance
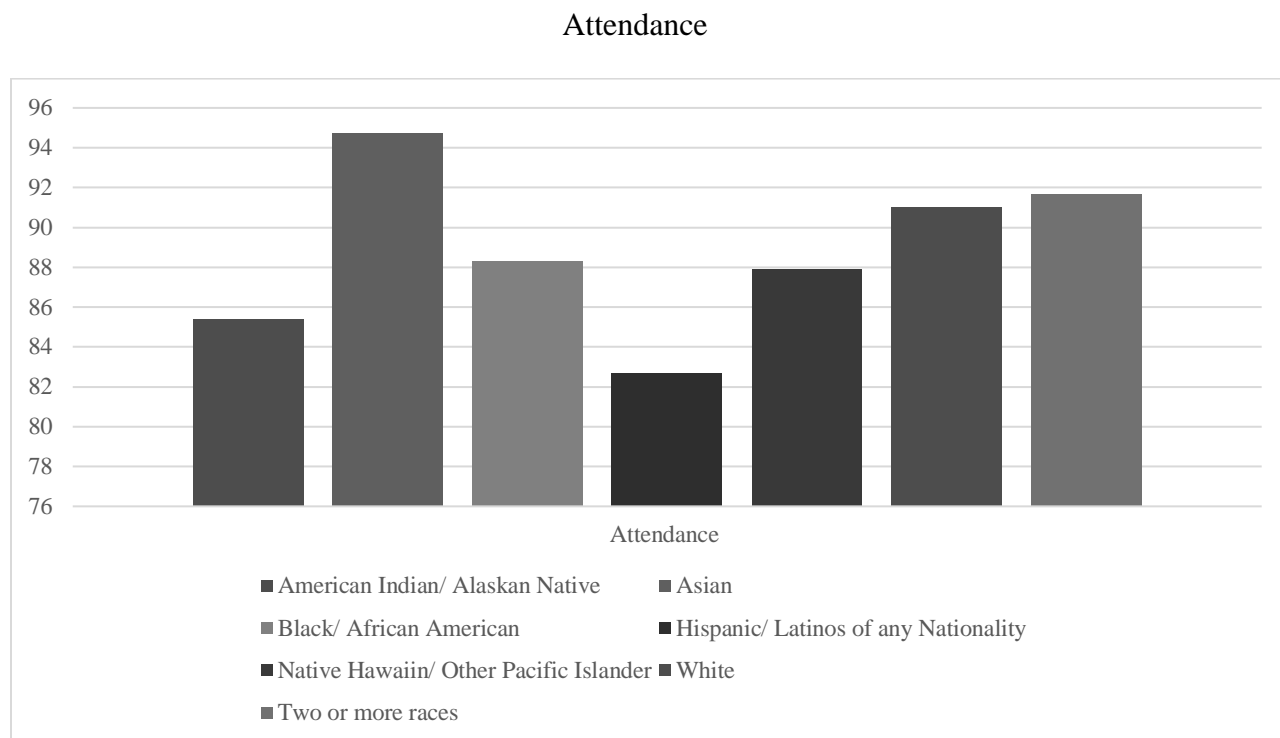
Figure 4. Percentage of students who had fewer than two absences a month organized by race

and ethnicity. Data was collected from OSPI for the 2018-2019 academic year.

State, standardized assessment results. Every Spring, students take the Smarter

Balanced Assessment (SBA). There are three tests (a) English Language Arts (ELA); (b) Math;

and (c) Science.

The demographic breakdown for the number of students expected to take the SBA and

WCAS was as follows: American Indian/Alaskan Native 26 students; Asian 4,495 students;

Black/African American 299 students; Hispanic/Latinos of any race(s) 1,352 students; Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander 29 students; Two or more races 1,003 students; White 3,727 students; Female student count was suppressed; Male 5,675 students; Gender X student count was suppressed.

The demographic breakdown for students passing the SBA at grade level for the ELA test was as follows: American Indian/Alaskan Native 69.2%; Asian 87%; Black/African American 53.5%; Hispanic/Latinos of any race(s) 47.5%; Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander 51.7%; Two or more races 79.2%; White 79.6%; Female 81.2%; Male 74.7%; Gender X was suppressed: N less than 10.

The demographic breakdown for students passing the SBA at grade level for the math test was as follows: American Indian/Alaskan Native 69.2%; Asian 87.3%; Black/African American 38.1%; Hispanic/Latinos of any race(s) 34.9%; Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander 41.4%; Two or more races 71.9%; White 69.2%; Female 71.5%; Male 71.9%; Gender X was suppressed: N less than 10.

The demographic breakdown for students passing the SBA at grade level for the science test was as follows: American Indian/Alaskan Native was suppressed: N less than 10; Asian 76.6%; Black/African American 32.1%; Hispanic/Latinos of any race(s) 33.4%; Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander 40%; Two or more races 66.4%; White 63.7%; Female 65.3%; Male 64.3%; no data was given for Gender X.

Standardized Assessment Results
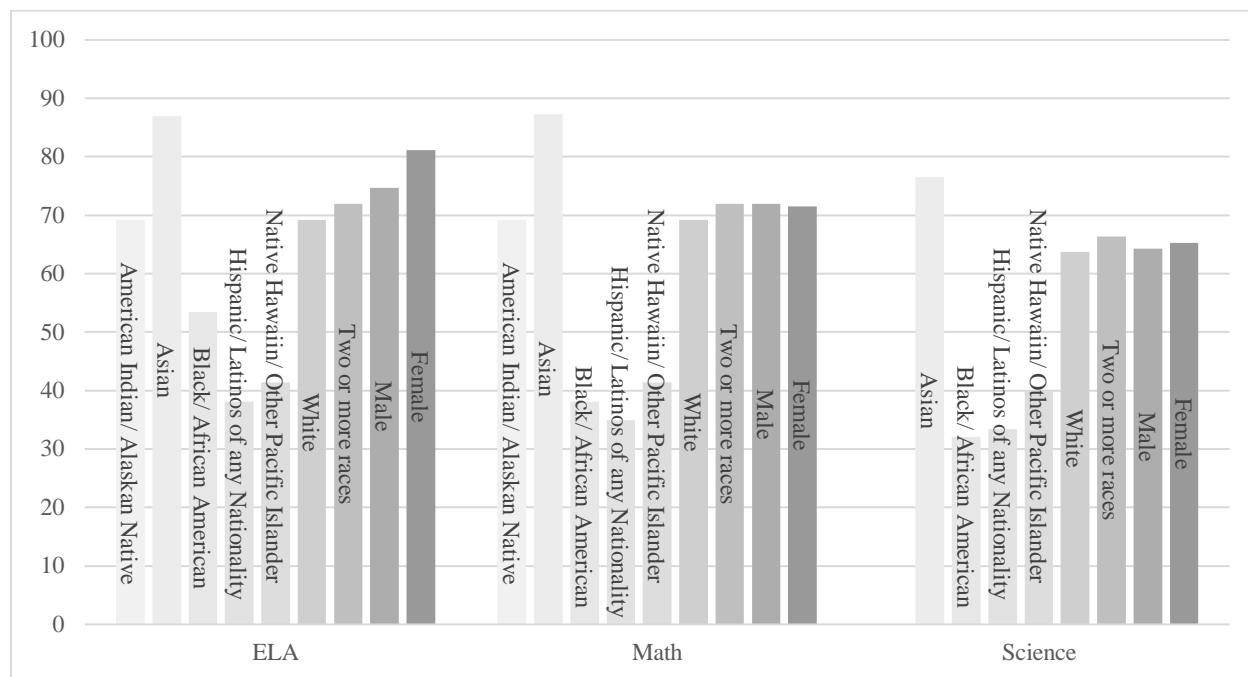
Figure 5. Percentage of students in the District who passed state assessments in ELA, Math and Science organized by race and ethnicity. Data was collected from OSPI for the 2018-2019 academic year.

Graduation rates. The graduation rates for students graduating in four year by race/ethnicity was as follows: American Indian/Alaskan Native 60.4%; Asian 90%; Black/African American 74.4%; Hispanic/Latinos of any race(s) 75.2%; Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander 74%; Two or more races 80.7%; White 82.9%; Female 84%; Male 77.8%.

Graduation Rates
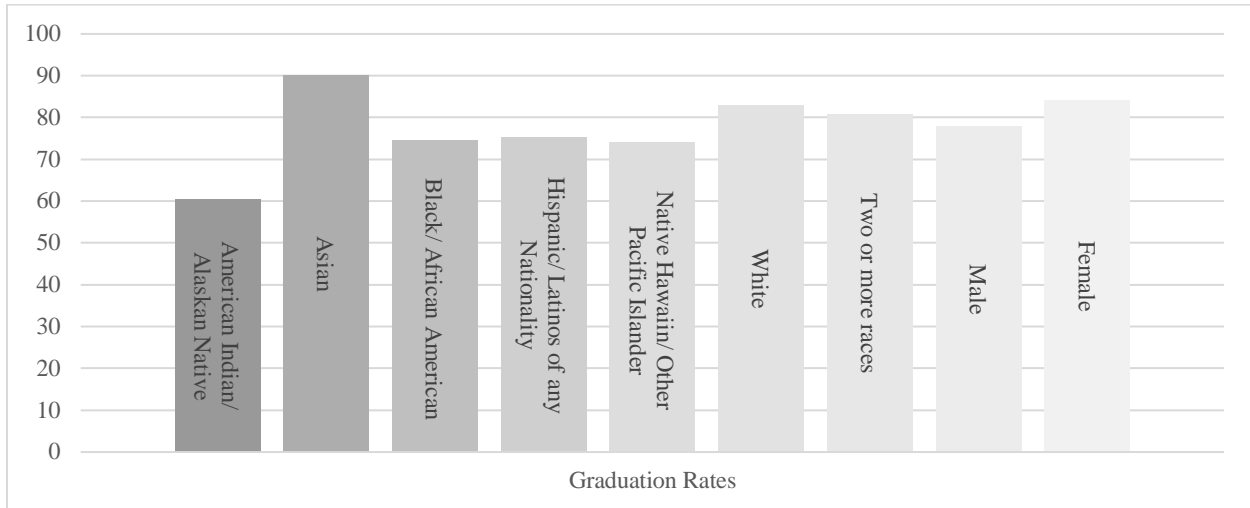
Figure 6. Percentage of students who graduated from the District organizations by race and ethnicity. Data was collected from OSPI for the 2018-2019 academic year.

Dropout rates. The student dropout rates by race/ethnicity was as follows: American Indian/Alaskan Native 26.6%; Asian 5%; Black/African American 13.6%; Hispanic/Latinos of any race(s) 15%; Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander 16.2%; Two or more races 11.1%; White 9.9%; Female 9.3%; Male 13%.
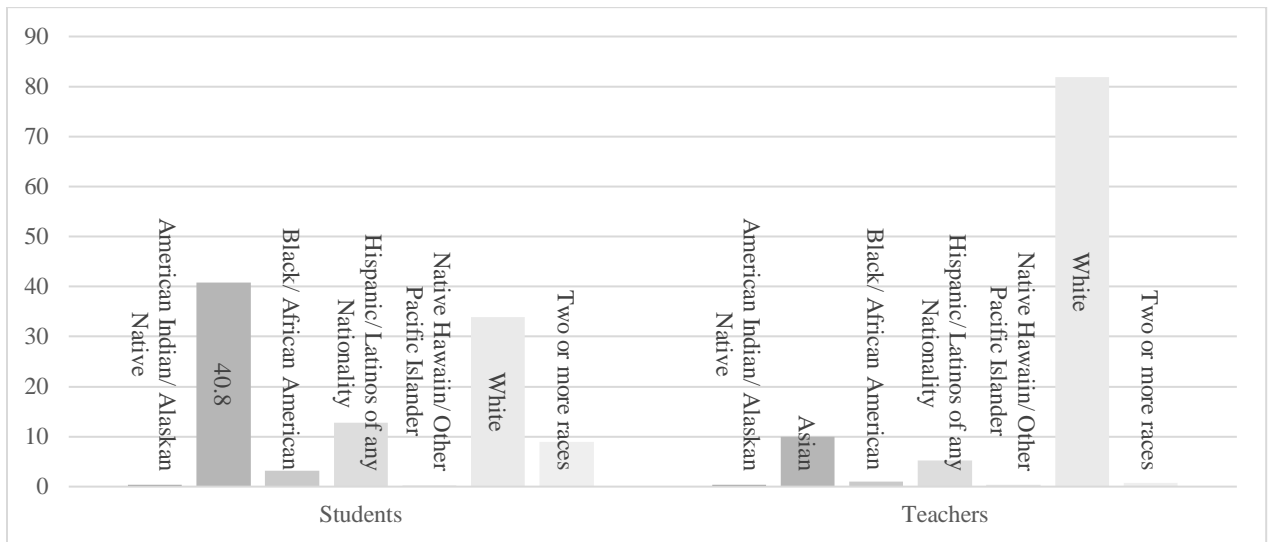
Dropout Rates by Race and Gender
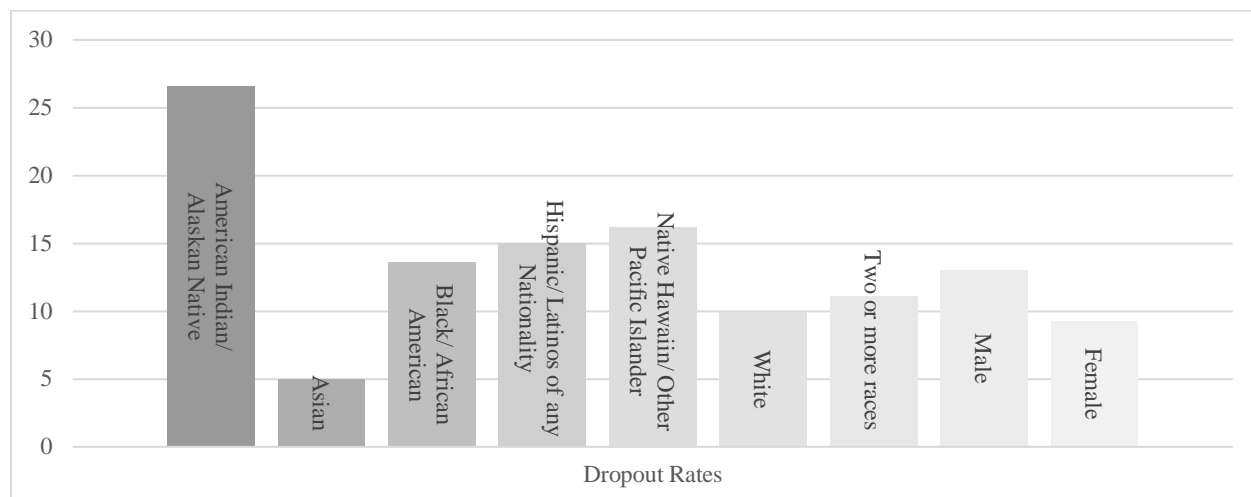
Figure 7. Percentage of students who dropped out from the District organized by race and

ethnicity. Data was collected from OSPI for the 2018-2019 academic year.

Overview of Methods

The research team conducted a qualitative critical case study to gain a comprehensive

understanding of the progress the District is making toward institutionalizing equity throughout

the organization. Critical studies focus on "systems of power and control, privilege, inequity,

inequality, dominance, and influence based on race, gender, and socioeconomic class"

(McMillan, 2016, p. 320). As this study is grounded in CRT and supporting the District in

serving Black and Brown students more equitably, this study meets the qualifications for a

critical case study.

Document analysis is a method used to analyze and interpret information from documents

and records. Bowen (2009) further explains that document analysis is useful and effective for

case study research. The procedures may adjust and change as data emerges from the documents

(Schwandt, 2001). The team used document analysis to analyze and interpret data from three of

the District's documents that reflect the work it has done to create more equitable systems for all

students. The researchers also analyzed and interpreted *Courageous Conversations About Race*, which is a text written by Glenn Singleton and the Pacific Educational Group, who provide a large portion of equity PD to the District. The team used the research questions to analyze the alignment between the recommendations outlined in the District documents and *Courageous Conversations About Race*.

Significance of the Study

According to the District website, the mission is to "provide all students with an exemplary college preparatory education, so they are able to succeed in college, career, and life." Disaggregating data by race reveals significant discrepancies, which fueled the research team's exploration of, "Who are 'all' students?" The District takes great pride in a 91% four-year high school graduation rate with nearly 70% of students enrolling into college. These impressive overall statistics are masked by the primarily White, Asian, and affluent families that make up nearly 80% of the students in the District, according to the OSPI.

In general, school districts may seek to address racial issues to uncover personal and institutional biases that prevent students from reaching their fullest potentials (Groenke, 2010). The District has adopted a policy that is designed to ensure all students thrive. The Equity and Accountability Policy focuses on (a) the Board of Directors to provide systems-wide direction, support, and oversight to advance equity and address inequities and biases; (b) the District at-large to provide equitable access to learning in a supportive environment for children, staff, and families of all backgrounds; (c) an accountability plan to ensure the goals are met.

Within the District, the focus on Black and Brown students is easy to overlook because they make up a small percentage of 3.2% of the student population. As of October 1, for the 2018-19 academic year, students in the District graduated at a higher rate than many surrounding

districts. However, the District's desire to focus on equity is essential to address the current and constant discrepancies in achievement, which can be predicted to be more disproportional based on the race of the student (Isik et al., 2018). Despite overall successes, data from OPSI shows Black and Latinx students are graduating at an average rate that is 12% lower than the District average. This case study provides essential information needed to address the discrepancy between the significantly higher White and Asian graduation rates and may offer solutions to address this disproportionality. In addition, 89% of Asian, 76% of White, 56% of Black, and 53% of Latinx students are enrolling in college post-graduation. Disparities in public data, like those mentioned above, exist throughout the District and are directly linked to a student's race. Therefore, the research team explored how the District has defined equitable education and alignment to PD, which is a primary intervention for the inequitable practices of the District and mainly given by the DESE.

This study explored an effective PD model for the District by identifying how the District defines equitable education and highlighting what research says is effective PD. The results of the data analysis provided valuable information to support the research team in the development of recommendations for the District that helps it to understand if the current structures and systems provided will produce the institutionalization of equitable education.

Background and Role of the Researcher

The research team is made up of three doctoral candidates within the Educational Leadership (EDLR) program at Seattle University. Each of the researchers currently works in public, K-12 education. None of the researchers work within the District.

Each member of the research team is committed to partnering with the District to support it in defining equitable education and working toward achieving it. To aid in this, each researcher

understands the importance of conducting an ethical and in-depth research study. The team implemented measures such as (a) engaging in critical conversations; (b) taking comprehensive notes; (c) collaborating on all components of the study; (d) checking for bias to ensure the study is both ethical and rigorous.

Definition of Terms

Achievement gap. A term used to describe the disproportionality of academic achievement between students of color and their White peers. This gap is more significant for Black and Brown students and continues to be an issue in the education system (Braun et al., 2006; Gardner, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lee, 2002; Robertson, 2008).

Adaptive change. Adaptive change requires new ways of learning and is conducted by the people facing the problem (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). Adaptive change also creates resistance as it challenges people's habits, beliefs, and values (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). This differs from problems requiring a technical solution. Technical problems are ones where the solution is already within the "repertoire" of the organization (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017, p. 18). The differentiation of this is a necessary aspect of this research study. As Heifetz and Linsky (2017) write, "There is a proportionate relationship between risk and adaptive change: The deeper the change and the greater the amount of new learning required, the more resistance there will be" (p. 14).

Black and Brown students. Students who experience more significant and significantly more discrimination based on their race or ethnic makeup are grouped as Black and Brown. All Asians are typically compounded into one group; however, it is important to acknowledge the range of experiences rooted in racist practices. Although the District and OSPI data suggest that Asian students are achieving at similar levels to White peers, it is essential to acknowledge that

there are still many students who identify as Asian who are also marginalized and negatively impacted by the education debt. Therefore, 'Black and Brown' is inclusive of all students who are negatively impacted by the education debt. It is important to acknowledge Indigenous students who are often ignored or left out of data as they too are negatively impacted by the education debt.

Critical Race Theory (CRT). A theory used to understand the relationship between race, racism, and power across White culture. Initially, this theory "emerged in the 1970s when a group of legal and academic scholars met to study the subtle nuances of the problems associated with race and equality in the United States" (Muhammad, 2015, p. 19). The CRT seeks to understand the effects of systemic racism and how those affected are working to counter this prejudice. In addition, CRT emphasizes an understanding of the socio-cultural forces that shape how people respond to, experience, and perceive racism.

Disproportionality. This refers to the uneven amount of representation of one group of people within a specific category. Although often used to describe higher rates of students of color in special education and discipline referrals (Griner & Stewart, 2012), the research team will also use this term throughout the study to describe the over-representation of one group's achievement over another.

Education debt. A concept created by Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006); this term is used to describe the result of the prevalence of the achievement gap in the education system. This debt is made up of historical, political, economic, and moral components that contribute to an overall debt that continues to accumulate.

Equity audit. Equity auditing is a leadership tool that supports the development of equitable schools. The tool is used to uncover, understand, and change inequities within schools

and districts. The focus of the tool specific to schools and districts is in three areas (a) teacher quality; (b) educational programs; (c) student achievement (Skrla et al., 2004).

Professional development. This is a term broadly used to include any activity that is used to improve pedagogical methods (Borko, Jacobs, & Koellnerr, 2010; Hargreaves, 2000). PD comes in various forms. Some of these include workshops, multi-day conferences, webinars, and individual instruction. The aspects of PD are (a) the content; (b) its implementation; (c) its efficacy in creating desired change.

Stakeholders. This term was invented in 1946 as an analogy for *shareholder* (Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2001). This analogy frames the questions, "Who will benefit and to what extent will they benefit?" For this research study students, particularly Black and Brown students, are the primary stakeholders, as the goal of this research study is to improve the District's ability to achieve equity. The secondary stakeholders include the DESE, district employees, and community members.

Whiteness. Whiteness is a term used to describe ways of thinking, behaving, and believing that stem from the dominant White culture. The three areas of inquiry about studying Whiteness are (a) color; (b) culture; (c) consciousness. The aspects of White consciousness are (a) universal perspective; (b) individualism; (c) avoidance; (d) decontextualization (Singleton, 2015).

Limitations and Delimitations

The research team had limited access to the documents used for this case study. Due to complications related to Covid-19, the research team analyzed three district documents and acknowledges this limits the depth of understanding for what is happening in the District. This study is also limited as the Director of Equity and Strategic Engagement has

been the only human contact. The focus on the Director's perspective limits the number of perspectives and input available to the research team.

The research team has had personal experience with equity-focused PD. This experience creates a layer of bias. However, the research team actively worked toward differentiating their personal experience with PD from the academic research focused on this topic. Additionally, as the researchers are also teachers, they must be aware of their bias as it relates to their understanding of PD based on their past experiences.

The research team chose to focus on the first step of an equity audit. This audit includes the contents of three equity-related documents from the District and the alignment to a third-party equity PD source. Therefore, the research team analyzed the documents with the intention of understanding the current recommendations the District has in achieving equitable education for all students. The Equity and Accountability Policy, Strategic Plan, Critical Criteria, and *Courageous Conversations About Race* are the boundaries for the data analyzed in this case study.

The research team focused solely on race. While studies that focus on the intersectionality of race and poverty would be useful, the research team decided to focus solely on race as the policy the District implemented focuses on race as does the PD provided to district employees. In addition, race is a defining marker in students' academic achievements (Lewis et al., 2008). The research team narrowed the focus of the study to analyze the intended effect of the equity-focused PD for Black and Brown students.

Within the District the Asian population currently has achieved academic success; therefore, the research team directed attention away from this group to help ensure that the focus of the data collection and analysis is directed toward students whose educational

achievement shows the disproportionality within the District as seen in the data provided by OSPI.

The goal of this qualitative critical case study is to produce generalizable support for the District in the development and implementation of PD focused on improving equity. Therefore, the research team used recommendations from *Courageous Conversations About Race* and research-based best practices for PD as a guide for the equity audit and the recommendations for improvement.

The research team used CRT as the framework for the study. Using CRT will ensure the information shared contributes to understanding the impact of race and racism in the education system.

Summary

This research study focused on the complexities of how a school district is trying to repay the education debt owed to its students of color. However, this is not the only challenge the District faces. There are members of the community who are adamantly opposed to both the Equity and Accountability Policy and the DESE. Even though this tension exists, the school district is still committed to accomplishing the goals outlined in the Equity and Accountability Policy and Strategic Plan. To act on these goals, the District is implementing PD that focuses on improving equity. Unfortunately, even with these interventions in place, the deficit has yet to be repaid as evidenced by the disproportionality seen in the OSPI data.

This study is grounded in the Critical Race Theory. In this case study, the research team conducted a preliminary investigation to support the work of an equity audit for the District to understand how the intervention of professional development is serving the District in its equity work. The tenets of CRT create a foundation for understanding how issues around race and

racism impact our current educational system. In order to ensure historically marginalized students, specifically Black and Brown students, are afforded the same educational opportunities as their peers these tenets must be clearly understood.

The research team conducted this qualitative critical case study in partnership with the District. After collecting and analyzing qualitative data from documents, the research team examined how the District recommends achieving equitable education. The District recommendations were then compared to the recommendations outlined in *Courageous Conversations About Race* (Singleton, 2015). The information found in this research study is significant in supporting the next steps for the District to work toward paying the education debt by providing PD, which supports the institutionalization of equity.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This case study is an examination of the District's recommendation of equitable education as described in the Equity and Accountability Policy, Critical Criteria, and the District's Strategic Plan. The District's Equity and Accountability Policy acknowledges that all students have a right to a learning environment that meets their individualized needs. The Equity and Accountability Policy identifies the commitments and actions the District will take to prioritize marginalized students as it works toward the elimination of racial inequities.

The research team used Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a framework for this study to serve two purposes. First, CRT mirrors the logic of the District's Equity and Accountability Policy in both the identification of systems of racism and how these systems are perpetuated. In doing so, CRT offers a basis to begin to counteract these inequitable systems. Secondly, using CRT provides a lens to propose potential models of equity-focused PD that will support the District effectively achieve the commitments laid forth in the Equity and Accountability Policy. Therefore, the CRT is the foundational framework for this case study in order to isolate race and understand the impact of racism.

Having established the need to ground this case study in CRT, the research team will conduct an equity audit on the District's Equity and Accountability Policy, Critical Criteria, and the Strategic Plan. An equity audit is a tool that will allow the research team to work in partnership with the District to address the existing disproportionality in achievement between Black and Brown students and their White and Asian peers as reflected in OSPI report card data.

The team explored the ways race informs every aspect of the District's educational system. The purpose of the study is to analyze the Equity and Accountability Policy, Critical Criteria, and the Strategic Plan to support the District in later identifying if a disconnect exists amongst district given PD, policy, and research suggested best practices. Through the application of an equity audit that is grounded in CRT, the research team will be able to explore to what extent the Equity and Accountability Policy, Critical Criteria, and the Strategic Plan align to the ideas and actions outlined in *Courageous Conversations About Race* to achieve an equitable educational environment.

Critical Race Theory

CRT offers multiple avenues of inquiry regarding the institutionalization, manifestation, and maintenance of race and racism in society. For this case study, the research team explores four tenets of CRT that are relevant to the case study as a lens to understanding race and racism and how it permeates the educational system. The focus of the research investigates the enmeshing of racial differences and how race reinforces barriers that preclude students of color access to educational opportunities readily available to their White peers.

CRT was born out of Critical Legal Studies, which offered a way for legal and academic scholars to understand the subtleties and complexities of race and power in the United States (Delgado et al., 2012). Zorn (2018), a critic of the CRT, writes, "Unlike scientific theories, CRT never construes its claims as testable hypotheses" (p. 205). Instead, Zorn (2018) argues, they are "self-evident axioms" (p. 205) and that there is not a scientific way in which to substantiate the claim that racism is ordinary. Zorn (2018) describes the logic of CRT as being "self-contained, self-justifying circles of thought" (pp. 204-205). Zorn's criticism of the CRT is ill-founded. He asserts that the CRT's weakness is its inability to be tested using the scientific method. However,

the founders did not set out for the CRT to explain the natural world as physics or biology does. Instead, the CRT's strength is in its inclusion of many voices who work together to describe the social world. What Zorn fails to acknowledge is that rigorous, reliable, and valid qualitative research can produce results that are representative of individual and group experiences, which is what the CRT accomplishes.

The research team has included the following tenets of CRT to frame the case study (a) permanence of racism; (b) interest convergence; (c) whiteness as property; (d) counter-storytelling (Delgado et al., 2012). These tenets are discussed in the context of the research study in the following sections.

The Permanence of Racism

This tenet asserts that race and racism is a standard way of being. Also, this tenet argues that America's routines, practices, and institutions are inherently racist. The normalization of the routines and practices makes it challenging to eliminate racism because race is not acknowledged, yet race is a permanent component of American life (Decuir & Dixson, 2004). When people or organizations address race, racism, and racist practices, attempts at equality can come in the form of color-blindness or formal conceptions of equality that further racial inequality (Delgado et al., 2012; Muhammad, 2015; Su, 2007). Su (2007) explains, "CRT forces scholars to look beyond well-intentioned rhetoric and liberal notions of equality. Instead, it suggests that we should examine the everyday practices, patterns of inequality, and results of real-life struggles for racial justice" (p. 532). "Aggressive, color-conscious efforts to change the way things are will do much to ameliorate misery" is needed to challenge the core values of District employees in order to create a more equitable system (Delgado et al., 2012, p. 27).

Taking into consideration both the support and the opposing argument for this CRT tenet, the research team finds it essential to think about the pervasiveness of racism in the education system. This is evidenced in data which makes it difficult to argue against the idea that the education debt is marked by racial lines (Braun et al., 2006; Gardner, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lee, 2002; Muhammad, 2015; Robertson, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

Moreover, school districts struggle to identify the appropriate interventions to address this complex problem. The understanding that racism is permanent is foundational, which is why this research study focuses on examining how the DESE supports bringing the Equity and Accountability Policy and the Strategic Plan to life. Professional development is used as the intervention to support a more equitable system within the District; therefore, this human interaction requires an acknowledgment of racism as a permanent force in American systems.

Equity audits. Having CRT in place as the soil from which each aspect of this case study will grow, allows the practice of an equity audit to become a seed that can aid in the flourishing of understanding the extent of the alignment between the Equity and Accountability Policy, Critical Criteria, and the Strategic Plan with the ideas and actions from *Courageous Conversations About Race*. More importantly, it also provides specific steps for this case study to take root, especially as equity audits are an established methodology for improving equity. Skrla et al., (2004) explain equity audits as a tool to continue the path toward equity and excellence. Equity audits are rooted in civil rights and state accountability policies, both nationally and internationally.

Equity audits have been conducted both voluntarily and involuntarily to determine compliance with civil rights statutes that prohibit discrimination. In recent years, there has been a push to conduct equity audits in a range of school-based programs. The push to use equity audits

in school-based programs is a new tool developed for school leadership practitioners to make changes and allow for more equitable practices system-wide (Green, 2017; Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009). After all, research shows more equal societies do better in terms of "human development, economic performance, and political stability" (Binelli, Loveless, & Whitefield, 2015, p. 246). Therefore, to improve educational outcomes for everyone, it is in the best interest of the District and community to ensure Black and Brown students are equitably supported—just as the policy states, "we work systemically to eliminate racial inequalities and inequities for all marginalized students" (see Appendix A).

Initially, equity audits were focused on compliance and typically included several hundred pages, adding a barrier to the necessary systematic changes. Such a long document was not accessible for schools and school districts, thus the need for a new tool. The school-based model of an equity audit provides a relatively unstructured set of steps which allows practitioners the freedom to make site-specific decisions. Skrla et al. (2004) suggest the combination of teacher quality equity and programmatic equity result in the achievement of systematic equity. The research team is focusing on programmatic equity for this equity audit using a document analysis of the Equity and Accountability Policy, Critical Criteria and the Strategic Plan. The focus of this study is to lay the foundation for the District to continue the equity audit process which will identify if inequalities and inequities exist and how to implement solutions effectively. In order to do this, it is essential to understand each of the tenets and the application to this study.

Interest Convergence

There is a large contingent within society that does not want to dismantle racism because the maintenance of racist structures connects to the need to feed the settler-colonial logic (Patel,

2016). Also, U.S. society is based on property rights (Ladson- Billings & Tate, 1995; Muhammad, 2015; Patel, 2016). Racist structures and property rights reinforce each other, helping to secure further power and property for the dominant group. Therefore, any member of the dominant group may not have a vested interest in dismantling racist structures nor practices. Interest convergence is the idea that White people advance the interests of people of color when both interests converge (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Sleeter, 2017).

Within the sphere of education, even when there is a convergence of interests, there remains White resistance and fatigue from talking about and working with issues around race (Sleeter, 2017). White educators can waver between participating or not participating in actions called for by the CRT. District administrators and educators may or may not have the tools to highlight spaces when interests converge, thus reinforcing racist structures and practices. In analyzing student data, the interests of high performing Whites have not yet converged with the remaining students in the District. Professor Derek Bell, one of the early contributors of CRT, points to the vast reach interest conversion has when he shows how the ruling of Brown vs. The Board of Education also benefited wealthy Whites (Delgado et al., 2012). Bell argued that "civil rights advances for blacks always seemed to coincide with changing economic conditions and the self-interests of elite whites. Sympathy, mercy, and evolving standards of social decency and conscience amounted to little, if anything" (Delgado et al., 2012, p. 22). These ideas lead to the questions (a) How then can proponents of CRT navigate these waters? (b) When is an ally, an ally? (c) When is an ally only acting from self-interest? These questions guided the analysis and recommendations of this case study.

Document analysis. Bowen (2009) explains a document analysis to be an interpretation by the researcher of an assessment topic. The research team expanded this definition to include

"other meaningful matter" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). The research team analyzed the Equity

and Accountability Policy, Critical Criteria, and the Strategic Plan to determine the extent of

alignment with *Courageous Conversations About Race*. The Director of the DESE described the

content of *Courageous Conversations About Race* as the target for which they are aiming

(Personal communication, Director of Equity and Strategic Engagement, February 13, 2020).

This analysis lays the foundation for subsequent studies to support the District in its goal to

institutionalize equity by working to eliminate racial inequalities and inequities systemically.

Data analysis is an essential first step in the triangulation of data to determine if the District's

Equity and Accountability Policy, Critical Criteria, and Strategic Plan are on course to hit their

intended target.

The team used a part of White and Marsh's (2006) procedure for qualitative content

analysis as it flows from a humanistic tradition, which is inherently and expectedly unique.

Bowen (2009) offers many advantages to conducting data analysis. To begin with, it is efficient

and effective. Documents are reliable, accessible, and cost-efficient. Also, documents are

stable—the research team can access them over time, multiple times, and the data will remain

unchanged. Finally, document analysis points to questions that need to be asked, situations that

need to be observed, ensures research is critical and comprehensive. There are also hurdles when

conducting a document analysis. It is sometimes difficult to access documents, which in turn

may leave questions unanswered. Another disadvantage is the researcher bias, which will likely

be present in the interpretation of documents.

The research team developed a version of an equity audit that focused on document

analysis for the District. This is the first in a series of data collection methods designed to

support the District in developing effective PD. The ultimate purpose is to create a model which

better supports the needs of educators work toward addressing the root cause of the education debt in the District. "To truly honor excellence, we need to embrace equity" (Brown et al., 2011, p. 57). This holds true for the work of this case study, and the research team must maintain documents where the interests of all parties converge. When schools work toward the best interests of all students, the outcomes of the District as a whole increase (Brown et al., 2011).

Whiteness as Property

The CRT tenet Whiteness as property has its origins in the study of White claims to land and labor (Harris, 1995 as cited by Zamudio et al., 2010). This tenet stretches beyond the acquisition of physical property and is seen in the current landscape of an inequitable education system, yet it is necessary first to understand the full impact of the White claim to land and labor before understanding it within the structure of the education system. The claim to land and labor conflated race and property, as Black people were "subjugated as slaves and treated as property" (Harris, 1993, p. 278 as cited by Zamudio et al., 2010, p.33; Lipsitz, 1998; Smith, 2006). Additionally, the turning of people into property by Whites extended to Native Americans and Mexicans (Zamudio et al., 2010). The justification for the acceptably subjugating Black people as slaves was rooted in an ill-founded understanding of biological differences (Kennedy, Middleton, & Ratcliffe, 2005). As a consequence of this origin, a set of assumptions regarding the rights of Whites was born.

Furthermore, the status attained due to white skin became a valuable asset (Harris, 1993). As Harris (1993) writes, "Whites have come to expect and rely on these benefits, and over time these expectations have been affirmed, legitimated, and protected by the law" (p. 1713). As a result, this way of experience fell into the realm of the unconscious for White people, thus becoming invisible (McIntosh, 1989). Thereby establishing and reinforcing a dominant White

culture that privilege members of this group (Kennedy et al., 2005). With the emergence of

White dominance, White people were born into a society where their privilege appeared to be a

birthright rather than the consequences of a racist social structure. As a result, property

"encompasses a host of abstract concepts associated with labor including time, creativity, and

benefits of education (Annamma, 2015, p. 298). The implications on public education

experiences for students of color is clear. Rather than coming from the dominant culture

established by White people, with all its attendant privileges, students of color come from a

history where they were not merely treated as property but instead understood as property. As

Annamma (2015) writes, "In public education, whiteness as property has become a signifier of

who reaped the benefits of education through the value of property owned" (p. 298). An analysis

of the education debt makes clear who the beneficiaries of this educational environment are—

White students (Braun et al., 2006; Gardner, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lee, 2002;

Muhammad, 2015; Robertson, 2008; U.S Department of Education, 2019). To fully understand

(and accept) the current inequitable education system requires a nuanced understanding of the

origins of this tenet through the historizing of Whiteness (Kennedy et al., 2005); the historization

process makes Whiteness visible to everyone while also showing the ongoing consequences for

all students, especially Black and Brown students. The Whiteness as property tenet also creates

the space to deconstruct the socially constructed ideas of race, racism, and Whiteness which

impede the current education system's ability to repay the education debt. Professional

development offers the opportunity to inform educator actions and thought processes to

dismantle this social structure and replace it with one that ensures Black and Brown students are

truly included in the phrase "all students."

Professional development. Professional development is an intervention being used to change the current inequitable practices within the District. The goal being to change the very fabric of the social structure that was designed to turn people into property—a system that will continue to do so without cessation lest the structure itself be demolished. "At the heart of structural determinism, is the idea that our system, by reason of its structure and vocabulary, is ill-equipped to redress certain types of wrong," this reason, among others, supports the researchers' use of the CRT to frame the understanding of the impact of PD, especially living within the Whiteness as property tenet (Delgado et al., 2012, p. 31). Delgado et al., (2012) gives the example of a painter with limited colors on the palate, an artist who can only look to the smog of the sky, having never seen a blue one. How could this person with limited resources and experience step beyond these bounds to create something new? The Department of Equity and Strategic Engagement (DESE) is working on expanding the palate through PD. This begs the questions: Is PD an effective means of righting the wrongs? Can PD deconstruct the racist social structure, thus making payment on the education debt? Additionally, all of this requires the content of the PD, the Equity and Accountability Policy, Critical Criteria, and the Strategic Plan to be in accord with the District's self-identified goals of creating an equitable educational environment as outlined in *Courageous Conversations About Race*.

Within education, PD is an opportunity to learn and grow professionally to support the goals of the district, school, community, and students being served (Borko et al., 2010; Hargreaves, 2000). As stated, the District is using PD as one way to implement the Equity and Accountability Policy and Strategic Plan while holding themselves accountable using the Critical Criteria protocol. To address the second research question, the research team will explicate the best practices, as suggested by research, before using these as a point of comparison of the way

the District is selecting its PD content and the way it is implementing the PD. There is an ongoing body of research dedicated to gaining a deeper understanding of the components of effective PD. The research team will focus on (a) content; (b) presentation method; (c) efficacy. An effective combination of these components allows the conditions for meaningful learning opportunities and transformative growth for educators (Fink, 2013; Walter & Briggs, 2012).

Content. Effective PD provides educators with the necessary tools to make a difference in student learning. Walter and Briggs (2012) identify characteristics of PD which support long term teacher change:

- Concrete and classroom based.

- Brings expertise from outside the school.

- Involves teachers in the choice of the areas to develop and the activities to undertake.

- Enables teachers to work collaboratively with peers.

- Provides opportunities for mentoring and coaching.

- Is sustained over time.

- Is supported by effective school leadership.

In addition to the characteristics mentioned above, research has shown the value of integrating equity-focused concepts and practices into all PD (Petty, 2008). The characteristics of equitable practices within content-specific learning opportunities are rarely modeled and often hard to see in practice. The lack of consistency in modeling equitable practices within the U.S. education system negatively impacts the dissemination of information and practice (Conklin, 2008). Reproducing bad habits, then, negatively impacts students and their educational journey, thus reinforcing the racist social structures that put them at a disadvantage in the first place.

Presentation method. Many presentation methods exist with a range of effectivity. Districts have worked to implement traditional face-to-face training, conferences, self-guided training, professional learning communities, coaching, courses, online training, and other methods. Financial resources and time cause a significant disconnect between the desired and given PD format (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2015).

Today, technology presents a cost-effective option to disseminating necessary information to support adult growth within the District. Unfortunately, according to the Computer History Museum website, when the computer became mainstream and cost-effective, a majority of districts' teaching force did not have access nor the choice to use technology—thus making technology inaccessible to the adults needing the information. Many factors influence the District's decision to implement a specific type of presentation method, all of which are dependent on the department and the funding for the department.

Efficacy of PD. Research suggests that active, reflective, sustainable, and job-embedded PD is the most effective (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Harris, 2016). Additional research also suggests the most popular form of PD is the observation of colleagues and sharing of practices. This type of teacher-directed PD, when long-term, pushed practitioners to change one or more aspects of their teaching practice (Boyle, While, & Boyle, 2004). This phenomenon is known as transfer—how well a learner accesses and applies learning in novel settings. Previous research has identified a positive correlation between transfer and application when the class and practice are similar (Anderson, Reder, & Simon, 1996; Pugh & Bergin, 2006).

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation found the following elements in PD creates the conditions for positive changes in teacher practice and an increase in student learning. When PD:

- Content is focused.

- Incorporates active learning.

- Supports collaboration.

- Uses models of effective practice.

- Provides coaching and expert support.

- Offers feedback and reflection.

- Is sustained over time.

The identification of these conditions is not sufficient to ensure their implementation. Research conducted by Pharis, Wu, Sullivan and Moore (2019) suggests that feedback and input are important to improving teacher practice and that teachers want authentic feedback from trusted sources. Moreover, this feedback process for improvement is strengthened when teachers are a part of developing the accountability process (Henderson, 2012; Pharis et al., 2019). However, a significant roadblock in the maintenance of peer observation systems that improve teacher efficacy is scheduling issues, time, resources, and a lack of trust (Henderson, 2012; Kuter, 2016; Pharis et al., 2019). This roadblock further complicates the already complex issue of developing PD that meets the previously stipulated qualities while simultaneously counteracting an education system designed, as evidenced by the CRT tenet Whiteness of Property, to marginalize and oppress students of color, especially Black and Brown students.

The District. Currently, the District uses a range of PD models. The DESE has failed to create significant learning opportunities for educators because there has not been a substantial change in practice according to OSPI annual data (Fink, 2013). Brown and Green (2016) argue an analysis of the context, and learning will provide the conditions to supporting significant learning experiences. There is an added layer of challenge as conversations around race create

discomfort, which pushes on the basic need for safety (Vilson, 2012). The purpose of exploring effective equity-focused PD models is to create significant learning opportunities for educators. Allowing oneself to experience discomfort will support the navigation of difficult topics such as race and an individual's role in perpetuating the education debt (Singleton, 2015).

Integrating equity audits and PD. The search for a PD model that increases teacher efficacy to impact student learning is on-going; this is due to the dynamic nature of the factors that enable professional learning (Meissel et al., 2016). Giannakaki et al., (2018) propose the use of stakeholders to support student awareness of subtle injustices, which are legitimized by current systems, preventing the closing of the "gap." Many have argued and analyzed the practices implemented to promote equity; however, the practices are widely ineffective because they fail to address the root cause of the education debt (Hirsh, 2005). Combing this inquiry-based framework with an effective PD model for teachers has proven promising as they "guarantee education for sustainable development" (Aldahmash et al., 2019, p. 172). The use of this equity audit, developed for the District, will provide valuable information to support the development of equity-focused PD, which can be useful for educators within the District as they work toward repaying the education debt through the institutionalization of equity.

Counter-Storytelling

As Delgado et al. (2012) write, "the voice-of-color thesis holds that because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, black, American Indian, Asian, and Latinx writers and thinkers may be able to communicate to their white counterparts matters that the whites are unlikely to know" (p. 10). Understanding multiple perspectives is a significant part of addressing the problem as counter stories can challenge current narratives and beliefs that may be harmful and continue perpetuating racists systems (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Education debt. This tenet grounds the research team's use of the term education debt in place of the achievement gap. The complexity and persistence of the achievement gap has been a catalyst to many educational reform initiatives (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Robertson, 2008). The education debt is a persistent problem that is directly connected with racial injustices nationally, namely within the U.S. education system. According to Desai (2010), the implicit understanding of race in America continues to perpetuate a cycle of inequities. Though race is often a controversial topic, the following ideas continue to divide the perceptions of how race impacts today's educational system. Desai (2010) explains the following notions about race in America:

1. People of color should pull themselves up by their bootstraps, thus implying that they are unmotivated.

2. Discrimination is not the cause of racial inequality.

3. The government gives too much attention to race and gives too many opportunities to people of color and not to Whites.

4. People of color are to blame for the persistent gaps in socio-economic conditions and in education.

5. Race is no longer an issue.

6. Whites face reverse racism.

7. People of color tend to use the race card to their advantage.

These concepts are detrimental because they continue to impact the way staff engage with students, thus further perpetuating a system of racial inequality (Sleeter, 2017). For example, it is a common belief that the achievement gap exists because of an oppositional culture in which "Black students practice and identify with harmful social norms that inhibit academic achievement" (Lewis, 2012, p. 132), and as Lewis (2012) argues hypotheses like this continue to

justify the existence of the achievement gap. The current language of the achievement gap puts the ownership of the problem on students of color rather than on the education system that should be serving all students. For many years, national and state policies have explored solutions focused on increasing achievement for students of color. One-way school districts have begun to address these inequities is by creating race and equity policies that are directed at closing the gap. These race and equity policies have begun to address the importance of identifying the impact of race when addressing issues of equity in schools and further address the achievement gap. By using Ladson-Billings' (2006) work on redefining the achievement gap as the education debt, the research team is changing the narrative.

Ladson-Billings (2006) argues the prevalence of the achievement gap is rooted in historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral issues which then creates an overall education debt that must be addressed. The sharing of counter-stories challenges the traditional blaming of outside factors that inhibit students of color from attaining academic success as a rate proportional to their peers. Thus, reframing the problem to account for the systemic injustices prevalent within the District allows for meaningful discussions around race and the impact of systemic inequities that continue to impact the education system (Cross, 2003; Desai, 2010). Shifting to the education debt moves ownership of the disproportionality in student success from students of color onto the racist systems that inhibit many Black and Brown students from achieving at the same levels as their White peers.

Furthermore, this tenet frames the understanding of how the Equity and Accountability Policy and the Strategic Plan can utilize counter-storytelling in the District's pursuit of equity. The District continues to use PD as one of the ways to address the education debt, therefore it is essential to begin from a place that factors in the multiple aspects that continue to create

educational barriers for students of color, namely Black and Brown students. Accounting for historic, current, systemic, and interpersonal barriers through intentional word choice has the potential of creating a culture rooted in combating inequities. Reframing the language used in policies and in person to describe the disproportionality inherent in the District is a way to operate from a place of deeper understanding, which allows the problem to be reified, thus creating a foundation for this critical case study.

Student voice. For students to voice their concerns in a structured and legitimate way that includes the creation of meaningful experiences and a catalyst for change, educators must remove the barriers that disempower students (Islam, 2012; Mitra, 2004). The PreK-12 educational institution is heavily influenced by adult culture which often does not align to the services provided to support the youth culture (Costello et al., 2000). According to Mitra (2004), when teachers are allowed to learn from students there is an opportunity to (a) bridge teacher life and student life; (b) hold adults accountable; (c) students creating change.

The bridge. Student culture and adult culture are quite different, yet similar in some capacities. Both cultures enjoy and are motivated when their voices are heard and taken into account (Hopkins, 2008). Seeing as the goal of the District is to educate all students, it would then be in its benefit to increase student voice in order to re-engage alienated students. Student surveys conducted within the District have shown students of color are feeling disengaged and not welcome in the schoolhouse (personal communication, Director of Equity and Strategic Engagement, December 5, 2019). One issue that negatively impacts student success is a school's systematic conflict with adolescent needs (Costello et al., 2000). This makes it important to align the needs of both groups in order to find an appropriate solution. Wood (2003) urges the perspectives of students to be heard to understand effective teaching and learning. In essence,

rather than doing education to students, student voice allows the District to do education with them—a vital shift in thinking. Research is suggesting this shift allows for students to be active agents for change (Fielding & Bragg, 2003).

   Holding adults accountable. Typically, the District's PD includes an opportunity for an explicit focus on the creation of short- and long-term goals. These learning opportunities are essential, though often fall through the cracks once an educator leaves the dedicated focus area— as Boston Consulting Group found, many teachers view PD as remaining in compliance rather than a learning exercise. When, however, students are involved there is the inability to continue ignoring controversy and tolerating monolithic spaces (Mitre, 2004). More so, change rooted in what students say is highly influential and challenges current teaching and learning practices (Cook-Sather, 2006). Therefore, student voice becomes an essential component of the abstract and philosophical side of teaching. Including students in decision making helps hold educators accountable to meeting the needs of the students in their classrooms. Engaging in dialogue with students and allowing students the space to shape their own educational experience is an integral part of development and holds the potential for being a catalyst for change (Hopkins, 2008; Mitra, 2003). When attending PD with their teachers, students have the unique opportunity to provide critical and necessary feedback which supports the creation of meaningful school experiences (Hadfield & Haw, 2001; Mitre, 2003; Oldfather, 1995; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). These experiences begin to remove barriers that disempower students and give a stronger sense of ownership over their learning in their schools (Hopkins, 2008; Mitre, 2004). In addition, the student teacher relationship can evolve into a two-way mentoring relationship rooted in mutual respect where change includes (a) increase in student engagement; (b) improving teacher

efficacy; (c) improving student-teacher relationships; (d) meaningful teacher training (Fielding, 2001; Mitra, 2003; Oldfather, 1995; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000).

Students creating change. Rudduck and Flutter (2004) found students are motivated when they are treated as active and responsible members of the educational system. When given this respect, and taken seriously, students are reshaping their own educational experiences because of the inclusion of their voice (Brooman, Darwent, & Pimor, 2015; Hopkins, 2008). The District data encourages this necessary change, especially for students of color, as they may hold the key to identifying problems and offering solutions that can organically create successful school experiences (Mitra, 2004). Valuing a student's unique perspective increases student engagement in the classroom while also preparing young people with the tools to successfully transition into adulthood (Hopkins, 2008; Mitra & Serriere, 2012). Allowing students and adults to work together in their shared space while also engaging with each other in a meaningful way supports an understanding of their roles and creates opportunities to align their goals. Including student voice is a movement and has the potential to serve as a catalyst for educational change (Islam, 2012; Mitre, 2003).

Adolescents are keenly aware of the political nature of schooling and the injustices that exist within the system, schools, and classrooms (Storz, 2008). Listening to students and involving student voice has many benefits. There are, however, ramifications to involving student voice in the decision-making processes within an educational system. Time, resources, and trust may prevent opportunities to allow students the space to show their agency (Mitra, 2004). It takes time and practice for adolescents to assume leadership roles as they engage navigate adult responsibilities (Connel, Gambone, & Smith, 1998). This is time the District may not have to invest. Additionally, youth development opportunities, such as a student forum,

require planning as well as adults. Youth will have to develop potentially new skills and abilities to actively solve problems presented within their context (Goodwillie, 1993; Takanishi, 1993). The resources required for youth development may or may not be available to the District. Trust is an earned behavior; Mitre (2004) found trusting relationships between youth and adults to be a key component of student voice. The adult-student relationship heavily influences the developmental outcomes which requires time, resources, and trust.

Through the inclusion of student voice, adults can gain a deeper understanding of the educational system and root its work in the needs of the students being served. Changing the narrative to include student voice becomes imperative to effectively address the District's racial disproportionality in academic success. Valuing in, engaging with, and shifting based upon student voice frames how the District can utilize counter-storytelling.

Conclusion

The literature review frames the context for the remainder of this critical case study, while also providing the foundation upon which the case study will stand—CRT. Establishing CRT as the fulcrum of this case study provided the research team with a lens through which to look during the document analysis phase. CRT also ensured the focus remain on race. The literature review delineated the necessity of equity audits and the steps this case study will follow. The literature regarding professional development set the stage for the research team to answer the second research question after the conclusion of the document analysis. The exploration of research supported the document analysis and recommendations provided for the District.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The research team conducted a qualitative critical case study examining a school district's effort to address inequities in its current system. Specifically, the team analyzed the District's Equity and Accountability Policy, Critical Criteria, Strategic Plan, and *Courageous Conversations About Race*. Within this case study, the research team used the initial step from the equity audit protocol as mentioned in the literature review as this will provide feedback for the District to make changes that meet its goal to create more equitable practices system-wide (Green, 2017; Skrla et al., 2009).

This chapter focuses on the rationale of using document analysis as the method to analyze equity-related documents from the District. This method supported the research team in analyzing the current progress of the Department of Equity and Strategic Engagement (DESE) concerning the recommendations outlined in *Courageous Conversations About Race*. Moreover, the research team seeks to support the District by analyzing what research suggests are the best practices of developing and providing PD. The research team used the document analysis method (Bowen, 2009; Labuschagne, 2003) to develop a comprehensive description of the recommendations outlined in the District's documents and *Courageous Conversations About Race* PD. The document analysis was conducted using the constant comparative method and the code-to-line method.

Overview of Purpose and Research Questions

According to the national report card by the U.S. Department of Education, there is an education debt that is increasing and owed to Black and Brown students. The increase of this

unpaid debt has motivated school districts to find ways to settle the account, to pay Black and Brown students what has long been overdue: a meaningful education, unfettered by the barriers of systemic racism (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The purpose of this study is to provide a district in Washington State with a form of feedback regarding the recommendations outlined in its district documents and the alignment to its primary source of equity PD. The District has been using *Courageous Conversations About Race* as a significant source of equity PD and intervention to create a more equitable system for all students. The research team will provide recommendations on research-based best practices for effective PD. The information found will support the District by evaluating the current reality and thus providing valuable information that can be used to determine whether the PD should be used as-is or modified to align with research-supported best practices and *Courageous Conversations About Race*. In turn, the study could help the District work toward accomplishing the goals set forth by the Equity and Accountability Policy and Strategic Plan, which is focused on ensuring academic success for all students. Two questions are guiding the case study. The first question investigates the current reality of the District and the extent of its alignment to *Courageous Conversations About Race*. The second question explores the next steps for the implementation of PD within the District:

1. To what extent do the recommendations for an equitable education outlined in District documents align to what is described as an equitable education in *Courageous Conversations About Race*?

2. In what ways can research supported best practices for the development and presentation of professional development be used to support the fruition of an equitable education in this district?

Research Design

Case studies are used to explain contemporary circumstances and create an in-depth description of what is happening in a given context (Yin, 2018). Case studies need to use a variety of different sources of evidence and triangulate data to ensure the phenomenon is clearly described (Yin, 2018). The boundary of this case study is the District and the work it has accomplished toward creating an equitable education. The research conducted in this study is intended to explore the current practices of the District in the implementation of the Equity and Accountability Policy and the Strategic Plan as it aligns with equitable education described in *Courageous Conversations About Race*. The research team situated the case study in Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a critical study. Critical studies are focused on systems of inequity based on race (McMillan, 2016). Critical case studies are essential as they require a reflective process leading to a more holistic approach to the study (Janesick, 2004).

The design of qualitative research studies are naturally emergent, meaning "the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed, and some or all phases of the process may change or shift after the researcher enters the field and begins to collect data" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 181). The researchers took a holistic approach to understand and uncover what is happening in this case study. Specifically, the research team examined multiple documents and engaged in inductive and deductive analysis of the District's alignment to recommendations outlined in its primary source of equity PD.

The research team used the initial step from the equity audit to guide the design of this study. Equity audits are used to achieve programmatic equity and are a tool to examine and provide feedback to the organization or system engaging in the audit. For this study, the use of a document analysis on the Equity and Accountability Policy, Strategic Plan, Critical Criteria, and

Courageous Conversations About Race will provide feedback to the District on its progress toward achieving systematic equity. As "document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material" (Bowen, 2009, p. 27), this research design will yield excerpts, quotations, or entire passages from the PD that can then be organized into themes and categories (Bowen, 2009; Labuschagne, 2003).

Research Methods

Document analysis is a methodology that can be used in isolation when conducting qualitative research (Bowen, 2009). Therefore, the document analysis for this equity audit has the potential to provide sufficient, meaningful, and relevant data for the District to use when determining the course of its future equity initiatives and equity-focused PD. Document analysis helped the research team "uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem" (Merriam, 1988, p. 118 as cited by Bowen, 2009, p. 29). In this case study, document analysis yielded specific data the research team used to compare and evaluate alignment and suggest the next steps for the District equity-focused PD.

Setting

The city has a population of over 145,000 in a 31 square mile radius; the city is in an urban setting. Since the 1990s, there has been a slow increase in the number of residents are from a different country, and it is now 50% White, 34% Asian, 7% Latinx, 3% Black, 4% Multiracial, and 2% other. While other groups could be listed, these are the only ones provided by city officials. According to current demographic data, 42% of the population speaks a language other than English at home, and 50% of the population are people of color.

Many corporate headquarters and major corporate offices are housed in this high-tech and retail epicenter. These headquarters bring in many job opportunities for the city and require college-educated minds—68% of the city's population has attained a bachelor's degree or higher, and 57% of the city is living above Washington state's median income, 40% of whom make over $100,000.

According to the city website, residents are some of the most highly educated in the state. There is a strong emphasis on education, and the city has a reputation for good schools—this is a major draw for families. The District includes 29 elementary, middle, and high schools. The superintendent has been serving the District for two years, along with the elected community members from each of the five geographical areas.

There are 13 departments within the District. The research team is partnering with one of these departments, the Department of Equity and Strategic Engagement (DESE). The DESE website states that it has one branch of support to the District, which includes the facilitation of PD that works toward the elimination of racial disparities and the systematization of equity and excellence.

Data Collection Protocols and Procedures

The research team collected data from the District's public documents and *Courageous Conversations About Race* text. The District's Strategic Plan and Equity and Accountability Policy are public documents that can be found on the district website. The team worked with the District's Director of the DESE to obtain the Critical Criteria. All three researchers purchased a copy of *Courageous Conversations About Race.*

Sample

The research team accessed the District's public documents that outline the recommendations for equitable education. The team analyzed a primary source from a third-party affiliated company that provides a majority of equity training to the District.

The following documents were used to conduct a document analysis. These documents were selected as a representation of the work the District has done to create equitable education for students.

Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan is a document that guides the work of the District. It encompasses the District's mission and vision and helps it to prioritize its actions. Strategic plans are used to develop, drive, and support an organization as it seeks opportunities for improvement (Chukwumah, 2015). Developed by multiple stakeholders, the District's Strategic Plan is a valuable representation of the work the District is doing and can also represent the values of this organization (see Appendix B).

Equity and Accountability Policy. The DESE was a critical stakeholder in the development of the Equity and Accountability Policy. The District recently adopted the policy to ensure the success of all students, and the DESE remains accountable for its implementation. The District's website provides information about the intense process of using stakeholder's voice. The collaborative process between community and staff was essential, leading to the District adoption of the policy on June 11, 2019. This policy reflects the effort of the District to implement system changes to ensure equity for all students.

Critical Criteria. The Critical Criteria is a document developed and recommended to the board by the Equity Advisory Group. The group was comprised of multiple stakeholders and facilitated by the DESE. The District implemented the Critical Criteria as a system of

accountability for equitable practices. The criteria are used during consideration in all the

District's system-wide work. This system-wide work includes the development of policies,

programs, procedures, and budgets. The criteria reflect the essential questions the District

engages in when making decisions that impact stakeholders throughout the organization (see

Appendix C).

Courageous Conversations About Race. *Courageous Conversations About Race* is an

equity-centered professional development protocol created by Glenn Singleton and the Pacific

Educational Group (PEG). This is a significant source of equity PD used by the District. The

document the research team analyzed was the text, *Courageous Conversations About Race: A

Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools*. This text is a comprehensive overview of the

concepts used in these PD trainings. Moreover, Singleton (2015) explains that he wrote this book

to support "leaders to develop and operate from a transformed racial philosophy that guides their

policy analysis, institutional restructuring, and programmatic reform" (p. 6).

Data Analysis and Procedures

The research team used document analysis to analyze public equity-related documents

from the District and from *Courageous Conversations About Race*. Bowen (2009) offers many

advantages to conducting document analysis. To begin with, it is efficient and effective.

Documents are reliable, accessible, and cost-efficient. Also, documents are stable—the research

team accessed them over time, multiple times, and the data remained unchanged. This stability

allowed the research team ample opportunity to individually code and theme the documents

before coming together to discuss findings. The focus of this data analysis is to understand the

alignment of the recommendations for equitable education in the District documents to

Courageous Conversations About Race.

The research team used document analysis to evaluate PD as described in *Courageous Conversations About Race*. Document analysis is an iterative process, combining both content analysis and thematic analysis (Bowen, 2009). To improve the efficacy of this case study, the research team examined the documents while maintaining objectivity and sensitivity to ensure an accurate evaluation of the original purpose of the document. O'Leary (2014) advises researchers to investigate the latent content of the document while also maintaining an understanding of personal biases and how the biases impact the interpretation of the document. Analyzing content in this way can highlight meaningful and relevant passages (Bowen, 2009).

The research team used the constant comparative method to analyze the documents. This method supports inductive coding and is iterative (Ivankova, 2015). The research team then came together, shared their codes, and recoded the documents based on agreements and disagreements. If the team agreed upon a code, they would recode the document with a joint code. For codes that were not shared, the researchers came together to determine if this code accurately represented the text. This process ensured that a holistic approach was taken and that each researcher regularly checked for bias. A similar approach was used in research conducted by Taylor (2016) to ensure that multiple coders can come together and create a shared meaning of observations. To further analyze the data and improve the consistency of the codes and themes that emerged, the research team used the qualitative analysis program ATLAS.ti. This program aided the research team by helping to organize, code, annotate and analyze the documents. This software also helped the team "facilitate the data categorization process and organize the evolving categories in a (casual) network" (Ivankova, 2015, p. 243).

For each document, the research team identified single, undivided units to analyze (Chenail, 2012). These units emerged from a line-by-line analysis of the text. However, each line

did not constitute a single, undivided unit, as this is problematic and can lead to misidentifying essential qualitative elements (Chenail, 2012). The research team used the code-to-line method to identify single, undivided units from the text to analyze. This method allows for the use of single lines of texts or multiple lines of texts to identify a single, undivided unit, thus allowing for meaningful qualitative data to be analyzed (Chenail, 2012). Additionally, an audit trail was used to detail how each member of the research team went about selecting the units to be analyzed. The research team also recorded all conversations regarding codes and themes as a part of the audit trail. The audit trail maintained transparency amongst research team members.

Ethical Considerations

The consultation and awareness of issues that may be present at the various stages of the research process supported the research team in addressing potential issues. The research team respected the norms of the DESE and the District. This respect flowed into the data collection process, and the research team focused on presenting as little disruption as possible. In the analysis and reporting of the data, the research team ensured the reporting of positive and negative results in a clear, straightforward, and appropriate way.

The research team dedicated time to anticipate potential ethical issues prevalent in the research process. Addressing the potential issues present supported the various phases of the research process, thus supporting the team in their research.

Context of the Researchers

All three researchers on the team, work in K-12 public education. One researcher works in an elementary school and has been teaching for five years. One researcher taught in an elementary school for five years; she currently serves as an administrative intern and the title

interventionist for her school. One researcher teaches in a high school and has taught for seven years.

As public educators, each researcher has experienced many years of PD, ranging from subjects that were content specific to the implementation of district initiatives. Each researcher has shared stories of PD, which she or he believed to be effective or ineffective. To check for bias, the researchers actively removed their personal experiences with PD and replaced them with the research found in their review of the literature focused on PD.

In their roles as researchers, each person is committed to producing new knowledge and conducting research which challenges and dismantles current inequitable, educational policies, and practices. The research team is also aware of the dangers of conducting research studies, which further perpetuate a cycle of oppression within public education (Harro, 2016; Patel, 2016). By stating this, the research team recognizes that this concept will be woven as the sine qua non thread throughout the texture of this study.

Researcher one positionality. As a black child growing up in America's educational system and now a woman working in it, researcher one has a deep understanding of the constant injustices, biases, and outright racist systems and behaviors working against all students, namely students of color and indigenous students. Throughout her time as an educator and in training to become a principal, researcher one has gained a deeper understanding of the roles and responsibilities around the development of PD and the need to better align the scope of the work to the needs of both students and adults. In acknowledging her biases toward the experiences of Black and Brown students in America's racist educational system, she hopes to serve the District in its goals to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students and continue working toward institutionalizing equity in education.

Researcher two positionality. As a second-generation Korean American woman, researcher two has benefited from the current education system. As an educator, she has learned of the injustices, implicit bias, and racism that continue to negatively impact students of color, especially Black and Brown students. Researcher two also understands the positive impact an educator can have on the lives of students and understands that if PD is done appropriately, it can build capacity for educators to work with the diverse needs of all students. In acknowledging her biases, researcher two hopes to help transform the current education system into a more equitable resource for all students.

Researcher three positionality. As an American, White, heterosexual, cisgender, male who was raised in an upper-middle-class family, researcher three has never faced the barriers which are in place due to the current inequitable educational system. Instead, due to the privilege of his demographic make-up, he has been the beneficiary of numerous opportunities that were advantageous yet unearned. Researcher three has recognized his position within an agent group and commits to partnering with those who continue to face discrimination based upon their demographic make-up and have limited access to educational opportunities.

Summary

This chapter delineated how the research team conducted a single critical case study using a qualitative design framed in an equity audit. This approach allowed the research team to explore the District's equity-focused documents and *Courageous Conversations About Race*. By collecting and analyzing this data, the research team was able to conduct an equity audit on the current recommendations of the District and analyze the extent of its alignment to *Courageous Conversations About Race*—the primary source of equity PD. The triangulation of this data with research-based best practices provided the research team with the necessary information to

determine recommendations for the District in achieving more equitable education for all students. In being transparent with the data and collaborating with stakeholders, the District has an opportunity to complete the equity audit in implementing recommended solutions.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

The following is the presentation of the findings of this critical case study. The purpose of this study is to provide preliminary data which will support the District when it is prepared to conduct a complete equity audit. The information gained from the document analysis informed the recommendations for an equitable education and support the District as it determines next steps to achieve systemic equity through professional development (PD). The following research questions were used to guide the research study:

1. To what extent do the recommendations for an equitable education outlined in District documents align to what is described as an equitable education in *Courageous Conversations About Race*?

2. In what ways can research supported best practices for the development and presentation of professional development be used to support the fruition of an equitable education in this district?

Summary of Research Design

In partnership with a school district in Western Washington, the research team conducted a qualitative critical case study to analyze the progress of a District's effort to achieve systemic equity. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the framework for this case study as the Director of the Department of Equity and Strategic Engagement stresses the importance of focusing on race and racism as the District seeks to institutionalize equity. Early discussions with the Director revealed the use of PD as an intervention to creating a more equitable system, therefore the research team conducted a literature review on best practices for professional development. This literature was

used to examine the current reality of the District, as reflected in public equity-related documents and *Courageous Conversations About Race*.

Data Collection Process

The research team collected the relevant documents to conduct this research study. The District's Strategic Plan and Equity and Accountability Policy are both public documents that can be found on the District website. These documents were selected as they directly guide the equity work of the District and are a public representation of the values, mission, and vision of the organization.

During the initial review of the Equity and Accountability Policy, the research team found a reference to a document titled "Critical Criteria." This criterion is referenced multiple times as a tool used to make system-wide decisions within the District. Therefore, the researchers thought it would be significant to analyze as a document for this case study. The research team was able to obtain this document from the Director of the DESE, who further explained that the criteria were developed as an accountability system to use when making district decisions.

The final data source was *Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools* developed by Glenn Singleton and the Pacific Educational Group (PEG). A significant source of professional development the District utilizes for equity PD is called "Beyond Diversity" provided by the PEG. This text is a comprehensive overview of the concepts and ideas shared in these trainings. Each researcher purchased a copy of this text to code and analyze.

Data Analysis

This research study focused solely on the use of document analysis. Therefore, the data collection instruments were the researchers themselves as they used document analysis to go

through the data set. The researchers converged, corroborated, and analyzed it to discover findings from relevant documents (Bowen, 2009). Triangulation is a major component of document analysis. McMillan (2016) explains, "triangulation is a technique that seeks convergence of findings, cross validation, among different sources and methods of data collection" (p. 357). This triangulation can be done amongst different people and across different sources. In this research study, both forms of triangulation were used to support the findings. First, the data set was triangulated amongst the three researchers as each coded the data set separately and checked to ensure the results were consistent. Secondly, the researchers engaged in a comprehensive literature review of Critical Race Theory and best practices for effective professional development to strengthen credibility through triangulation. The research team referenced this literature throughout the study to guide the analysis process and further ground the discussions about implications and recommendations of this research.

The research team began with an analysis of the Equity and Accountability Policy. The researchers individually engaged in an initial overview of the document, where they gained an understanding of the overall purpose and identified big ideas. During the second read, each researcher individually used the code-to-line method to determine critical units of information that related to the research question.

After the researchers completed the coding individually, the research team came together and determined which codes shared similar characteristics. Since the coders may not have coded a line the same way, the research team worked together to determine which codes the team agreed upon and which were irrelevant to answering the research question. This process provided an opportunity to create meaning and take in multiple perspectives while also checking for

biased observations. The research team kept an audit trail of all conversations on codes and themes.

The steps completed for the Equity and Accountability Policy were repeated for the Strategic Plan and Critical Criteria. In using the constant comparative method (Ivankova, 2015), the research team continued to compare data from all sources throughout the study as new codes emerged and were categorized. The research team merged these documents to analyze all the documents from the District as one entity. These codes were then merged into one project using Atlas.ti. The research team agreed upon 113 codes. The research team also went back into each code to determine if any lines that were miscoded. The team then analyzed these codes to identify themes that emerged. The team utilized a sorting process to identify themes in relation to the research question. There was a total of nine themes that emerged.

In order to increase the credibility of these findings, the research team engaged in the process of member-checking (McMillan, 2016). The research team shared these themes with the Director of the DESE as he played a significant role in the development of the three documents. The research team checked with the Director of Equity and Strategic Engagement to ensure the themes that arose were "fair, reasonable and complete" (McMillan, 2016, p. 357). The Director of Equity and Strategic Engagement agreed with the themes presented and noted the themes are an accurate reflection of how the District is working toward creating an equitable educational experience for students (personal communication, Director of Equity and Strategic Engagement, May 4, 2020).

The research team analyzed the *Courageous Conversations About Race* text. This document has a total of 288 pages; therefore, the team adjusted their approach to ensure that all codes were represented. Beginning with a similar process used to analyze the District documents,

the research team initially read the entire text to obtain an overall understanding of the content. Each researcher coded the text individually. These codes were merged into one project using Atlas.ti resulting in 672 codes. The research team rejected 23 codes as not pertaining to the research study resulting in a total of 649 codes. The team worked together to analyze the codes and sorted them into themes. Through discussion and comparison of the codes a total of 13 themes emerged. The following section will describe these findings further.

Findings

District Documents

The research team conducted a document analysis of three public documents that are a reflection of the work the District is doing in regards to creating an equitable education for all students. The research team generated 113 codes from these documents as they directly addressed the two research questions of this study. From these codes, the research team identified the following nine themes (a) professional development; (b) explicitly targeting racism; (c) collaboration with the community; (d) within district collaboration; (e) progress monitoring; (f) organizational development; (g) reporting and action; (h) directly impacting students; (i) student-centered.

Professional development. Coding showed that professional development is an element to creating equitable schools in the District. The data showed this to be the least coded theme. This theme was evident in 10.6% of all codes identified. Examples include (a) support staff well-being; (b) professional development for culturally responsive teaching; (c) systems and structures for professional development. In discussing professional development codes, the team identified professional development geared toward continuous support, learning, and reflection. Examples include (a) supporting staff; (b) continuous learning through reflection; (c) staff

collaboration for accountability for professional development. In eight of the 12 codes, the researchers identified the specific use of "professional development" confirming why this theme is an essential component of how the District is working to create an equitable education.

Explicitly target racism. Coding showed explicitly targeting racism is an element to creating equitable schools in District documents. The data showed explicitly targeting racism to be one of the least frequently coded themes. This theme was evident in 11.5% of all codes identified. Examples include explicit language regarding naming (a) bias; (b) race; (c) racism; (d) racial tension; (e) racial equity. In discussing explicitly target racism codes, the team identified the use of explicit language as relevant to their work. The District defines equitable education as explicitly targeting racism in policies, professional development, and interpersonally as seen in the following codes (a) targeting racism in policies; (b) provide professional development about strategies to address biases; (c) understand the impact of racism on educational experience. The researchers identified the explicit use of language around race, confirming why this theme is an essential component of how the District is working to create an equitable education.

Collaboration with community. Collaboration involving the District community presented itself as an essential component of an equitable educational experience. The theme of collaboration with the community emerged in 14.1% of all codes identified within District documents. Examples of common codes include (a) collaboration of whole community for student success; (b) value in stakeholder's voice; (c) transparency with information. In the analysis of the documents from the District, there is a common thread of valuing humanity, cultural diversity, families, and the community. The District is using language focused on including families in many aspects of their work as another salient code included "removing barriers to opportunities for families."

Within district collaboration. Coding showed within district collaboration as an element to creating equitable schools for the District. This theme was evident in 20.3% of all codes identified. Examples of common codes include (a) value in stakeholder's voice; (b) institutionalizing equity through professional development; (c) staff collaboration to create change. In discussing within district collaboration codes, the team identified collaboration as an essential value for the District as it is working toward creating equitable educational experiences. The documents use language such as (a) value rigorous education; (b) value cultural diversity; (c) value humanity. In 11 of the 23 codes, the researchers identified the explicit use of language focused on valuing the people and relationships in many aspects of their work as another salient code includes valuing staff diversity and positive relationships.

Progress monitoring. Coding showed progress monitoring as an element to creating equitable schools for the District. This theme was evident in 23.4% of all codes identified. Examples of common codes include (a) collect relevant data to inform decisions; (b) institutionalizing equity through organizational alignment; (c) institutionalizing of equity through prioritization of equity. In discussing progress monitoring codes, the research team identified deeper reflection and understanding as an essential value to working toward creating equitable educational experiences. The documents and codes share the following language (a) continuous learning through reflection; (b) collect data to understand context; (c) mindfulness. In seven of the 27 codes, the researchers identified accountability in many aspects of the District's work as another salient code included accountability measures through various avenues.

Organizational development. Coding showed organizational development as an element to creating equitable schools for the District. This theme was evident in 27.4% of all codes identified. Examples of common codes geared toward organizational development include (a)

institutionalizing equity; (b) institutionalizing equity in hiring; (c) institutionalizing equity within the community. In discussing organizational development codes, the research team identified accountability measures, including progress monitoring, organizational alignment, and reporting as essential components while working toward creating equitable educational experiences. In 18 of the 31 codes, the researchers noted language from the documents, including institutionalizing equity, accountability and removing barriers in many aspects of their work as another salient code included institutionalizing equity through accountability and removing barriers for students, adults, and families.

Reporting and action. Coding showed reporting and action as an element to creating equitable schools for the District. This theme was evident in 33.6% of all codes identified. Examples of common codes include (a) using relevant data to inform decisions; (b) using reporting as a tool for instilling accountability; (c) removing barriers to resources for students. In discussing reporting and action codes, the team identified action resulting from an analysis of data during progress monitoring as an essential value to working toward creating equitable educational experiences. The documents used language that involves exploration such as "make adjustments based on progress monitoring" and "address inequities through intervention methods" it was clear that action and change are components of the work the District has outlined. In 30 of the 38 codes, the researchers identified codes that illumine the actions the District has committed to in writing as it seeks to create an equitable educational experience.

Direct impact on students. Coding showed direct impact on students as an element to creating equitable schools for the District. This theme was evident in 21% of all codes identified. Examples of common codes include (a) value student diversity; (b) focus on student well-being; (c) focus on academic success. In discussing direct impact on students' codes, the team worked

to include codes only if students were directly impacted—over half of the codes that emerged directly impacted students. The 57 codes aligned to create this theme, these codes quickly presented common language around student safety, students' academics, and student success. Additionally, the District worked to incorporate the diverse needs of students as 12 of the 57 codes included language around diversity and barriers. Language such as (a) value student diversity; (b) addressing biases for students; (c) removing barriers to all district programs for students; (d) address student diverse needs.

      Student-centered. Coding showed student-centered as the primary element to creating equitable schools for the District. The data showed this to be the most coded them. This theme was evident in 94% of all codes identified; seven codes did not align to work with an indirect or direct focus on students. Examples of common codes that indirectly impacted students include (a) meeting the needs of students; (b) addressing inequities for students; (c) collaboration for student success. In discussing student-centered codes, the team identified students as an essential value to working toward creating equitable educational experiences. Most codes use language that directly impact students. Examples include for student success, for all students, or student experiences. The researchers identified the specific use of language focused on centering students in many aspects of their work as another salient code included placing students at the center of equitable education. This code is different than the code directly impacts students because it includes elements that may or may not have a direct interaction with students yet are done for the benefit of students.

Courageous Conversations

      The following themes emerged as the result of the research team's document analysis of *Courageous Conversations About Race*. The research team generated 649 codes from this text

that directly addressed the two research questions of this case study. From these codes, the research team identified the following 13 themes; they are (a) cultural competency; (b) safety; (c) progress monitoring and data collection; (d) collaboration; (e) multiple voices and perspectives; (f) student-centered; (g) leadership; (h) conversations; (i) norms for discussion; (j) White supremacy and Whiteness; (k) educator practice; (l) race and racism; (m) equity, anti-racism, and system change.

Cultural competency. The data showed this to be the least coded theme, nonetheless a necessary component of achieving an equitable educational environment as described by *Courageous Conversations About Race*. This theme was evident in 1.8% of all codes identified. Such examples are (a) becoming culturally proficient; (b) culturally proficient educators; (c) increased racial consciousness. In the discussion of these 12 codes, it was clear to the research team that while cultural competency is an aspect of achieving equity, it is not as prominent as some of the other themes that will be explained later in the section. The code "recognize culture" pointed out the necessity of educators being able to understand the intersection of race and additional aspects of human diversity in students. In contrast, other codes such as "innovative ways of learning rather than imposing rule-following" were more direct in their application within a classroom. The code "cultural competency" (while sharing the title of the theme) also identified multiple passages within *Courageous Conversations About Race* that identified specific actions and mindsets educators should take to achieve equity; some of these included (a) valuing and affirming students' cultures; (b) not blaming external factors for causing the achievement gap.

Safety. Coding showed safety as a necessary component of achieving equity within schools. This theme was evident in 4.0% of all codes identified. Such examples are (a) fostering

a safe environment for PD; (b) safe and healthy school environment; (c) promote safety; (d) equitable education defined as intellectual safety; (e) access to emotional security; (f) student access to education with caring adults. In the discussion of the 26 codes which informed this theme, the research team identified safety as permeating throughout the school, positively affecting students and educators. These ideas are seen in the codes (a) unencumbered access to emotional security; (b) improved sense of student well-being; (c) equitable education defined as physical safety. The latter of these being a result of students feeling intellectually, emotionally, and physically safe, rather than as a result of locks, metal detectors, and security guards (Singleton, 2015).

      Progress monitoring and data collection. Coding showed progress monitoring and data collection as a necessary component of creating an equitable educational environment as described in *Courageous Conversations About Race*. This theme emerged in 5.0% of all codes identified. Such examples include (a) analyze progress of serving students of color; (b) identify racial problems; (c) impact monitoring; (d) monitor for continuous improvement; (e) using disaggregated data and action research to inform decision; (f) institutionalized equity through teacher reflection of practice. In the discussion of these 33 codes, the research team identified that progress monitoring and data collection needs to occur for individual educators and school leaders. Mindful inquiry and reflective practices are essential actions evidenced in codes. Additionally, the codes for this theme also highlight the necessity for this to occur at the school and district levels, as seen in the codes interpret achievement disparities among racial pairings and examine the teaching gap.

      Collaboration. Coding showed that collaboration between leaders, educators, family, and community members is a necessary component of creating an equitable educational environment

as described in *Courageous Conversations About Race*. This theme was evident in 9.0% of all codes identified. Such examples are (a) adult collaborations on racial equity; (b) developing strong relationships; (c) everyone engages; (d) normalizing multiple perspectives; (e) value community voice; (f) reaching out to partner with the community; (g) full participation by everyone to achieve success. In the discussion of the 59 codes for this theme, it was clear to the research team the ideas and actions called for by *Courageous Conversations About Race* require participation between each of the groups mentioned above. Codes such as "interracial dialogue between students, community, and staff" point to the necessity of collaborating through discussion. The code "working together sustained by shared commitment to meet the needs of all students" shows the motivation behind (and possible outcome) of collaboration. Yet another code alludes to the positive impact of collaborative practices within the District and community as it may result in a "healing [of] the community."

Multiple voices and perspectives. Coding showed including multiple voices and perspectives is a necessary element to creating equitable schools as described in *Courageous Conversations About Race*. This theme emerged in 9.3% of all codes identified. Examples of this are (a) acknowledge missing voices; (b) engaging in conversations with multiple racial points of view; (c) the curriculum is respectful and reflective of diverse experiences; (d) identify code-switching; (e) all voices are heard; (f) White people believing people of color regarding truths about race. In discussing the 61 codes of this theme, the research team identified the multitude of environments where this inclusion of multiple voices must occur. These include (a) within the community; (b) within the classroom; (c) between staff; (d) within the curriculum. This is seen in codes such as (a) value community voice; (b) interracial dialogue (students); (c) teacher voice matters to administration; (d) student representation in curriculum. The different environments

where this theme needs to be incorporated points to the level of intentionality with which leaders and educators must act.

Student-centered. Coding showed the theme of student-centered being an element to creating an equitable school as described in *Courageous Conversations About Race*. The theme of student-centered emerged in 11.7% of all codes identified. Examples of this are (a) differentiating needs for individual students; (b) equitable access promotes student success; (c) prioritize students of greatest need; (d) understanding complexity of student diversity; (e) stereotype threat; (f) positive relationships between students and teachers. The discussion of these 76 codes provided insight into the multiple components of what being student-centered entails. Codes such as "see students of color" and "white culture impacts students of color" points to actions educators and leaders need to take to counteract White privilege that blinds some educators from seeing how different life is for students of color. Codes such as "unencumbered access to academic success" and "teachers and administrators who appreciate students as individuals" have a relationship that helps the individual talents of students emerge.

Leadership. Coding showed leadership as a theme necessary to develop equitable schools as described in *Courageous Conversations About Race*. This theme was evident in 14.7% of all coded identified. Examples of these codes are (a) racial equity leaders challenging the status quo; (b) recreate education; (c) research-based best practices for serving Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC); (d) principal must fully commit to equity work; (e) guarantee equitable access; (f) developing leadership passion for equity. The last code is foundational. The discussion of these 96 codes led the research team to conclude that leadership is a sine qua non of establishing an equitable school. While the percentage of codes with which the theme emerged was less than other themes, the absolute necessity of the influence of

leadership cannot be overlooked. The importance of leadership can be seen in codes such as "institutionalizing equity requires leadership," "school change due to effective leadership," and "focus on leadership."

Conversations. Coding showed that having conversations centered on race is the beginning point of creating an equitable learning environment as described in *Courageous Conversations About Race*. This theme was evident in 15.1% of the codes identified. Such examples are (a) engage in courageous conversations about race; (b) engaging in conversations with multiple racial viewpoints; (c) importance of having conversations about race; (d) necessity of talking to create change; (e) supporting staff to have conversations about race; (f) use explicit language. Codes such as "transform school culture through language" and "importance of language for systemic change" draws attention to the power of conversations to create change. Codes such as "dialogue about Whiteness" and "share feelings" provide a subject about which to discuss, while also encouraging the conversation to move beyond the intellectual response to conversations about race.

Norms for discussion. Coding revealed the theme of norms for discussion as an integral part of creating an equitable educational environment as described in *Courageous Conversations About Race*. This theme is evident in 16.4% of all codes. Some of these codes are (a) accept non-closure; (b) clear norms in PD; (c) manage emotions; (d) normalize social construction of knowledge; (e) practice anti-racism; (f) institutionalize equity through persistence. The discussion of these 107 codes led the research team to conclude that adhering to these norms is a mandate rather than a suggestion. Codes such as "maintain explicit focus on race" and "practice anti-racism" anchor this theme, while also guiding leaders and educators. Furthermore, codes

such as "institutionalize equity through passion" and "institutionalize equity through practice" encapsulate emotion as motivation and the repetitive nature of equity work.

White supremacy and Whiteness. Coding showed White supremacy and Whiteness as a theme as described in *Courageous Conversations About Race*. This theme is evident in 20.6% of all codes. Example codes are (a) develop critical perspective about Whiteness; (b) challenging the status quo; (c) active participation of White people; (d) dialogue about Whiteness; (e) necessity of confronting Whiteness; (f) understanding White culture. The discussion of the 134 that comprised this theme illuminated the pervasiveness of Whiteness and its damaging effects. The codes "make White culture visible," "impact of Whiteness," and "dismantling White privilege" point toward White supremacy and Whiteness as an insidious element of many current educational environments. The codes "lack of trust in people of color by White people," "understand historical racism," and "White fear" only further substantiate the corrosive power of unexamined White supremacy and Whiteness. However, within this theme, some codes elaborate on how schools can examine White supremacy and Whiteness to move toward developing equity. These codes include (a) White people encourage change; (b) White educators must take greater responsibility in understanding Whiteness; (c) White educators must allow change to happen; (d) training on how to challenge the White racial status quo; (e) addressing Whiteness.

Educator practice. Coding showed educator practice as a theme as described in *Courageous Conversations About Race*. This theme was evident in 30.9% of all codes. Examples are (a) PD focus on self-reflection of race and racism; (b) personal beliefs; (c) racial empathy to develop teacher effectiveness; (d) school change due to classroom implementation; (e) focus on student needs; (f) examine practices. In the discussion of the 201 codes that comprised this theme, the research team uncovered the various ways this presents itself in the development of an

equitable educational environment. Codes such as "individualized instruction" and "implement effective practices" show how this theme emerges in the classroom and directly impacts students. The codes "explore deep-seated attitudes" and "educators committed to equity regardless of institutional influences" attest to the individual work educators must engage in beyond the classroom to bring about the desired goal of institutionalizing equity.

Race and racism. Coding uncovered race and racism as a theme as described in *Courageous Conversations About Race*. This theme was evident is 36.2% of all codes. Examples are (a) isolate race; (b) personalize racial experiences; (c) racial empathy to develop teacher effectiveness; (d) transforming racial philosophy to impact organization; (e) understand historical racism; (f) unpack race. During the discussion of the 235 codes for this theme, the research team concluded that race/racism connects to the personal, professional, and institutional levels of education. Some of the codes regarding the personal aspects of this theme (as related to students) include (a) prioritize students of color; (b) see students of color; (c) teach internalized racism. Some of the codes regarding the personal aspects of this theme (as related to leaders and educators) include (a) personalize race; (b) personalize racial reality; (c) believe racism exists. Some of the codes regarding the professional aspects of this theme (as related to educator and leaders) include (a) teaching faith in the unwavering belief that families of color want what is best for their children; (b) taking professional responsibility when it comes to meeting the needs of students of color; (c) teacher self-reflection on race. Some of the codes regarding the institutional aspects of this theme include (a) training on how to challenge the White racial status quo; (b) addressing racial inequality; (c) racial equity leadership development.

Equity, anti-racism, and system change. Coding identified equity, anti-racism, and system change as the most identifiable theme as described in *Courageous Conversations About*

Race. This theme was evident in 46.2% of all codes. Some of these include (a) create systems that guarantee all elements of educational investment to all students; (b) equity as a moral imperative; (c) fostering a safe environment for PD; (d) institutionalizing equity through addressing race and racism; (e) practice anti-racism; (f) specific characteristics of racial equity. Through the discussion of the 300 codes that informed this theme, the research team concluded that equity, anti-racism, and system change takes different forms and is implemented through different roles. There is a relational quality between some of the codes of this theme. For example, the codes "success through a supportive system" and "speaking up against racism" are directly connected as the former creates the type of environment where the latter can occur. Additionally, codes such as "starts with leadership" and "racial equity is a value, not a program" show the two necessary components for successfully creating an equitable environment. Codes such as "resource allocation using an equity lens" attests to the necessity of using equity to inform all decisions.

Summary

This chapter analyzed the results from the document analysis to determine alignment between how the District and *Courageous Conversations About Race* defined equitable education. The results indicate nine themes that are present in the District's Equity and Accountability Policy, Critical Criteria, and Strategic Plan. The themes allude to the District's unwavering focus of students at the center of their work. 13 themes were identified in *Courageous Conversations About Race* with a high emphasis on using explicit language when engaging with matters around race as a pathway to ensuring students have an equitable education. The next sections detail the findings and offer a discussion of this qualitative critical case study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The following chapter is a discussion of the findings of this qualitative critical case study. The chapter includes an overview of the study, discussion of the findings, implications for the District, implications for future research, and strengths and limitations of this study.

Overview of the Study

Educators in the U.S. are working on closing the achievement gap—a persistent problem in the education system today. The pervasiveness of this gap has created an education debt that is owed to marginalized communities, especially students of color (Ladson-Billings, 2006). As this debt is especially evident across racial lines, there has been a call for school districts to create systematic equity in education. Organizations have developed equity departments and initiatives to try to combat and alleviate disproportionality.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a framework used to identify the impact of race and racism in our society (Delgado et al., 2012). This framework is used to critically examine the historical impact of racism on equitable access to education for students of color namely Black and Brown students. Moreover, CRT is used to analyze all components of this study to isolate race.

The research team has partnered with a school district in Western Washington to conduct the initial steps of an equity audit to examine how the District is currently working toward achieving systematic equity, specifically concerning professional development (PD). Leaders of effective organizations engage in reflection and progress monitoring in a constant effort toward improvement (Day et al., 2016). Specifically, this District has voluntarily engaged in an equity audit to determine if it is on the right path to achieving systemic equity. This is a qualitative

critical case study because the research team uses CRT as the framework and is partnering with one school district.

The District has used professional development as a source of intervention to provide employees with the tools to engage in practices which lead to a more equitable education for all students. Specifically, the District has used *Courageous Conversations About Race* from the Pacific Educational Group (PEG) as a major source of PD for staff. Therefore, a major component of this study is an examination of alignment between the recommendations presented by the District equity related documents and content from *Courageous Conversations About Race*.

The following research questions have guided this qualitative research case study:

1.   To what extent do the recommendations for an equitable education outlined in District documents align to what is described as an equitable education in *Courageous Conversations About Race*?

2.   In what ways can research supported best practices for the development and presentation of professional development be used to support the fruition of an equitable education in this district?

The research team used a combination of different document analysis procedures to analyze equity-related documents from the District as well as the *Courageous Conversations About Race* text. The coding and theming of these documents resulted in a total of 22 themed findings. The findings were analyzed and discussed to understand the extent of alignment and further support the implications and recommendations for the District.

Discussion of the Findings

This study is a precursor to a deeper dive into how the District is working to institutionalize equity through PD. The research team explored alignment between how the District and *Courageous Conversations About Race* defines equitable education. The research team first conducted a document analysis of three public documents from the District as a guide to understanding the meaning of equitable education for the District. Nine prominent themes emerged from these documents: (a) PD; (b) explicitly target racism; (c) collaboration with community; (d) collaboration within the District; (e) progress monitoring; (f) organizational development; (g) reporting and action; (h) directly impacting students; (i) student-centered. The team then conducted a document analysis of *Courageous Conversations About Race.* The research team identified 13 themes as they relate to the meaning of equitable education and the research question: (a) cultural competency; (b) safety; (c) progress monitoring and data collection; (d) collaboration; (e) multiple voices and perspectives; (f) student-centered; (g) leadership; (h) conversations; (i) norms for discussion; (j) White supremacy and Whiteness; (k) educator practice; (l) race and racism; (m) equity, anti-racism, and system change. These themes will be discussed and linked to the research questions which explore how the District works to institutionalize equity through defining equitable education. These questions sought to provide a better understanding of student and adult learning in the context of the District and the extent to which professional development can support said learning.

Research Question One

To what extent do the recommendations for an equitable education outlined in District documents align to what is described as an equitable education in *Courageous Conversations About Race*?

The research team analyzed three public documents generated from a collaboration between the District and various other stakeholders. These documents were used as they ground the equity work of the department. A total of 113 codes were identified from these three documents and later translated into nine themes. These themes were used to define equitable education within the District. The most salient theme, which transcends all the others, is the centering of students. Therefore, the research team has surmised that the most essential component to the work of the District is keeping students at the focal point.

In addition, the research team analyzed *Courageous Conversations About Race*, where 649 codes were found and later divided into a total of 13 themes. *Courageous Conversations About Race* calls for the use of explicit language around race, racism, and identifying Whiteness, especially for White people. 36.2% of codes called for practicing anti-racism and changing the organizational system to bring the vision of equity to fruition. It becomes important to compare the language of the District against that of *Courageous Conversations About Race* and the CRT as these bodies of work support the foundation of the Department of Equity and Strategic Engagement (DESE) and are aiming to be interwoven into the fabric of the District. CRT calls for intentional and continual identification and naming of race and racism to preclude the normalization of Whiteness. Additionally, *Courageous Conversations About Race* calls out racism and emphasizes a focus on Whiteness, as it often goes unnoticed. These findings are relevant to the District as it is situated within a community that is nearly 50% White. Whiteness often goes unnoticed by White people as their experience and race are normalized. Although the Critical Criteria is an attempt to utilize CRT and *Courageous Conversations About Race* as an accountability system, it fails to explicitly name Whiteness. The research team found the

normalization of Whiteness to be evidenced in the three documents as there are no occurrences of the terms White nor Whiteness.

Additionally, the Equity and Accountability Policy, Critical Criteria, and Strategic Plan fail to examine the everyday practices, patterns, and results. Su (2007) suggests working toward neutralizing Whiteness and identifying areas where injustices are prevalent especially due to race, individual racism, and systemic racism. It becomes imperative, then, that to work toward an equitable education for all students the District is centered around it must use direct language that explicitly names race, racism, and Whiteness to provide clarity of the mission and vision (Bellman & Ryan, 2009; Bolman & Deal, 2013; Shapiro, 2015).

This is a preliminary study conducted by the research team, benefits include the use of documents which are stable and remain unchanged. An encumbrance is the inability to engage with the document which leaves questions unanswered. The District alludes to a focus on serving all students and removing barriers to programs to ensure equitable access is provided, thus directly impacting students. A major shortcoming of the documents is the lack of identifying the changes that will support the removal of barriers. This further speaks to the vagueness of the language used within each of the three documents, thus challenging an aligned vision of equitable education.

CRT offers interest convergence as an explanation of a means to instill vested interest of all stakeholders. The research team was unable to identify alignment and converging interest of any stakeholders to the investment or support of all children the District serves. Nevertheless, the inexplicit language of the District allows a significant amount of freedom to center or serve students, which data has and continues to show as an ineffective means of repaying the education debt. *Courageous Conversations About Race* has a clear vision of equitable education where the

required adjustments are identified in the explicit naming of components of equity within an educational system.

Finally, the research team identified organizational change as a common theme within the District as well as in *Courageous Conversations About Race.* However, this theme was identified in the documents for two different reasons, stemming back to the choice in the language used. *Courageous Conversations About Race* seeks system change, which is rooted in active anti-racism—language that refuses to allow subtle and explicit injustices to go unnoticed through the holistic view of issues plaguing the organization at systematic and interpersonal levels. The District also pushes for organizational change; however, the change avoids using racially charged language and defers to progress monitoring, alignment, and reporting as a means to shift current practices to ensure all students are provided with an equitable education. Although these findings reflect an alignment between the District's focus on organizational work and PEG's suggestion to focus on system change, the current reality for the District is not representative of the system change as detailed in *Courageous Conversations About Race*.

Research Question Two

In what ways can research supported best practices for the development and presentation of professional development be used to support the fruition of an equitable education in this district?

Research suggests PD needs to include the following components to create long-term change for educators (a) concrete and focused; (b) actively involves teachers; (c) actively involves learning; (d) collaboration; (e) coaching and mentorship; (f) feedback and reflection; (g) time; (h) an effective leader. *Courageous Conversations About Race* is a field guide to achieving equity in schools. The guide instructs schools seeking to instill equity to have courageous, or

difficult, conversations that are rooted in four agreements and six conditions. The root of the institutionalization of equitable practices within a district is passion. Passion is "the level of connectedness educators brings to racial equity work and to district, school, or classroom equity transformation" (Singleton, 2015, p. 14). The backbone is the practice, "the essential individual and institutional actions taken to effectively educate every student to his or her full potential" (Singleton, 2015, p. 14). Finally, the work perseveres through persistence, the time and energy necessary to work toward undoing injustices toward people who have been predetermined to a subservient position within our American society (Kendi, 2016).

The integration of best practices and *Courageous Conversations About Race* provides the District with a focused guideline for professional development as a primary means of creating an equitable education. *Courageous Conversations About Race* further explains dialogue needing to be situated within a compass that accounts for moral, intellectual, emotional, and relational processing necessary to move a group into a space where they can center race, practice anti-racism, and work toward achieving equity. The documents analyzed did not provide enough information to understand how the District is using or not using professional development as described by *Courageous Conversations About Race*. This will be further discussed in the recommendations to the District.

Implications

The persistence of the education debt requires educational leaders to act with intentionality and use explicit language to address and target racism. The District has focused on improving equity through the implementation of its Equity and Accountability Policy, Strategic Plan, and using Critical Criteria to inform decision making. The District has set its sights on achieving an equitable educational environment as described in *Courageous Conversations*

About Race. The District has worked to align the two through the implementation of PD from the Department of Equity and Strategic Engagement.

Recommendations for the District

Based on the findings of this case study, the research team has developed three recommendations for the District to support it in achieving its goal.

Recommendation: Explicitly calling out race, racism, and Whiteness. The first recommendation presented to the District is to ensure the PD generated to support the goals outlined in the Equity and Accountability Policy and the Strategic Plan (and any future policies) is imbued with language and practice that explicitly calls out and examines racism; this must include the study of Whiteness. As identified by the current themes of the District's documents, Whiteness nor its damaging consequences are provided. While aspects of the District's documents directly address race, this is not done to the extent advised by *Courageous Conversations About Race* nor CRT. This misalignment presents the District with an opportunity to improve equity through the development of policies and the implementation of PD that is unbashful in its examination and confrontation of racism (including Whiteness).

For example, currently the Equity and Accountability Policy is working toward "Every staff member participates in professional development that addresses implicit bias, anti-discrimination, cultural responsiveness, and inclusion." The addition of Whiteness could seamlessly be added to this list. Additionally, the Equity and Accountability Policy states, "The District acknowledges the historic existence of institutionalized racism which has systematically limited the educational and societal advancement of people of color, including Black, Hispanic/LatinX, Native American, Asian, and Pacific Islander." The addition of the sentence "The District also acknowledges the current consequences of Whiteness as part of the historic

evolution that institutionalized racism." The research surrounding the CRT tenet Whiteness as property supports this claim. Including the acknowledgement of Whiteness and the impact it continues to have as part of the vision of the District creates a signpost, one among many, marking a path to follow. Walking this path will yield an understanding of the negative consequences of Whiteness, thus pushing the District's staff call out Whiteness while ensuring it is not centered.

However, combined with the inclusion of language that explicitly identifies race, racism, and Whiteness, the District would benefit from examining the extent to which staff understands White fragility and White fatigue, as each of these concepts can act against the implementation of the first recommendation. White fragility is the result of living in a social environment that protects and insulates White people from race-based stress (DiAngelo, 2011). As DiAngelo (2011) writes, "This insulated environment of racial protection builds white expectation for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress, leading to […] White Fragility" (p. 54). Therefore, if the District accepts White fragility as an inevitable result of the increased explicitness of language identifying race, racism, and Whiteness, it can also implement a structure to support White people to become resilient in the face of this fragility. The increase in White resilience to talk about race will positively affect Black and Brown students as their teachers will be more capable of engaging in conversations focused on race, racism, and Whiteness with colleagues and students. Additionally, White resilience to talk about race will positively impact teachers of color by creating safe spaces (such as affinity groups) that will allow for authentic racial conversations to happen while remaining focused on the same goal. Thereby teachers are placed in a position to hear, acknowledge, and hopefully believe their students and peers. Having these conversations is a vital component to institutionalizing equity

(Singleton, 2015). Fortunately, *Courageous Conversations About Race* provides this structure. Even with this structure in place, White educators experience White fatigue as a result of learning and discussing race and racism (Flynn, 2015). The difficulties of reducing (and eliminating) White fatigue are furthered as these same White educators who resist talking about race and racism also resist being labeled racist for their unwillingness to engage in racial dialogue (Flynn, 2015).

While White fragility and White fatigue make it more difficult for the District to implement this first recommendation, it can still be achieved. As student-centered was the most coded theme, the District can leverage its commitment to students to encourage White educators to persist in racial equity work; part of the encouragement will come in the form of professional development that teaches strategies to overcome White fragility and White fatigue, and it will also come in the form of restructured systems to be more conducive for White educators to engage in racial equity work. The District's willingness to achieve institutionalized equity is evidenced in the language of the Equity and Accountability Policy which states, "District efforts to bridge inequalities will include a combination of programmatic, cultural and systemic efforts." The inclusion of explicit language which acknowledges Whiteness within the educational realm brings attention a missing component for the District as it works toward repaying the education debt.

Recommendation: Evaluate professional development. The second recommendation is an extension of the first as it pertains to aligning research suggested best practices for the development and implementation of PD with the ideas and actions called for in *Courageous Conversations About Race* and CRT. The research team recommends the District focus on evaluating the content, presentation method, and efficacy of the current PD within the District.

PD is an area the District has invested resources into yet, the results from the study showed it was the least coded area of focus in the District documents. This discrepancy means it is essential for the District to carefully analyze the effectiveness of PD and further make decisions to increase the efficacy.

Examining the efficacy of PD will also support in understanding the effectiveness of content and presentation methods. Research suggests active, reflective, sustainable, and job-embedded PD is the most effective (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Harris, 2016). As previously stated, the most popular form of PD is the observation of colleagues and sharing of practices; when used long-term, this type of PD aids teachers in changing one or more aspects of their teaching practice (Boyle et al., 2004). Based on the findings of this case study and research supported best practices for the development and implementation of PD, the research team recommends staff members observe staff who have been identified (especially by students) as ones who have created a safe, welcoming, and academically-rigorous classroom for students of color specifically Black and Brown students. The recommended observation system may be implemented after equity-focused PD is given to support and coach teachers in implementing the practices they learn from PD training. Moreover, the experiences from the observations can drive further PD content development for the District to distribute on a larger scale.

While it is true research has shown efficacy can increase through peer observations, some factors should be considered prior to implementation. Research suggests peer observation and mentoring are effective, though the context of the observations is important. While teachers benefit from collaborative conversations and peer observations, research indicates collaborative conversations are effective when teachers lead it and feedback is coming from a trusted source (Henderson, 2012; Kuter, 2016; Pharis et al., 2019). Therefore, the District will have to

implement a vetting process to ensure the peer observation system is effective. Another consideration includes technical issues such as scheduling and time as these may interfere with the District's alignment to best practices (Kuter, 2016). Thus, it will be important for the District to create systems of accountability and transparency. The systems will need to include teacher voice throughout the process as the inclusion of teachers support accountability, implementation of transparent systems, and the observation of another teacher's practice. As the District works to align PD to best practices, there will be hurdles to overcome. The District, however, will overcome these barriers through its focus on repaying the education debt.

Recommendation: Include student voice. Finally, the District would strongly benefit from an evaluation of its current PD to determine in what ways the content and presentation methods align with the best practices outlined in this case study—which embraces the inclusion of student voice. If the District allows students to attend some of the PD sessions, the alignment to best practices is more likely to be achieved. When attending PD with their teachers, students have the unique opportunity to provide critical and necessary feedback, which supports the creation of meaningful school experiences (Hadfield & Haw, 2001; Mitre, 2003; Oldfather, 1995; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). This shared experience of PD begins to remove barriers that disempower students and gives them a stronger sense of ownership in their schools (Hopkins, 2008; Mitre, 2004). Also, the student-teacher relationship can evolve into a two-way mentoring relationship rooted in mutual respect where change includes (a) increase in student engagement; (b) improving teacher efficacy; (c) improving student-teacher relationships; (d) meaningful teacher training (Fielding, 2001; Mitra, 2003; Oldfather, 1995; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000).

The benefits of including student voice are clear. This District, however, will have to account for the potential negative outcomes. The inclusion of student voice will consume time

and additional resources. For instance, a representative sample of students will readily attend meetings and engage with data along with the staff in the District. It will take time to build a trusting relationship which will then lead to an increased willingness to collaborate, engage in dialogue, and thus lead to deeper growth (Mitre, 2003). Additionally, funding resources will need to be secured to support the early integration of student voice. The inability to secure resources may inhibit the proposed model of students as partners. Therefore, the inclusion of student voice may present the District with having to restructure to include and encourage student voice— restructuring which takes both time and resources (Mitre, 2003).

Weighing the advantages and disadvantages of including student voice will be an intentional decision the District will have to make. Additionally, sharing this vision to bring the inclusion of students into the work of the District will likely prove advantageous though time consuming. Research continues to show the inclusion of students will amplify the chance of creating and sustaining educational change, thus repaying the education debt. This final recommendation lends itself to future research.

Recommendations for Future Research

The inclusion of stakeholders' voices needs to occur (Stringer, 2014). The research team recommends that the District partners with future researchers who will use a triangulation convergence, mixed-method research model. To accomplish this study, the researchers will need to collect qualitative data from students and staff. The researchers should also collect quantitative data from staff.

Qualitative data from the teachers should be collected using interviews. Interviews can target specific areas of the PD and provide insightful information about peoples' perceptions and attitudes (Yin, 2018). The transcripts of these interviews can then be analyzed using the Método

Fenomenológico Hermenéutico (Guillen, 2019). This method will support district administrators and researchers understand the phenomenon of what emerges between the intention of the PD sessions and the impact on staff from these sessions.

Qualitative data from the students should be collected using a focus group with eight to ten students and a trusted adult. The importance of collecting this data needs to be understood, especially as its interpretation and the resulting decisions could assist the District achieve its goal of institutionalizing equity. According to Mitra (2004), when teachers are allowed to learn from students, there is an opportunity to (a) bridge teacher life and student life; (b) hold adults accountable; (c) reduce tension. This focus group must be conducted in such a way as to provide psychological safety to students; therefore, an adult with whom the students trust should be present.

Quantitative data should come in the form of a survey sent out to district employees. This survey should yield data that lends itself to multiple statistical tests. Examples of these are (a) Pearson correlation tests; (b) chi-squared goodness-of-fit tests. The Pearson correlation test will show the correlations between a staff member's years of employment in the District with the three areas of (a) perception of the usefulness of equity-focused PD; (b) the extent to which staff use the content of the equity-focused PD; (c) the experience with the equity-focused PD. Additionally, as the equity-focused PD are optional these tests can also show if there is a correlation between the years a staff member has been employed by the District and the number of PD sessions attended. The chi-squared goodness-of-fit tests will show whether one type of learning style (visual, auditory, kinesthetic) and method of PD implementation is more effective than others and for which staff these implementation methods are most effective. This information will support the District further align its PD to meet the individualized needs of staff.

Conducting this mixed-methods research study will assist the District administrators further triangulate the findings of this case study, thus yielding a nuanced understanding of the problem, which will, in turn, aide the District refine its equity-focused PD and generate new equity-focused PD.

Strengths

The research team identified the following strengths for this critical case study.

Document Analysis

Document analysis can be an effective way to analyze a rich source of data (Bowen, 2009). The use of document analysis allows the researchers to take easily accessible public documents and examine how the documents reflect the work of the District. Documents are a representation of the organization and are sources of data that often remain unchanged (Bowen, 2009). Therefore, the analysis of these documents is a way to gain an understanding of the mission and vision of the District. Further, the researchers were able to access the primary data sources throughout the study consistently. Moreover, due to the stability, availability, and exactness of the documents, it was the appropriate method to use as this research study was taking place during Covid-19.

Partnership with District

The research team maintained a healthy partnership with the District. This partnership is vital as research shows that it can help to shorten the time it takes for implementation (Goldstein et al., 2019; López Turley & Stevens, 2015). Moreover, a close partnership allowed the research team to focus on the specific needs of the District (Wentworth, Carranza, & Stipek, 2016). An essential purpose for this research study is to support the District in achieving its goal of creating a more equitable educational environment for all students.

Credibility

In order to strengthen the credibility of the study, the research team implemented various procedures. First, the research team engaged in member-checking of the themes that emerged from the District documents. After the coding and theming procedure was completed, the research team introduced the themes to the Director of the DESE to member-check, ensuring the themes were accurate to the purpose, mission, and vision of the District. As a member who played a role in the development of these documents, the Director is a reliable resource to conduct this member-checking procedure. Furthermore, the research team focused on triangulating the results with each other and with the research of literature.

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Limitations

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The research team identified the following limitations for this qualitative critical case study.

Sample

The sample of this case study included three district documents and *Courageous Conversations About Race.* The sample of documents were strategically selected to answer the research questions for this study. Therefore, the implications of are not generalizable outside of the boundaries of this case study. This creates a limitation to the contextual characteristics of this case study as the results are focused on a specific context (McMillan, 2016). The research team were purposeful in selecting public-facing documents that would support in the investigation of the research questions. The researchers took into consideration this limitation and did not exclude any documents that were accessible and would benefit in supporting the data used for this case study.

Researcher Bias

The primary research instruments were the researchers. Therefore, there is a chance that research bias has impacted the findings. For example, there is a chance of biased selectivity (Yin, 2018), as the researchers chose which documents were going to be used to analyze. Although the research team explicitly implemented steps around triangulation to account for biased selectivity, researcher bias is still a concern. All three researchers are educators in K-12 Public Schools and have experience with professional development. Moreover, all researchers are passionate about equity and ensuring the work generated from this study focuses on dismantling racist practices. The researchers acknowledged these biases and made a conscious effort to identify and address bias during the analysis of the data and discussion of the findings.

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Researcher Comments

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The research study provided an opportunity for each member of the research team to engage with learning in a deep and meaningful way.

Flexibility

In the midst of our research process, we were impacted by the unprecedented challenges stemming from Covid-19. Just as we were preparing to begin research with human subjects, we had to shift the focus of our study to complete only a portion of what was originally intended. Shifting the focus was important as we had to follow the social distancing order that was in effect in our state. During the pandemic, we have learned the importance of maintaining rigor and practicing flexibility in the pursuit to support the District.

Due to the forced adjustment to methodology, we developed a deeper understanding of document analysis and embarked upon a research journey that is not as commonly used in dissertations. The adjustment of the methodology for this study proved to be a daunting yet

rewarding experience as each of us had the opportunity to delve deeper into the data sources. We learned that rainbows follow rainstorms and were afforded the opportunity to engage in a methodology that might not have been otherwise selected as a focus.

Covid-19

During the time this research study was conducted, the world was impacted by the Covid-19. This pandemic changed the trajectory for many organizations, and society has had to make adjustments to accommodate, combat, and persevere through the repercussions of this virus. This research study was also impacted, and the research team had to make major adjustments while maintaining the purpose, rigor, and credibility of the case study. The following section describes the research team's response to Covid-19.

The initial study proposed was a mixed-methods case study. The study included data collection from teachers and students in the form of interviews, a quantitative survey from teachers, observation of PD, and a document analysis of PD resources and district documents. The sudden onset of Covid-19 created state-wide restrictions, which led to social distancing regulations. As the research team is made up of doctoral candidates, a requirement of the study includes university approval. The university made the difficult decision to restrict research with human subjects. The research team responded by reexamining the purpose of the case study. To keep the focus of an equity audit on the DESE's current work, the team decided to focus on just the document analysis of PD resources and the Equity and Accountability Policy. Further, research showed document analysis as a useful tool in creating a comprehensive understanding of what is happening within case studies (Bowen, 2009). The research team decided to focus on the scope of the research and utilize document analysis to examine the District's PD documents, *Courageous Conversations About Race,* and the Equity and Accountability Policy as these

documents would support a deeper understanding of the current state of PD within the District—

an essential first step in working toward meeting its goal to serve all students.

As the research team began the data collection process, another problem presented itself.

The District was working hard to respond to the needs of the students during the pandemic,

which restricted the District's availability. Moreover, as a significant component of the research

team's ethical considerations was to ensure the research did not interfere with the District, the

team prioritized noninvasive ways to navigate the partnership with the District. In addition to

limited access to the District, schools and district offices were closed throughout the state. The

closure presented a problem as the Director did not have access to the District PD documents and

files—these documents were essential to conducting the document analysis. The inability to have

access to the District PD documents created another roadblock the team was forced to address. In

careful reflection and contemplation, the team reevaluated the research question and considered

how this study could continue its purpose in supporting the District without burdening the

partnership. The team then re-centered the scope of the study to examine public-facing

documents. Public-facing documents are representations of the District's goal and mission,

which means each document should reflect the equity work the District is working toward

implementing. The research team believed an audit of these documents could provide data that

may show the progress of the equity work the District has accomplished and further examine

alignment to the recommendations in *Courageous Conversations About Race.* As *Courageous*

Conversations About Race is the main source of equity PD within the District, the research team

focused on analyzing the extent to which the text is represented within the District documents.

The research team rationalized that the District documents must be representative of the

expectations set forth in the equity PD for staff. Thus, the team extended the study to include the

Critical Criteria and the Strategic Plan, which are essential documents in guiding system-wide decisions within the District.

Initially, Covid-19 was seen as a roadblock and limitation to the study. After reflection, the research team has written this section to explain the impact the virus has had on the research and convey that the purpose, rigor, and credibility were not compromised in this process. Through careful consideration, the decisions the research team made allowed for a focused study that provided a comprehensive understanding of the documents and the extent of alignment to *Courageous Conversations About Race.* The comprehensive data collected from this study can now be a springboard for future research with teachers and students that can further support the District in its work to institutionalize equity.

Conclusion

A school district located in Western Washington is actively working toward creating a more equitable education for all of the students it serves. Equitable education in this context is defined as the success of all students, especially students of color who continue to be impacted by the education debt. Education debt is the impact of the never-ending achievement gap that continues to blame students of color for lower rates in achievement marked by measurements such as assessments, graduation rates, and attendance (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Glenn Singleton and the Pacific Educational Group created *Courageous Conversations About Race*, which is equity focused PD dedicated to supporting educators to understand the impact of race and racism on the education system through conversations. The District has implemented this PD and is using the recommendations outlined by *Courageous Conversations About Race* to support the work of creating a more equitable education to serve all students.

The purpose of this qualitative critical case study is to understand the current state of the District's work to create a more equitable education through the alignment to *Courageous Conversations About Race*. The research team conducted a document analysis of the District's public documents that showcase the work it has accomplished and describe the alignment to the *Courageous Conversations About Race* PD it seeks to implement fully. The Critical Race Theory frames the study as the research team used steps from an equity audit to critically examine the work of the District to systemize equity for all of its students.

The research team used the first research question to analyze critical documents from the District and identify what it has implemented and focused on thus far to create a more equitable system. The researchers then used a similar method of document analysis to go through a comprehensive resource created by *Courageous Conversations About Race.* The research team explored the alignment of the recommendations in both data sets to identify what themes emerged. The data collected was used in combination with the second research question. The second research question focused on utilizing the literature to develop recommendations for the District to work toward the targets outlined in *Courageous Conversations About Race* as well as research-based best practices for the long-term implementation of effective PD.

The findings presented areas of alignment and highlighted recommendations for moving forward. Alignments between the District and *Courageous Conversations About Race* were the focus on organizational development and serving all students. The findings also indicated that the District is not calling out race and racism as explicitly as it needs to (in the documents analyzed), and indirect language may inhibit the clear mission or vision necessary for the District to move forward toward educational justice.

The research team is making three recommendations for the District. The first is that the District work on explicitly naming race and the impact it has on the system. It will be important that the District also calls out the impact of Whiteness as a barrier to institutionalizing equity. The second recommendation is that the District evaluate its current PD practices and cross-reference to the research suggested best practices and suggestions from PEG in *Courageous Conversations About Race* focusing on areas of content, efficacy, and presentation method. The third recommendation is to increase student participation and voice in the professional development that is provided to educators in the District.

As public-school educators, the research team offers this critical case study with the sincere hope that it will contribute to payment toward alleviating the education debt. The research team conducted this study to work toward dismantling the racist practices currently found in schools across America. Should the recommendations made to the District in this case study prove useful in improving equity, the research team will be satisfied. However, isolated improvement is insufficient. It is not enough to feed people once, hoping they remain full. Instead, what is needed is the persistent and unwavering dedication to change a system that withdraws inherent rights from students.

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APPENDIX A

Equity and Accountability Policy

Equity and Accountability

All students have an inherent right to an equitable, accessible, inclusive, and culturally responsive learning environment. The District values students' diverse ideas and contributions, and believes that students' identities and backgrounds should actively contribute to their successful academic outcomes and that of their peers. Diversity is a core strength of our District and requires that we work systemically to eliminate racial inequalities and inequities for all marginalized students.

I. Commitments

The Board commits to:

A. Provide system-wide direction, support, oversight, and shared accountability to advance equity and eliminate inequities in our ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇ District community.

B. Affirm, inspire and serve each and every student in our diverse population, especially students who have been marginalized through race or other means, and students who face significant barriers.

C. Create opportunities and remove barriers to identify and nurture strengths in each and every student and to ensure our community can in turn be strengthened by each and every student.

D. Provide ongoing Board development and learning opportunities about inequities and biases that impact students, staff, and families in our community, and about effective strategies for addressing them.

E. Address inequities and biases that create feelings of fear, lack of belonging, and academic and psychological barriers for students, all of which can contribute to reduced academic participation and performance.

F. Work with the District to develop, maintain, and apply a consistent collection of Critical Criteria, approved by the Board and specified in an accompanying procedure, to the creation and review of all District policies and any Board approvals of District plans, budgets, and curriculum materials.

G. Ensure our policies directly address racism and occurrences of racial tension in ways that both provide positive guidelines and expectations, and that direct development of robust reporting and investigation processes.

H. Review and update policies regularly to ensure they proactively advance an equitable and exceptional education for all students. The Board shall conduct an initial prioritized review of its policies within five years of the implementation of this policy and should conduct subsequent prioritized reviews every five to seven years thereafter. The Board shall work with staff to create and maintain a procedure to guide this process.

This policy establishes that our District shall:

A. Adopt curriculum, and teaching and learning strategies, that leverage, reflect, and affirm the unique experiences and social, racial, cultural, linguistic, and familial backgrounds of our ▮▮▮▮▮▮ District community.

B. Ensure that all students have equitable access to and provision of resources based on their unique needs, including but not limited to, English language learning, advanced learning, free and reduced-price lunches, special education, and homelessness supports.

C. Ensure that all students have equitable access to all District programs including but not limited to all District choice schools, college and career readiness and counseling, sports and activities, and Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate coursework.

D. Provide concerted universal instructional efforts and extensive and varied intervention opportunities to support all students, including those who face barriers and inequities, to meet key milestones for student growth and achievement, and their own personal growth and learning goals.

E. Ensure disciplinary actions are undertaken without bias and/or disproportionality.

F. Work with the employee groups and staff to ensure that, at least once every three years, and within the first year for all newly hired staff, every staff member participates in professional development that addresses implicit bias, anti-discrimination, cultural responsiveness, and inclusion. For those staff who work directly with the instruction of students and for those who support such staff, the professional development will include training on culturally responsive instruction and inclusive practices. The Superintendent will ensure professional development in these instructional practices is ongoing and will provide job-embedded opportunities for collaborative learning and application of these practices with respect to other instructional priorities.

G. Implement hiring processes that proactively support the District's commitment to hiring, recruitment, and retention of highly qualified staff of color and that promote and honor other aspects of a diverse workforce.

H. Apply a consistent collection of Critical Criteria, approved by the Board and specified in an accompanying procedure, to the creation and review of all District procedures, the selection of curriculum materials, and the construction of District-wide and program- specific plans and budgets.

I. Develop reporting, investigation, communication and accountability processes, particularly related to actions of racism and occurrences of racial tension or other discriminatory actions. Ensure these processes

1. Identify expected behaviors and behaviors we cannot accept.

2. Provide clear responsibilities for staff who observe such behaviors, including any required reporting or other actions.

3. Include guidelines for how staff and volunteers should address racial and other discriminatory tensions that arise in classrooms, hallways, playgrounds, buses, and any other school environments.

4. Account for power differences among those reporting, those to whom they report, and those who may be enacting or enabling racism or discrimination.

5. Include clear expectations for follow-up with all relevant parties (including those the actions impact, those reporting, and those alleged to be enacting unwelcome behaviors).

J. Foster strong partnerships with diverse groups of parents and stakeholders and increase direct family engagement, especially with families whose students may be marginalized or face barriers.

The Superintendent or designee shall create and maintain procedures, associated with this policy and other relevant policies (cross-referenced in the procedure associated with this policy) as appropriate, to guide how each of the above District commitments will be implemented. The procedure associated with this policy should document and maintain clear measures of success related to each District commitment.

II. Context and Need for Equity and Accountability Policy

Equity is rooted in the values of our District and we must intentionally and continually work to achieve it. We can only serve each and every student if we live our District values, including showing respect and compassion for each other. Racism, discrimination, and marginalization of any people or groups of people, whether intentional or not, have no place in our community. Such actions damage not only those individuals and groups at which they are directed, but also our community as a whole.

We acknowledge the inequities that many of our students face and that we are challenged to address. District data confirm what broader research shows: many factors impact a student's performance, including but not limited to race, income level, disability, gender, country of origin, mobility, and English proficiency. While these factors may be related to one another, each can independently impact students; and students who experience multiple factors can experience greater barriers.

We recognize that students face inequities that are associated with aspects of their identities and their contexts, including race, ethnicity, culture, disability and learning differences, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, and when they are acquiring English, or are experiencing homelessness or low-income. We are committed to addressing these inequities and helping each and every student to equitably access learning opportunities in our District to enable them all to thrive.

A. Racial Equity

We are working to ensure that all students, regardless of race, experience a supportive and barrier free learning environment. The District acknowledges the historic existence of institutionalized racism which has systematically limited the educational and societal advancement of people of color, including Black, Hispanic/LatinX, Native American, Asian, and Pacific Islander. The specific barriers of students and families of color exist within a larger, racial context. Historic and contemporary BSD data measuring student

achievement, performance, and well-being demonstrate an obvious and predictable gap in outcomes, opportunities, and sense of belonging for students of color, most notably Black/African American and Hispanic/LatinX students, and also Native American, Pacific Islander, and Southeast Asian students.

District and other data sources show that there are many ways that students of color experience school differently. In particular, students of color experience forms of racism and unconscious bias that impact all aspects of their educational experience and that impede and limit how successful students of color can be. Additionally, when students are marginalized from participating fully with peers, *all* students lose valuable contributions to their learning. This policy aims to pro-actively promote a culture that supports students of all races and backgrounds, and to address both institutional practices and the behaviors of any individuals in the system that perpetuate any sort of biased actions or ambivalence that allows biased actions to inhibit students of color from accessing the opportunities of our District.

B. Inclusion and Full Engagement

We are working to achieve inclusion in our schools such that all students and families have safe and equitable access, feel a deep sense of belonging, and experience a welcoming classroom and school community where instruction is strengths-based, aligned to or exceeds grade-level and subject standards, and to the maximum extent possible, takes place with all grade-level or subject peers. While this goal extends to all our students, it is especially relevant for students with disabilities and students acquiring English.

The District recognizes that students with disabilities can be marginalized and often separated from their peer community. We also recognize that these students face additional barriers when they come from other marginalized groups, particularly students of color. The District is committed to addressing inequities and biases towards students and families whose voice or access has been marginalized in conjunction with their disabilities, and the District is committed to minimizing situations that separate students from their peers and peer learning environments.

C. Approach to Address Inequities

District efforts to bridge inequities will include a combination of programmatic, cultural and systemic efforts. We recognize that each group faces different barriers, challenges and needs, and that the experiences of different groups of students cannot all be addressed in the same ways. While the District may focus particular efforts to address specific inequities, the District will implement such efforts in a way that allows them to serve any students who need such supports.

III. Accountability

To ensure that we are truly serving each and every student, especially those who have been marginalized and those who experience barriers, we will monitor our effectiveness, report, analyze, and adjust our related practices in the following contexts:

- Regular reporting and program planning
- Annual report, including follow up plans, on equity and accountability
- Consistent application of the Critical Criteria

A. Annual Equity & Accountability Reporting & Recommendations

The Superintendent or designee, in consultation with the Board, will monitor and report, at least once annually, on the progress of the specific commitments identified in the Commitments section of this policy and on the District's overall progress in removing barriers and effectively serving each and every student. This equity and accountability focused report will identify where success was reached both in terms of the commitments established in this policy and the related outcomes. Specifically, this equity and accountability report will include, though is not limited to, the following:

1. Evaluation of each commitment listed in the commitments section of this policy

2. Evaluation, with particular attention to those groups of students who have been marginalized and who experience barriers, of multiple relevant measures including, but not limited to:

   - Graduation rates
   - Discipline referrals
   - Referrals for special education services
   - Student sense of belonging
   - College entrance exam [e.g., ACT/SAT] performance
   - State test passing rate
   - D and F rates in secondary core content areas
   - Post-secondary plans

   The District should consider other relevant, research, and data-supported measures (qualitative or quantitative) that may be closer to classroom teaching and learning, and should include those as they are identified.

3. Information about, and recommended adjustments the District will make, to programs, initiatives, and resources implemented to remove related barriers, provide needed supports, and increase access and opportunities for students.

4. Any recommendations, if applicable, about relevant changes to District policies, procedures, plans and programs.

5. Updated measures of success for the commitments and initiatives related to this policy.

6. A timeline for any follow-up actions and modifications

This reporting will be in addition to any separate program, school, or departmental reports that may also examine overlapping data sets.

The Superintendent or designee, in consultation with the Board, will create and maintain a procedure to identify relevant measures, associated success metrics, and an appropriate monitoring and reviewing schedule. [should also be consistent with Policy 0300]. The associated procedure should be updated as needed each year within three months of the final equity and accountability report.

B. Regular Ongoing Equity & Accountability Reporting

In all reports to the Board and in all District direction-setting reports, outcomes for students who have been marginalized or who experience barriers should be monitored and considered.

Within the context of its strategic and annual planning process, the District will identify and monitor select key milestones for student growth and achievement. Such milestones should hold equitably high expectations for all students and should appropriately account for the personal growth and learning goals of each and every student.

The Superintendent or designee, in collaboration with the Board, will develop reporting procedures [including procedure 0300P] that ensure progress monitoring for outcomes for marginalized groups.

C. Critical Criteria Documentation

Application of the Critical Criteria must be documented for each of the following:

1. Policies brought to the Board for first reading.
2. All District plans, budgets and curriculum materials presented to the Board for approval.
3. Changes to District procedures, school handbooks, program and departmental plans, and any other relevant direction-setting documents.

The Superintendent or designee, in collaboration with the Board, will develop and maintain tools to support, and a process to monitor, use of the Critical Criteria, and will document these in an accompanying procedure.

Cross References: Policy 3205   Prohibition of Sexual
        Harassment

Policy 3210 Nondiscrimination

Legal References:	WA Administrative Code Chapter 392-190	Equal educational opportunity-Unlawful Discrimination Prohibited
	Title 28A.640 RCW	Sexual Equality
	Title 28A.642 RCW	Discrimination Prohibition

Adoption Date: 06.11.19
██████████**District**
Revised:

APPENDIX B

Critical Criteria

Critical Criteria: Shared Commitment to Each and Every Student

Per Policy 0130, the following criteria will be considered in the creation and review of all District policies, procedures, construction of District-wide and program-specific plans, budgets, and curriculum materials.

Consider each and every student.
- Which student groups (e.g., racial/ethnic, students with disabilities, English language learners) are most affected by this policy/program? What are the potential impacts on these groups?
- Does this policy/program ignore or worsen existing disparities or produce other consequences that may impact any particular student groups? How?
- How does/could the policy/program promote opportunity or access for those who have been historically excluded? How can this policy benefit all students equitably?

Serve all students and stakeholders.
- Does this policy/program put serving students first?
- Does this policy/program identify all stakeholders impacted, intentionally and unintentionally?
- Have the needs of each stakeholder group to carry out this policy/program been identified?
- What family engagement and community involvement is warranted by updates to this policy/program?

Align with values, historic realities, and current contexts.
- Is this policy/program aligned with the District's mission, vision, and values, and the current strategic and annual plans? If not, is there a clear path to reconcile any misalignments?
- Does the policy/program recognize and account for the history and current realities regarding race, racism, disabilities, poverty, English language learners, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and learning opportunities and outcomes?
- What about this policy/program poses problems or barriers (e.g., emotional, financial, programmatic, or managerial concerns, or unnecessary mandates) to more equitable outcomes?
- What additional information could be added to strengthen the policy/program to ensure it promotes equity in our District?

Build in accountability.
- Are successful and measurable outcomes clearly defined?
- Have provisions been made to provide necessary supports (e.g., training, resources, time, etc.) for implementation?
- Is there a process, including a timeline, for evaluation of impact (intended and unintended) and outcomes, and a process to identify and make any needed revisions?

APPENDIX C

Strategic Plan

██████████████████ Strategic Plan 2018–2023

████████████████
███████████
█████████

Table of Contents

Letter from Superintendent and Board

Dear ████████████ Community:

We are excited to present and share our Strategic Plan—a five-year guide and blueprint for our educational community that will help ensure that our students continue to excel. This plan affirms our commitment that **each** ████████ student—no matter their race, ability, language background, religion, national origin, immigration status, or sexual orientation—will receive an exemplary education and reach their full potential.

Our Strategic Plan will bring cohesion to the efforts of the ████████████ Board of Directors, the ████████████ District team, and our community, aligning us toward strengthening our investment in our students' success. It takes all of us—staff, families, and the community—working together to exceed expectations and continue to earn our place as a national model of educational excellence that meets the needs of every student academically, socially, and emotionally.

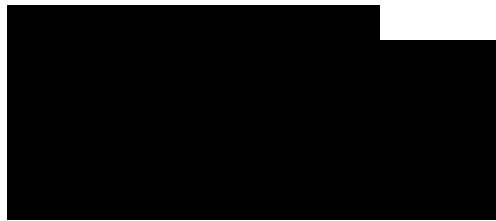As part of the strategic planning process, we established the following values:

✓ Service
✓ Integrity

✓ Excellence
✓ Compassion
✓ Respect
✓ Collaboration

These values are not only a reflection of our commitment to serving all students but also an acknowledgement of our deep respect for all humanity and a recognition that we need each other to thrive. From the boardroom to the classroom, our values will drive decision-making at every level.

As your superintendent and school board, it is truly an honor to serve the ███████████████. We thank our dedicated students, parents, community, and extraordinary educators for their work in developing the Strategic Plan and for the work we will do together over the next five years to put this plan into practice.

Your commitment to excellence and ongoing improvement is moving us forward.

In Partnership,

Incorporating Many Voices

The voices of a wide range of stakeholders shaped both the strategic planning process as well as the plan itself.

Listen and Learn
In July 2017, ████████ began his tenure as superintendent of the ███████████████ and conducted a "Listen and Learn" tour. Interviews with individuals and groups revealed the district's many strengths and achievements, as well as opportunities for improvement in the future. These insights shaped the planning and laid the foundation for the Strategic Plan.

District staff and the ████████████ Board of Directors hosted multiple community forums. The ██████████████████████████ community agencies, and district working committees were key partners in this work. The sources of information reviewed included: the dual language program review; student climate survey results; family feedback survey results; and student demographic and achievement data.

The Steering Committee
The Steering Committee was made up of 23 members, representing a diverse set of interests across the community. Parents, educators, staff, and administrators met five times over the course of four months to review collected data and develop the Theory of Action and Priorities for the Strategic Plan. The broad range of voices represented on the Steering Committee ensured that the plan captures the diverse viewpoints that make the ███████████████ an exceptional place to learn and thrive.

Steering Committee Members (to be in chart format)

███████████████████████████
███████████████████

Parent of a student receiving Special Education services
Parent of a student receiving Advanced Learning services
Parent from the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA)
Elementary, Middle, and High School Educators*
Elementary, Middle, and High School Principals
School Classified Staff
Superintendent
Chief of Staff
Executive Director, Curriculum & Instruction
Executive Director, Schools
Assistant Superintendent, Human Resources
Director of Equity
Executive Director, Special Education
Executive Director, Student Services
School Board President

***Educators were selected by the** ███████████████████

Building the Strategic Plan

Over the course of a year, the voices of thousands of stakeholders were heard via community meetings and public surveys. Their perspectives inspired the Board of Directors to refresh the district's vision, mission, and values.

March–April 2018: Over 35 focus groups and 150 interviews were conducted with students, parents, teachers, school staff, building leaders, central office staff, district leaders, and Board Directors, capturing the district's strengths and opportunities for improvement.

May 2018: Over 4,600 community members responded to a survey soliciting community input on potential district priorities for the next five years.

June–July 2018: An initial draft of the Strategic Plan was created, incorporating input received from students, staff, community, and the Board and including a Theory of Action and district priorities.

August 2018: ████████████ Board of Directors, district leadership, and school building leaders reviewed the draft Strategic Plan and provided input.

September 2018: The district hosted a series of information sessions that solicit community feedback for further discussion and refinement.

October 2018: The district finalized and presented the Strategic Plan to the Board of Directors for approval.

██████ Students & Programs

The ████████████ District serves over 21,000. The rich diversity of the student body is demonstrated by the 124 countries our students come from and the 95 languages spoken across the district. The district employs roughly 2,300 employees, 1,400 of whom are teachers. Over 400 teachers are National Board certified, and 85% hold master's degrees.

District Profile
- Over 21,000 students
- Student Demographics (K–12, Oct 2017)
    - 39% Asian/Pacific Islander
    - 37% White
    - 12% Hispanic/Latino
    - 9 Multi-Ethnic
    - 3% Black
    - < 1% Native American
- Schools in ██████
    - 18 Elementary
    - 5 Middle
    - 4 High
    - 2 Choice
    - Total: 29
- 18% of students receive Free and Reduced-price Meals
- A Diverse Community:
    - 15% English Language Learners
    - 36% First language other than English
    - 14% Language other than English spoken at home
- Academic Performance 2017–18:
    - 74% grades 3–5 English Language Arts proficiency
    - 73% grades 3–5 Math proficiency
    - 78% grades 6–8 English Language Arts proficiency
    - 72% grades 6–8 Math proficiency
    - 87% grade 10 English Language Arts proficiency
    - 77% grade 10 Math proficiency

- 91% Graduation Rate
- 78% AP Exam Pass Rate (over 8,100 exams taken annually)

District Accomplishments

████████ students, parents, staff, and community are very proud of our schools and have experienced great success at each school site. Throughout the strategic planning process they expressed the expectation that we continue to offer a world class education program and preserve the momentum the district has generated over the past five years with its many accomplishments including:

- Expanding opportunities for students to be college and career ready, particularly in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) and Career/Technical Education (CTE).
- Increasing student participation in Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses with the percentage of AP exams receiving a "passing" score (at least a 3 on the 5-point AP scale) continuing to exceed the national average.
- Introducing new Pre-K – 12th programs and strategies that provide students with critical social-emotional skills and safe and positive learning environments.
- Providing innovative training for instructional and support staff on effective practices to meet the learning needs of English language learners that builds on our rigorous dual language learning opportunities for students.
- Promoting a preschool program that provides academic and social skills that prepare students for future success in positive and interactive environments.
- Committing to an instructional focus that is inclusive of students from diverse backgrounds, languages, and special needs.
- Expanding athletics, humanities, music, art, and other activities for all students with the support of the district, parents, and community partners.

Areas of Opportunity

While the bright spots are many, we also recognize and embrace opportunities to better serve each and every student. We are committed to ensuring all students receive a high-quality education, and we are focusing our efforts on strengthening the following to improve our ability to meet each and every student's needs:

- Providing high-quality instruction at all levels, in every classroom
- Aligning systems and structures across the district and at every school
- Building upon and maintaining safe, secure, and stable learning environments

Vision, Mission, and Values

Our vision, mission, and values provide direction for our work over the next five years. They highlight our focus on racial equity, inclusion, and serving each and every student as an individual with unique needs.

Vision

To affirm and inspire each and every student to learn and thrive as creators of their future world.

Mission
The mission of the ▋▋▋▋▋▋▋ District is to serve each and every student academically, socially, and emotionally, through a rigorous and relevant education that is innovative and individualized. As a learning community that values one another's humanity, we provide courageous support for an equitable and exceptional education for all students.

Values
As a values-driven organization, we strive to embody our shared purpose each and every day, in every interaction, between and among our students, families, staff, and community. To that end, we've identified the following values to guide our work in the way we prioritize our energies and efforts, how we make decisions, and ultimately how we serve our students and each other:

Service - We seek to understand our students, meet their needs and those of our families and community, and to serve each other.
Integrity - We earn trust through consistently and accountably following through on our commitments, and by acknowledging and addressing our shortfalls.
Excellence - We pursue and nurture the exceptional achievements of our students, teachers, and staff through hard work and growth.
Compassion - We are mindful of and respond to the thoughts and feelings of others, and are kind, authentic, and self-aware in our interactions.
Respect - We welcome diverse ideas and contributions, assume each other's best intent, and honor each other's strengths and traditions.
Collaboration - We build inclusive teams of students, families, staff, and community partners, and engage each member's contribution on behalf of our students.

Priorities

The ▋▋▋▋▋▋▋ District, in collaboration with the Strategic Plan Steering Committee, identified six priority areas to focus our work for next five years, all with the purpose of serving each and every student, each and every day.

1. High-Quality Instruction
2. Student Well-Being
3. Exceptional Staff
4. Family & Community
5. Culture & Climate
6. Organizational Alignment

High-Quality Instruction
We will provide engaging and culturally responsive instruction that addresses the academic, social, and emotional needs of individual students.

We believe every child deserves an excellent education. Each and every child has the potential to learn and grow to high standards.

To ensure…

Each student experiences continuous growth in all subject areas. Students who are a grade level or more behind will experience accelerated growth each year until they reach or exceed grade level standards. Students who are already achieving at grade level or above, will continue to make measurable growth each year.

We commit to:

- Expand systems and supports – at the district, school, and classroom levels -- to ensure each and every student is achieving academically and socially, emotionally, and behaviorally.
- Utilize data to evaluate and continuously improve the effectiveness of instructional practices to support and accelerate learning.
- Transform student engagement and performance in math and reading by increasing teachers' and leaders' understanding and knowledge of content standards to provide high-quality instruction.
- Strengthen dual language programs and world language courses to honor students' own culture, other cultures, and build connections in our global community.
- Provide multiple career and technical pathways that ensure flexible and relevant learning experiences that keep students engaged in their courses while providing a real-world, career-oriented curriculum.
- Offer an integrated Computer Science curriculum for each and every student that applies computational thinking, programming, and physical computing to analyze new problems, build predictive models, and create innovative solutions
- Implement culturally-responsive and linguistically-appropriate assessments and tools to measure and monitor student growth and progress.

Student Well-Being

We will support the emotional and physical well-being of all students by affirming students' sense of identity and belonging.

We believe students learn best in safe, secure, and stable environments. Beyond helping learners to achieve high academic growth and success, we foster environments, districtwide, that promote healthy social-emotional and physical well-being.

To ensure…

All students feel safe physically, socially, and emotionally in all of our learning environments.

We commit to:

- Infuse Social Emotional Learning into curriculum and instruction to support students in understanding and managing emotions, setting and achieving positive goals, feeling and showing empathy for others, establishing and maintaining positive relationships, and making responsible decisions.

- Educate the entire community – students, families, staff, and community-based organizations – in understanding, creating, and reinforcing Positive Behavior and Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and culturally-responsive behavior expectations.
- Strengthen positive relationships to foster intellectually safe environments for students to learn and thrive.
- Assess and improve the physical security of all our district facilities.
- Provide equitable access to school and community-based mental health supports

Exceptional Staff

We will recruit, support, and retain exceptional staff throughout our organization.

We believe diverse and highly skilled staff are critical to the success and well-being of our students.

To ensure…

Staff feel supported, respected, and valued for the work they do every day to serve students.

We commit to:

- Prioritize staff well-being.
- Ensure the hiring process advances our district priorities.
- Provide professional development that empowers and inspires educators with the knowledge, skills, resources, and tools to support student learning and growth.
- Utilize school and district climate data to enhance staffing and professional development for all employees.
- Recognize staff who embody district values.

Family & Community

We will continue to cultivate partnerships with families, members of the community, and community organizations to support our students.

We believe informed, engaged parents and a supportive community are key to our success. Working together as collaborative partners, we can accomplish far more than we can alone.

To ensure…

Families and community members are aware of and understand the work we are doing, the direction we are heading, know where to find support, and feel empowered to contribute.

We commit to:

- Expand opportunities for parents, local organizations, and members of the community to learn and support our work together.
- Strengthen relationships with parents and families through deeper understanding of their perspectives and needs.
- Focus community partnerships on high-leverage, high-impact strategies.
- Improve two-way communication with families and community partners.

- Match resources and services in the community with identified student needs.

Culture & Climate
We will support and foster positive relationships between and among students and staff.

We believe what we do, what we say, and how we act each day matters. Great organizational cultures don't just happen. They are created. With every conversation and every interaction, we live our values and contribute to our district's vision, mission, and culture.

To ensure…
Students and staff develop positive relationships with one another, feel a sense of belonging, and unite around our shared vision, mission, and values.

We commit to:

- Remove obstacles and barriers for any student .
- Serve each and every student equitably.
- Embed values-based leadership into our work.
- Champion equitable and inclusive practices.
- Create positive learning environments.
- Affirm students' sense of identity.
- Facilitate restorative practices.

Organizational Alignment
We will align school and central office resources to support our strategic priorities.

We believe that to achieve the goals outlined in this plan, we must be willing to make hard decisions that focus on what matters most. With finite amounts of time, people, and money, we need to strategically align our efforts and energy to those initiatives we believe will have the greatest impact for our students.

To ensure…
As a district, we are all moving in the same direction, aligned, and equipped with the skills and tools needed to improve outcomes for each and every student.

We commit to:

- Enhance continuous improvement planning cycles for schools and departments.
- Implement equitable staffing processes that align to school and student needs.
- Invest and refine the strategic budgeting process and cycle.
- Expand our program evaluation and return on investment analysis.
- Utilize data dashboards to inform resource allocation and prioritization.

Strategic Plan Measures of Success

In four years, we'll know that our Strategic Plan has been successful when:

1. Our students report they are thriving and feel safe in school.
2. Our parents report high levels of satisfaction with schools, including timely communication.
3. Our staff report they are engaged, valued, supported, and have sufficient resources.
4. We will recruit, support and retain exceptional staff throughout our organization *[measures TBD].*
5. Our community partners provide services that are aligned to school needs and feel like valued members of the school community.
6. Increase student growth so that at least 90% of our current cohort of 2nd graders meet state standards in ELA, math and science by the end of 5th grade. (This will substantially reduce subgroup gaps.)
7. Increase student growth so that at least 97% of our current cohort of 5th graders meet state standards in ELA, math and science by the end of 8th grade.
8. At least 98% of our current cohort of 9th graders who are on a 4-year path to graduation graduate on time (up from 91%).
9. Strengthen culture of shared leadership.
10. Resources are allocated to identified needs, priorities, and goals to improve efficacy and clarity of our work.

Next Steps

In addition to this Strategic Plan, which sets the course for the district for the next five years, we will also create subsequent annual plans with specific implementation and outcome targets needed to reach our goals.

As we work to sustain and grow the strategies and initiatives that have the greatest impact on our students, we will monitor our efforts, communicate our results, and hold ourselves accountable for achieving our vision and mission. We invite you, our community, to actively join us as we endeavor **to affirm and inspire each and every student to learn and thrive as creators of their future world.**

Appendix

THEORY OF ACTION

A Theory of Action is a set of beliefs and underlying assumptions we believe will have the greatest impact, moving us from our current state to our desired future vision. ███████████ District's Theory of Action reflects our core beliefs about what will continue and enhance the success of our students, families, and staff.

If we use our tools to inspire and lead for racial equity, and we implement shared value-based leadership and cycles of improvement to...

- Ensure high-quality instruction that meets the academic and social-emotional needs of every student
- Attract, support, and retain exceptional staff
- Engage students, families, and community organizations as advocates and partners for equity, access, and results for all students
- Foster a welcoming, safe, and supportive environment
- Align resources to strategic priorities

...then each and every student will receive an exemplary education that is responsive to their racial, linguistic, and cultural diversity—and prepares them for success both today and tomorrow.

Glossary of Terms

- **Community**: The individuals, groups, businesses, and institutions that are invested in the welfare and vitality of ████████████ District
- **Mission**: A statement of objectives and the approach to reach those objectives
- **Priorities**: Broad areas of focus to support the Theory of Action
- **Resources**: The human capital, operational systems, institutional knowledge, and financial support available to support ██████ School District achieve its vision and mission
- **SEL**: Social & Emotional Learning
- **Shared Leadership**: A style of leadership that involves utilizing members of an organization or community by empowering individuals and giving them an opportunity to take leadership positions and/or contribute to key decisions
- **Theory of Action**: Fundamental belief about what will lead to long-term success in the district
- **Vision**: A statement that describes the future state of an organization
- **Strategic Planning Framework:** The strategic planning framework connects a broad vision for the district with concrete goals and implementation tactics that are aligned and interconnected.

Footnotes

[1]The District will be used as a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality.

Tables

Table 1

Themes and Codes from District Documents

Theme	Number of Codes	Common Code Language
Professional Development	12	Professional development Supporting staff Continuous learning through reflection
Explicitly Targeting Racism	13	Race Targeting racism Racial equity
Collaborating with the Community	16	Collaboration of whole community Transparency Removing barriers
Within District Collaboration	23	Collaboration Value in stakeholder voice Institutionalizing equity
Progress Monitoring	27	Deeper reflection Understanding
Organizational Development	31	Accountability measures Progress monitoring Organizational alignment Reporting
Reporting and Action	38	Make adjustments Address inequities
Directly Impacting Students	57	Student safety Student academics Student success
Student-Centered	106	For student success For all students Student experiences

Note. This table shows the themes that emerged from the document analysis of the District documents, the number of codes for each theme, and examples of common language used by the researchers during coding.

Table 2

Themes and Codes from "Courageous Conversations About Race"

Theme	Number of Codes	Common Code Language
Cultural Competency	12	Cultural competence Become culturally proficient Value diversity
Safety	26	Fostering save environment Create safety Mindfulness
Progress Monitoring and Data Collection	33	Institutionalize equity Monitoring for continuous improvement Progress monitoring
Collaboration	59	Talking to create change Having conversations Collaboration
Multiple Voices and Perspectives	61	Engaging in conversations with multiple perspectives Interracial dialogue with the community White people believing people of color
Student-Centered	76	Serve all students Differentiating needs for individual students Positive relationships between students and adults
Leadership	96	Institutionalized equity Racial equity leadership development Developing leadership passion for equity
Conversations	98	Benefits from conversations Staying engaged in the conversation Interracial dialogue
Norms for Discussion	107	Full participation Clear norms Practice anti-racism
White Supremacy and Whiteness	134	Target race Address whiteness Challenging status quo
Educator Practice	201	Developing passion Teacher self-reflection Training how to challenge Whiteness

Race and Racism	235	Institutionalize equity
		Target race
		Developing racial consciousness
Equity, Anti-Racism, and System Change	300	Institutionalizing equity
		Target race
		Understanding individual racial conscious

Note. This table shows the themes that emerged from the document analysis of *Courageous Conversations About Race*, the number of codes for each theme, and examples of common language used by the researchers during coding.