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A DOCUMENT ANALYSIS OF LEADERSHIP LANGUAGE THAT ENHANCES FAMILY-  
SCHOOL COLLABORATION IN EFFORTS TO NARROW THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

BY

ANDREW JOHNSON AND DARYL WRIGHT

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

SEATTLE UNIVERSITY

2020

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# ANALYZING LEADERSHIP LANGUAGE

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Seattle University student researchers would like to thank Dr. Walker for her continuous support throughout the year. Dr. Walker gave our team needed encouragement and allowed us to process our ideas to move the dissertation forward.

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### **Andrew Johnson**

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## ANALYZING LEADERSHIP LANGUAGE

### **Daryl Wright**

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**DEDICATION**

We dedicate this dissertation to all the educational systems committed to the difficult task of developing student equity. Hopefully, this research will improve practices to close the achievement gap and provide all students with an equitable education.

# ANALYZING LEADERSHIP LANGUAGE

## ABSTRACT

### A DOCUMENT ANALYSIS OF LEADERSHIP LANGUAGE THAT ENHANCES FAMILY-SCHOOL COLLABORATION IN EFFORTS TO NARROW THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

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Chair: Dr. Trena Walker, Ed.D.

Complex problems such as the achievement gap need to be presented to all the stakeholders in the school community to utilize their combined expertise. This requires a specific language to encourage all the stakeholders in the process. Effective leaders achieve this through the principles of transformative leadership by communicating in a way that motivates, challenges, and encourages cooperation. This qualitative comparative case study utilized a document analysis to understand the barriers and solutions to family-school collaboration and leadership solutions to narrow the achievement gap in a highly resourced district. This district recently passed an equity initiative that called for the "consistent collection and examination of the critical criterion" that improves family and community engagement (see Appendix A, p. 5). Seattle University (SU) student researchers compared the District Annual Strategic Plan and two Elementary School Improvement Plans (belonging to the highest- and lowest-performing elementary schools, based on test scores) to determine their congruence, compare their practices to the literature documenting the achievement gap, and assess the leadership language of these documents. The researchers coded for autocratic leadership language that works against family-school collaboration and transformative leadership language that supports family-school collaboration. They triangulated their findings to identify recommendations at the individual building and district level regarding the use of leadership language in documents and outlining improvement efforts to close the achievement gap as it relates to the relevant literature.

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*Keywords:* transformative leadership, autocratic leadership, achievement gap, equity, family–school collaboration, document analysis, leadership solutions, barriers, underrepresented

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

What will it truly take to leave no child behind? If we genuinely believe that this is possible or even desirable, we must ask this question to every community where students are struggling. School leaders must be able to use effective language to address the needed changes and assemble diverse communities in order to understand the barriers and solutions to improving academic achievement. Complex problems such as the achievement gap need to be presented to all the stakeholders in the community to utilize their combined expertise. The achievement gap is the difference in educational attainment among different groups (Morris & Perry, 2016). Dealing with it requires specific language to encourage all the stakeholders in the process. Effective leaders achieve this through principles of transformative leadership by communicating in a way that motivates, challenges, and encourages cooperation. These linguistic messages become the contextual frameworks used to create the sensemaking needed to act. As Aristotle proposed, praxis is an action but not just any action. Praxis is morally committed action to ensure all students are provided with quality education. If we value all children, we must ask about all students and recognize that the educational problems in all communities cannot be addressed without also responding to the social and economic conditions that influence the outcomes (Kornrich, 2016; Noguera, 2003; Owens, Reardon, Pfeffer, & Schanchner, 2017).

In the United States, educational reform has long focused on closing the achievement gap between low- and higher-income students (Morris & Perry, 2016). Educational attainment is measured by standardized tests, diplomas, access to higher education, or employment. Achievement gaps exist at every level of education and among groups based on ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, physical or mental abilities, and income. Although some achievement

gaps have narrowed in the past 50 years, the achievement gap persists in most schools for many reasons; this results in millions of students missing out on jobs and career opportunities (Pfeffer & Hertel, 2015). Schools have a moral responsibility to address systemic inequities that harm students and society. Rather than blaming students and their families, educators must advocate to close the social inequities that become larger if left unaddressed. These long-term inequities include incarceration, lack of societal power, mortality rate, employment, and generational poverty. Teachers must engage in socially just pedagogy to ensure the fate of society is secure for all students. The current public-school structure must be reconsidered if the achievement gap is to be closed; alternatives such as democratic schools, which put in place arrangements that bring democracy to life via structures and curriculum, give students more power in their learning choices, thereby increasing their academic engagement and future success (Apple & Beane, 1995).

The fundamental problem is that we have pushed the current system as far as it can go, and it cannot go far enough. If we care about all students and about the fate of society, we cannot ignore real problems or merely seek to get around the present system. We must recreate it so that it in turn reshapes the possibilities for the great majority of schools. (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 27)

This request should not be interpreted as a naïve willingness to embrace every new fad in educational reform but rather as an opportunity for leaders to elevate all voices in the community and assess their educational and social values in building a partnership with underrepresented families. Noguera (2019) suggests that the District's mission, vision, and practice must be rooted in the data.

Hearing and honoring all voices will require schools to become welcoming (Delpit, 1995). Including community voices has led many communities to implement the concept of community or democratic schools, defined by the US Department of Education as a strategy that partners with families to create and integrate comprehensive academic, social, and health services. Advocates for a community-school approach have reported promising results, with improving academic achievement, reducing dropout rates, reducing disciplinary problems, and increasing parental involvement (Beatty, 2013). Understanding the dynamics of family-school collaboration and leadership practices at the national and district level are the focus of this case study analysis.

The income distribution in the United States is stratified along ethnic and racial distinctions, with poverty heavily concentrated among African Americans, Latinx, and Native American students (Berliner, 2009; Pfeffer & Killewald, 2017; Pfeffer & Schoeni, 2016). Lack of resources continues to produce predictable patterns of underachievement in schools regardless of their location in urban or suburban communities. Financial accountability is needed to improve learning. Schools cannot only rely on Title 1 funding but must also consider how resources are used. School leaders must ensure Title 1 funding directly addresses the achievement gap (Owens, 2016).

Most of the widespread educational reforms enacted by the state and federal governments (e.g., standards and accountability through high stakes testing, charter schools, and phonics-based reading programs) have had limited success for many students, especially for those who are furthest from justice. These programs provide limited growth because they do not address the social and economic conditions that invariably affect the quality and character of a school (Kirp,



1982; Radenacker, Giesselmann, & Koheler, 2017; Saez & Zucman, 2014). Low income is associated with a variety of factors that directly affect students.

While some districts are undeniably failing in their mission to serve all children, public schools in the United States are the only social institutions that cannot legally turn a child away regardless of race, religion, or other classifications (Kirp, 1982). Access to public education in the United States is universal and compulsory, serving as the only public service that functions as social entitlement and social good for citizens (Carnoy & Levin, 1985). This dynamic has placed schools in a unique position to accommodate families with different perspectives on how to support students.

Superintendents, school boards, and state representatives must acknowledge that schools and communities have been separated from each other and language can be used to reunite them (Marzano, 2003; Ravitch, 2010; Fry, Taylor 2012). As praxis requires, we must put forth morally committed action. Until we can appreciate the urgency to establish schools that adapt to the unique makeup of all communities, we will continue to experience a division between schools and their rapidly diversifying neighborhoods, which include diversity of ancestry, languages, beliefs, and income levels. The United States Census of 2000 reported that 33 percent of the nation's African American children, 45 percent of Hispanic children, and 54 percent of Asian children live in suburban communities; schools must adapt their services to meet their academic needs. Census projections also confirm that European Americans will become the racial minority by 2045; therefore, schools must recognize that outdated pedagogy will not be appropriate for the changing demographics. The goal is to improve the achievement of all students while closing the gaps between the highest and lowest performing groups. The responsibility to effectively educate all underrepresented groups is rapidly approaching, and communities committed to

educating all students are being called upon to contribute authentically to the mission of closing the achievement gap. Even as students of color become a majority, racial structures limit the equitable distribution of power that is required for institutional change among different racial/ethnic groups. These structures include a lack of racial representation in teaching and administrative positions, which causes power imbalances in decision-making and consequently marginalizes underrepresented groups. When schools are open to leveraging the strengths of their diverse communities, all students have the potential to benefit from the diversity of perspectives that bring clarity, focus, and purpose (Banks, 2001).

The district of focus in this study has one of the most diverse schools in the state. More than 80 languages are spoken in the District, with 35 percent of students speaking a first language other than English. Fourteen percent of students receive English-Language Learner (ELL) services and 19 percent receive a free or reduced lunch. The racial demographics of the District comprise three percent Blacks/African Americans, 41 percent Asians, 13 percent Hispanics, 34 percent non-Hispanic Whites, and nine percent Multiracial (OSPI, 2019). The District's reputation, combined with its proximity to high-skilled jobs, has attracted an influx of educated immigrants to the area (see Appendix B). Within the last 10 years, there has been a rapid influx of demographic changes, which has changed the culture of the District. The District represents 123 countries, and 365 new students entered the District in 2018 (see Appendix B). The number of Asian language-speaking students was 185 in 2004, and by 2015, the District grew to approximately 1,600 students primarily speaking Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese, and Taiwanese Min-Nan; there were at least 800 speakers of East Indian languages. Since around 2004, the number of Chinese speakers increased by 91 percent and Eastern Indian language speakers increased by around 400 percent in 10 years (see Appendix B). Owing to the diversity

and success of the District, President Barack Obama visited the campus on February 17, 2012, to applaud the District's commitment to diversity and high levels of excellence demonstrated on local and national assessments (see Appendix A).

Noguera (2019) suggests that educational equity should not lower standards or serve one group over another but instead should ensure that all students have access to high-quality education. Initiatives focusing on educational equity should focus on all districts, whether highly resourced or underrepresented (Noguera, 2019). However, Noguera (2003) explained that diverse communities "must be approached from a different perspective" (p. 7). Instead of reprimanding and decrying that underrepresented families are not doing enough to support their children, schools need to focus their energy on supporting these families and examining how to serve them more effectively (Tyack, 1980). School leaders must call attention to the weaknesses of schools, whether these are related to unresponsive leadership or the poor quality of teaching provided to underrepresented students (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Noguera (2019) identifies that school transformation requires a common vision between leadership and staff. Leadership language can be used to unite communities to overcome barriers to academic achievement. Leaders can help communities understand their biases and presumptions that impact community, school initiatives, and the population being served. The language utilized in these documents is critical to motivating the community towards working together in order to share power and resources. Leaders, as well as the community, must be willing to ask, "Where are we going, and how are we going to get there?" All the members of the community must demonstrate active support for change and improvement, and they must be open to considering a variety of innovative strategies.

### **Problem Statement**

The District has identified lack of academic achievement as a problem among certain groups of students; these students face unique barriers that contribute to the achievement gap. The achievement gap is any significant and persistent disparity in academic performance or educational attainment among differing groups of students. Students affected by this phenomenon are at higher risk of poverty, dropping out of high school, and having lower rates of performance on state standardized assessments (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). The District is looking forward to improving the academic achievement of all students, with a focus on students who have been historically underrepresented.

The most impacted populations are homeless. Only 24 percent of homeless students passed all their courses in the ninth grade during the 2017–2018 school year in the District (OSPI, 2019). Hispanic students were the least Kindergarten ready, with only 24 percent ready for Kindergarten (OSPI, 2019). African Americans and Native Americans were the worst affected populations in terms of adequate yearly progress in English; about 45 percent of Black as well as Hispanic students made adequate yearly progress (OSPI, 2019). These data points were taken into consideration when the District and Seattle University (SU) student researchers identified the achievement gap as the phenomenon of study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to improve the academic achievement of all students, especially of those impacted by the achievement gap. The SU student researchers identified the barriers that continue to perpetuate the achievement gap and examined the practices in the District so as to support all students. The District acknowledges the historical existence of institutional racism in the United States, and knows that the broader context has systematically

limited the educational and societal advancement of people of color, including Africans/Blacks, Hispanics/Latinxs, Native Americans, Asians, and Pacific Islanders (see Appendix B). The District's goal is to ensure all students have the knowledge, skills, and experiences to successfully navigate an economically viable career pathway in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (see appendix B).

In an effort to close the achievement gap, the superintendent and the District Equity and Inclusion Leadership Team created a new mission and vision statement to ensure the adequate yearly progress of all students on state assessments. The District acknowledges that a focus on equity is paramount and culturally relevant teaching and professional development must be incorporated across the District. The District is also committed to delivering a multi-year effort in order to foster a service-oriented mindset (see Appendix B). Understanding the demographic of the District is necessary when seeking to close the achievement gap.

These improvement efforts can be examined in District documents, such as District strategic plan and individual school improvement plans. Language is important when communicating intent; if the District's language does not match their equity practices aimed at closing the achievement gap, this can lead to distrust within the community. Leadership language is the gateway to school transformation; it must be congruent, grounded in the literature, and inclusive to address the unique barriers of academic achievement.

### **Research Questions**

The District is looking for ways to improve academic achievement of all students. Family-school collaboration is the primary strategy. There are continuing debates about the most appropriate ways to meet the educational needs of all children, with additional focus on students who have been historically underrepresented. Specifically, research suggests that school-related

parental involvement is important in affecting adolescents' academic achievement (Hill & Craft, 2003; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2013) However, the effectiveness of school-related parental involvement in influencing positive adolescent academic achievement outcomes may be hindered by certain circumstances in the broader community context (McBride Murry, Berkel, Gaylord-Harden, Copeland-Linder, & Nation, 2011).

According to a recent survey, 60 percent of students and families report feeling a sense of belong within the District. Du Plessis (2019) showed that when educators build a culture of belonging where learners are valued and supported, the achievement gap reduces. The equity policy aims at closing the achievement gap but does not specify the annual goals. Our research team will assist the District in supporting the activities and goals that close the achievement gap among all students, with a focus on underrepresented students. Our team conducted a case study using document analysis to understand the barriers that inhibit academic performance. The goal of this case study is to answer the following research questions:

Q 1. How does the leadership in the District describe their strategy for leveraging family–school collaboration to improve academic achievement?

Q 2. How do family–school collaboration/partnerships address the phenomenon known as the achievement gap in a highly resourced district?

Q 3. How can the District leverage family–school partnerships to improve academic achievement for all students, with a special focus on students most impacted by the achievement gap?

### **Overview of Methodology**

This qualitative case study used a comparative case study design and District documents to review the academic achievement and resultant achievement gap (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Document collection was focused on the District annual plan, school board and superintendent communications, board minutes, individual school improvement plans, building communication, mission statements, newsletter communication, disciplinary data, digital communication, state assessments, and demographic information; however, it was not limited to these. All the documents were pulled from the public domain. Data analysis involved emergent coding, pattern matching, and taxonomy as strategies to answer the research questions, which led to categorical themes within the data. The resultant themes were used to answer the three research questions. Trustworthiness was guided by data triangulation, member checking through multiple perceptions, and coding procedures that ensure credibility (Stringer, 2014).

### **Significance of the Study**

This study will identify opportunities for the District to strengthen its strategic plan by leveraging family–school collaboration to enhance academic achievement. The document analysis will function as an audit so that the District becomes aware of initiatives that do not meet its goals. Our research will examine the congruence between what the District is mandated to do, what the District says it does, and what the District actually does to improve the academic achievement. Then, district practices will be compared to the literature in order to align the family–school collaboration with research-based solutions to close the achievement gap.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study assumes that the following limitations are not under the researchers' control (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008):

- Institutional information can be misinterpreted if the context is not considered.

- Available documents are limited, and this limits the scope of analysis. Many documents, such as school improvement plans and those available on District website, are accessible, but transcribed conversations with district personnel are limited. Most documents in the District are updated only annually or semiannually, not daily. Owing to a lack of updated documentation, the researcher may not know if the District policies have changed.
- The SU student researchers have limited access to District personnel, such as elementary school principals, director of equity, and District-level researchers. This limited access to school professionals who are directly involved with closing the achievement gap was a limitation to the present research. However, key documents outlining District policies to close the achievement gap are available publicly.
- The present study was in progress for approximately one year. There have been longitudinal effects that changed the research study. The SU student researchers were planning to conduct a qualitative study using focus groups to investigate the impact of family–school collaboration on closing the achievement gap; however, this research plan was changed, since the SU student researchers could not access participants because of COVID-19.

The SU student researchers acknowledge they have a cultural bias. This bias impacted the present study in different ways. For instance, how the problem was defined, how research questions were developed, and how reference materials were selected. The



SU student researchers acknowledge their positionality when giving their personal context in their dissertation. Although researcher bias is a limitation, it lends more credibility to the study when it is acknowledged.

### **Definition of Terms**

In this study, we avoided terms such as "minority," "non-White," and any other term that normalizes Whiteness while positioning Black, Asian, Hispanic/Latinx, and Native people as "other." Instead, we used the term "students of color" and "underrepresented groups" to describe students who do not meet the standard on state assessments. The term "students of color" and "underachieving groups" have been used widely; they have been adopted as the contemporary way to acknowledge shared experiences of people who are traditionally marginalized based on race or ethnicity in the United States context (Vidal-Ortiz, 2008). Race and ethnicity are not synonymous, but both are social constructions of the difference used to reinforce existing sociopolitical power structures (Coates, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Yudell, Roberts, Desalle, & Tishkoff, 2016). For example, ethnic groups included in definitions of the Caucasian "race" have historically varied along with sociopolitical power structures to distinguish ethnicities in power from marginalized ethnicities. For example, Irish immigrants and Mexican American residents have, at various times, been defined as White or as non-White, depending on existing sociopolitical hierarchies (Burkholder, 2012; Donato & Hanson, 2012; Donato, Guzmán & Hanson, 2017; Haney-López, 1994).

The researchers were aware that the term "achievement gap" has different meanings depending upon its usage. The use of the achievement gap in this study is more in alignment with how the term opportunity gap is used to frame how race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English proficiency, community wealth, familial status, or other factors contribute towards perpetuating

lower educational aspirations, achievements, and attainments for certain groups (Mooney, 2018). While the term "achievement gap" is used throughout this study, the researchers strongly believe that educating all students equitably is the responsibility of inequitable systems that have historically not put an emphasis in providing equitable opportunities for all students to thrive and succeed.

Equity research in education is concerned with academic achievement and fairness to close the achievement gap. Educational equity assumes that schools need to provide everyone with the necessary skills to be successful after high school. It ensures the basic minimum standard of education for all and pays attention to reading, writing, and math scores on state assessments and graduation rates of underrepresented groups. The following terms are significant when conducting equity research in education:

**Achievement gap:** The achievement gap refers to the outputs of unequal or inequitable distribution of educational benefits. It is concerned with the subgroups of United States students, typically defined by socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, and gender. It can be measured through grade point average, standardized test scores, dropout rates, or college enrollments. The achievement gap can be defined as the difference in achievement between White and minority students (Carpenter & Ramirez, 2012).

**Autocratic leadership language:** Autocratic leadership language involves the words, phrases, and actions generally associated with the style of a leader who makes all the strategic decisions for the organization. In this language, advice is rarely solicited from people outside the traditional realms of decision-making power. This language is concerned with an authoritarian leader's ideas (Kiazad, Restubog, Zagenczyk, Kiewitz, & Tang, 2010).

Culture: Schein (2010) defined culture as a series of assumptions made by an individual about the group in which he/she participates; this is a product of social learning. Culture comprises three levels: artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions.

Diversity. Diversity is an acknowledgment of the role of different beliefs, perspectives, and ideologies present within social groups in deepening cross-cultural understanding (Banks & Kohn-Wood, 2007). Students have much to gain when learning from each other. Such interactions teach students essential democratic skills and broaden their perspective, making them more tolerant and culturally literate over time (Bickmore & Parker, 2014).

Equality. Equality refers to the belief that all students should be given the same treatment and access to educational resources and opportunities regardless of their learning ability or racial, ethnic, linguistic, or socio-economic status. Underpinning the argument of providing equality in the educational system is a belief that the central purpose of public schools is to ensure greater democratic participation and social mobility for all its citizens (Labaree, 1997).

Equity: In educational research, equity is defined as providing students with differentiated levels of support and resources in order to provide them with an equal opportunity to succeed in schools (Leonardo & Grubb, 2018).

Family–school collaboration: Family–school collaboration is based on relationships and activities involving the school, staff, parents, and other family members of students. Relationships are most effective when they are based on mutual trust, respect, and shared responsibility. Moreover, schools should have congruence with families to ensure there is a fit. The school environment should be welcoming to all families and meet their needs (Glueck & Reschly, 2014).

**Inclusion:** Inclusion refers to the policies and procedures that organizations make to intentionally include diversity in social or organizational context. In many ways, inclusion is the enactment of belief in the value of diversity (Banks, 1993).

**Institutional racism:** Institutional racism is reflected in disparities regarding wealth, income, employment, criminal justice, housing, political power, health care, and education. It is perpetuated by social and political institutions. Institutional racism is a socially constructed phenomenon that changes as social, political, and economic conditions change (Headley, 2000).

**Racial equity:** Racial equity is the condition that would be achieved if racial identity stops influencing and predicting educational outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Kozol, 1991).

**Transformative leadership language.** Transformative leadership language involves words, phrases, and actions that inspire and motivate people to innovate and create change that will boost and shape the organization's future. This type of leadership language includes high standards and trusting relationships with followers (Northouse, 2016). It comprises the following qualities: idealized influence or charisma, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, contingent reward, individualized consideration, laissez-faire, and management by exception (Northouse, 2016). Transformational leadership language considers the growth of followers and places strong emphasis on morals and values (Northouse, 2016).

**Underperforming:** Underperforming is used for students who get impacted by the barriers that produce the achievement gaps.

**Underrepresented:** Underrepresented refers to those individuals, families, or groups who have been relegated to the peripheral edges of society and continue to be denied full participation in mainstream cultural, social, political, and economic decision-making. This power dynamic has

led to inequitable access to education, rights, opportunities, and resources, which perpetuates the achievement gaps.

### **Summary**

Although improving academic achievement is the goal of legislators, administrators, and teachers, the achievement gap persists despite the efforts for equity reform on a national and local scale. Some achievement gaps have narrowed in the past 50 years, but many persist. This negatively impacts our communities and does not contribute to our economy. Moreover, underrepresented students are not graduating at the same rate as their White and Asian peers. Therefore, the public strategy must move beyond improving inner-city schools, as disparities in academic performance persist across city and suburban environments. Leadership language has the potential to improve family–school collaboration, which can serve as a powerful influence in narrowing the achievement gap. This study focuses on the barriers that perpetuate and exacerbate the achievement gaps and suggests leadership solutions to close it. While overall, the District is high-performing and has an excellent reputation, there are still academically unsuccessful underrepresented groups of students. Consequently, as a strategy, the SU student researchers focused on elementary schools to understand and improve outcomes at the earliest stages of academic development through family–school collaboration and leadership solutions. In Chapter II, the researchers will focus on the history of the achievement gap and family–school engagement, the power of language, barriers contributing to achievement gaps, and solutions to address the achievement gaps. Our research team identified the barriers that contribute to the achievement gaps and the solutions to close it, as cited in the research literature in Chapter II.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

The SU student researchers conducted a relevant literature review that was critical to the research process (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). The research literature in this study was selected based on seminal works and the frequency of citations on the topic of the achievement gap. Articles were also selected based on their ongoing dialogue in the literature, filling in of gaps, and extending prior studies (Marshall & Rossaman, 2011, 2014). According to Gay et al. (2006), a literature review should involve the systematic identification, location, and analysis of documents that contain information related to the stated achievement gap and the barriers that maintain it. This literature review attempted to meet this threshold by including primary and secondary texts that span several decades; it was found that the literature is iterative in nature, showing that many of the barriers are interconnected and working in concert to maintain systems of exclusion for underrepresented groups. The literature study also provided a historical context of academic achievement and how the achievement gap came to be. With an understanding of academic achievement, the SU student researchers defined the barriers and solutions in the literature and discussed at length about how to address the achievement gap in a highly resourced school district.

Integral to the achievement gap are the underperforming students who face multiple barriers to academic success. These barriers impact their test scores, graduation rates, instructional time in the classroom, school engagement, and classroom knowledge. Data of underperforming students can be retrieved under the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, which required states to collect data on student achievement and disaggregate test

scores by race, demographics, and educational characteristics (Noguera, 2012; Ravitch, 2010). Since the inception of NCLB, state governments have mandated the use of standardized tests to hold students and schools accountable for underperformance. However, the underperforming students consistently fail to meet the standard on state assessments (Noguera, 2012; Ravitch, 2010). They are often from impoverished families belonging to different ethnic backgrounds; when the achievement gap is studied closely, it primarily appears to be due to social inequalities, with many of the gaps in achievement occurring even before the students begin school (Noguera, 2012).

In this study, the barriers that inhibit equitable achievement for underrepresented groups were of interest. If society is to create effective schools that genuinely serve all children, then closing the achievement gap will be an essential priority. When we disaggregated the educational data, a consistent pattern emerged: Race, culture, ethnicity, language, and economic status serve as powerful predictors of school success. As Howard (2019) elucidates, "Whether the measure is grades, test scores, attendance, discipline referrals, dropout or graduation rates, those students who differ most from mainstream White, middle/upper class, English speaking America, are also most vulnerable to being underserved by our nation's schools." Our research team believes that individual and institutional racism contributes to the achievement gap. According to Singleton (2006), schools were not designed to educate students of color, and "educators continue to lack the will, skill, knowledge, and capacity to affirm racial diversity" (p. 6). Owing to historical factors within the United States, there is a racial achievement gap that produces a variance of performance that is statistically connected to different racial and ethnic groups. Therefore, the achievement gap is often referred to as the racial equity gap (Singleton, 2006). To address this gap intentionally, explicitly, and comprehensively, leaders throughout the district and in the

community must identify unique factors of their community and cultivate a culture of willingness to speak up, be honest, and challenge the unaddressed educational inequities and vestiges of systematic oppression. In the process, racism will be discussed along with inequitable systems; the focus will not be on individual racism but rather on increasing achievement of underserved groups by examining macro barriers to racial group achievement (Ahram, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011). After educators with significant institutional power have identified the systemic barriers to achievement, they will be empowered as advocates to lead the deconstruction of systems that maintain inequity. Neither excellent curriculum and pedagogy nor good intentions and hard work alone are sufficient for eliminating the achievement gap for students of color. Society must invest in communities where it is safe enough for the invisible to be made visible and where those who have institutional power leverage their power to support all students of color (Howard, 2014).

Attempts to address the achievement gap without addressing the structural conditions that foster and reinforce these gaps will inevitably lead to uneven, unsustainable results and will perpetuate the gap. The research indicated that parental involvement is highly important and contributes to an increase in academic performance (Marzano, 2003). However, the problem with much of the literature on family–school collaboration is that it uses an outdated model that accommodates only middle-class European Americans (Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001).

### **History of the Achievement Gap**

It may not be wise to focus exclusively on the achievement gap as a way to understand the persistent inequality in our nation’s public schools, since this may lead to only short-term solutions; instead, it is recommended that researchers understand the underlying problem



(Chambers, 2009). Historical factors have contributed to racial disparities in educational attainment, which has contributed to an educational debt that has grown over the years.

Allen (2008) identifies that the Massachusetts Act of 1647 established schooling in North America to teach reading, writing, math, and religious studies only to White males, since public education in the United States was originally not intended to educate people of color or women.

African Americans have struggled to gain access to education since the time of slavery; during that time, they were not allowed to read or write on penalty of death (Chambers, 2009). After *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, African Americans were forced to attend segregated public schools, which often lacked resources and funding. African Americans pooled their limited resources but were double-taxed by the government, which diverted their money to White schools (Chambers, 2009). Then, in 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education* ushered in public white resistance to desegregation of public schools (Chambers, 2009).

From the 1960s to the 1980s, schools went "back to basics" (Ferguson & Mehta, 2004). This movement spread rapidly in the 1970s in response to media attention that identified failing SAT scores (Ferguson & Mehta, 2004). It was driven by the concern that children were not acquiring basic skills; it produced results-based accountability reforms, which were similar to notions of teaching to the test and diluting curriculum. In 1985, these minimum competency tests required students to pass them in order to graduate (Ferguson & Mehta, 2004).

However, this basic-skills movement was weakened, since it did not focus enough on higher-order reasoning. Critiques of the movement argued that students needed much more than basic skills. The outcome was a shift towards hiring more qualified teachers who possessed more than just the basic skills (Ferguson & Mehta, 2004). In the 1980s, only three states required initial certification testing of new teachers, but after 1990, 42 states required certification testing.

States also adopted initiatives to encourage underrepresented students to take more advanced courses (Ferguson & Mehta, 2004).

Since the 1980s, public education has sought to improve schools and school systems. Systemic reform and standards-based accountability have been used at every level of policymaking (Ferguson & Mehta, 2004); this is most evident in NCLB Act of 2001. Since *Brown v. Board of Education*, much has changed in education and much has remained the same. Segregation in schools is still widespread, and improving schools continues to be a slow process. However, even with incremental growth, many politicians are talking optimistically about improving outcomes for disadvantaged children (Ferguson & Mehta, 2004).

Ferguson and Mehta (2004) identify that Title 1 funding supplements school-level resources to address academic instruction for underprivileged students and is not a prescriptive intervention; schools have flexibility now in how they use these funds. Before 1994, Title 1 funding could only be used for the early grades, since they were identified as the ones needing the most support (Ferguson & Mehta, 2004). However, after 1994, reforms encouraged support at every grade level.

Although African Americans have fought for better education, they have encountered continual resistance, which suggests harboring of Black inferiority by members of the White community (Chambers, 2009). As a result, there are gaps in test scores, literacy, elementary school attendance, and high school completion.

With these persistent and pervasive gaps, is academic achievement possible for all students? The literature accumulated over the past 40 years is not encouraging (Lee, 2002). While hundreds of individual schools and a few districts have had success in closing the achievement gap, most districts have been unable to sustain a culture of equitable achievement.

Research suggests that repeated failures are connected to a flawed fundamental approach (Lee, 2002). Closing the achievement gap in high-resourced districts requires high levels of intellectual sophistication and cohesion amongst the entire learning community, which is not currently present in school governance models (Schlechty, 1990). Achievement gaps for racial minorities are correlated with disparities in income, poverty rates, unemployment rates, and parents' education levels. Stanford Center for Educational Policy (2012) found that the correlation between achievement gaps and socioeconomic factors were at least 62 percent for Blacks and 83 percent for Hispanics. A 2009 McKinsey study found that the average score of Black and Hispanic students on standardized tests was two to three years behind that of White students of the same age. Similarly, the wealthier states have better education scores. Half of the states with the 10 best economies (New Jersey, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Washington) have the best education scores.

The McKinsey study noted that the achievement gap cost the United States economy more than all recessions since the 1970s combined. For example, for the 10 years between 1998 and 2008, United States gross domestic product (GDP) would have been \$525 billion higher in 2008 if the race-based achievement gap had not existed. Similarly, if low-income students had the same educational achievement as their wealthier peers over that same period, they would have added \$670 billion in GDP. Why so? Because education increases the income, and this generates higher economic growth; over a lifetime, Americans with college degrees earn 84 percent more than those with only high school diplomas.

Between 1970 and 2012, racial achievement gaps shrank. Most of the gains came from an increase in Black and Hispanic achievement scores in math and reading. Concurrently, White scores remained at the same levels. The racial income and gender achievement gaps in United

States education are pervasive. Although they have been well studied, they are not clearly understood; some are tied to income, some to societal expectations, and some to structural inequality. Although the gaps are improving in some areas, they continue to impact economic growth even more than recessions. Policies that help students achieve a college degree would go a long way towards boosting economic growth.

In hope to avoid the many failures experienced by other schools, the District provided a community forum for members to discuss their concerns and recommendations regarding how to better improve outcomes for all students. Community responses provided a foundation for this study and generated new questions for the District leaders to consider. The community expects rigorous programs for all students. Families want to know how resources have been put in place to serve at-risk populations, and what is the plan to close the achievement gap (see Appendix A). Many families interpret equity as "needing more support," instead of "balancing programs and resources," to ensure all students have an opportunity to achieve. Currently, the District's approach to equity has been to develop its professionals, provide updates to policies and procedures, support leadership within student groups, and build connections with families to close the achievement gap. It uses multiple strategies in efforts to lead equity and inclusion. These strategies include identifying key supports, keeping students at the center, and being aware of blind spots (see Appendix A). It sees the value in getting buy-ins from influential stakeholders to build a unified movement that includes multiple perspectives. Families who have been underserved need to be a part of the solution, and there is a need for school personnel to examine their individual biases and implicit assumptions to prevent damage to those who are seeking support.

### **History of Family–School Engagement**

Racial and ethnic minority groups in the United States continue to face persistent and profound barriers to educational opportunity. Without acknowledging this history transparently, students are presumed to be the issue, instead of the system that has been intentionally designed to exclude them (Banks, 2010). In order to include the most underrepresented communities to narrow the gaps in academic achievement, research suggests bringing parents, families, and students into the internal and external structures of how schools operate and function.

Research on school practices and family involvement in the 1980s began to challenge the prevailing theories of schools, which held the belief that schools were most effective when they operated independent of families and communities (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001; Waller, 1932). Epstein (1987) developed a model that overlaps the spheres of influence of both families and schools. His theory addressed the impact of family engagement and how it can be leveraged at different grade levels. The author also integrated and extended the ecological model of Bronfenbrenner (1986) to connect to other institutions that could be of benefit to academic achievement. Epstein's work connected to Meyer's (1974) work on the emphasis given to shared responsibility and the long tradition of sociological and psychological research on school and family environments. Epstein and Sanders (2000) worked to develop models on how social capital is developed by parents, educators, and community members in the exchange of information, and how they could assist one another and help students succeed in school.

The model of overlapping spheres of influence includes both external and internal structures. The external structure represents the multiple contexts of home, school, and community, which overlap depending on the philosophies and practices of the concerned entities. The model considers the age or grade level of the student, which may affect the context,

participants, and practices of partnership. The internal structure of the model presents paths of interaction for educators, families, and community members within and across contexts at the institutional and individual levels.

It is assumed that a child's success in school is a reason for connections at home; therefore, children have been placed at the center of the model. Students are often the main conductors of two-way communication between school and home and also the interpreters to their families regarding information about school and community activities. Overall, the external and internal structures of overlapping spheres of influences recognize the interlocking histories of institutions that motivate, socialize, and educate children and the changing skills and interactions of individuals in those contexts.

Research confirms that diverse cultural groups are a major influence on children's learning that develops from preschool and goes through high school (Banks, 2010). Other research shows that school programs are important for determining whether families become productively involved in their children's education and which families do so. The sections of this chapter converge in suggesting that two main connections must be made and strengthened.

First, family and community involvement needs to be explicitly about students' learning and development. Second, the board, district, and school need to be clearer about how they communicate their message and how that language leads to improving and increasing involvement of all families. This combination of educational restructuring could help many more students of all cultural backgrounds.

### **The Power of Language**

Our ability to use language in a sophisticated manner is the single distinguishing characteristic that sets us apart from other animals (Mooney & Evans, 2018). Language has

enabled humans to bring to fruition inventions that have made social progress possible.

Language is fundamental to how we view the world and serves as the bridge between the present and the possible future. When leaders use effective language, it influences thinking and emotions, which can contribute to solving our most complex problems (Lindquist, 2009).

Complex problems in a community should lie within an appropriate context that encourages all groups to contribute their expertise (Mooney & Evans, 2018). This requires specific words and phrases that encourage all the stakeholders in the process. Effective leaders do this by creating linguistic messages and embedding them in their communication to prompt cognitive shifts that motivate, challenge, and cause groups to reflect on their entrenched worldviews

(Foldy, Goldman, & Ospina, 2008). These linguistic messages become the contextual frameworks used to create the sensemaking needed for action. In creating and exchanging meaning, good leaders translate psychological experiences into an explicit and communicative form that explains the "why" behind their decision. This process of meaning-making helps diverse groups tackle complex problems, such as closing the achievement gap. According to Pettigrew, Woodman, and Cameron (2001), "The language of change can be a liberating force or an analytical prison." Change initiatives can support growth or be restrictive based on the language used by the leader. Leaders at the top of the organization are uniquely positioned to set the tone with their leadership language.

### **Leadership Language**

A community interprets a leader's language through its own interpretive lens, which means that information may be processed in an unintended manner (Schein, 2010).

Consequently, leaders and language communities must adjust their words for impact. Language can be used to address the certainty people seek; it can change people and has the potential to

influence culture (Schein, 2010). Therefore, the type of language used to tell stories about a community must bring people together rather than pushing them apart.

**Transformational leadership.** Transformational leadership relies upon change agents who are good role models (Northouse, 2016). These leaders create a clear vision through articulation and empowerment of followers. This type of leadership language includes high standards and trusting relationships with followers (Northouse, 2016). It comprises the following qualities: idealized influence or charisma, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, contingent reward, individualized consideration, laissez-faire, and management by exception (Northouse, 2016). Transformational leadership language considers the growth of followers and places strong emphasis on morals and values (Northouse, 2016).

**Autocratic leadership.** Autocratic leadership language is authoritarian in nature and exercises control over key decisions with minimal input from community members (Kiazad et al., 2010). Advice is rarely solicited from people outside the traditional realms of decision-making power. This language is concerned with an authoritarian leader's ideas (Kiazad et al., 2010). Characteristics and style of this leadership do not allow for input; leaders make unilateral decisions and dictate work methods; trust is low, creativity is discouraged, most decisions happen within the box, and rules are clearly outlined and communicated (Kiazad et al., 2010).

**Leadership documents.** The development of the district strategic plan and individual school improvement plans should involve school and district leaders, families, and community members; however, unfortunately, these participants do not have equal power in the decision-making process. This can lead to unequal development of district policies and school-wide practices that traditionally revert to hierarchical leadership. Schools are in a position to offer choices to parents, which can be likened to patriarchal authority offering choices to children;



both are what a leader wants, and both serve autocratic outcomes with the illusion of choice. By offering choices, schools can avoid power struggles, thereby maintaining their authority. Schools may rely on autocratic leadership since it allows for quick decision-making, whereas transformative leadership is community-oriented and depends on consensus (Northouse, 2016). The principle drawback of autocratic leadership is that it hurts morale and can lead to resentment in the community. Family–school collaboration is the principle strategy that can be leveraged to address the barriers to student achievement. Families have unique expertise that can aid district leaders in addressing the barriers to achievement.

### **Barriers and Solutions to Address the Achievement Gap**

Chapter II reviews the 10 major barriers that perpetuate the achievement gap: (a) schools have all the power, (b) conflict of cultural values, (c) cultural differences in kindergarten readiness, (d) self-fulfilling stereotypes about student abilities and behaviors, (e) racial inequities in school discipline, (f) inability of educators to engage all parents, (g) inequitable access to technology, (h) traditional structures minimize the capacity of building-level leadership, (i) consensus decision-making slows change, and (j) lack of incentive to change internal school governance. As the District looks to narrow down the achievement gap, family–school collaboration has been identified as the primary research-based strategy to close the gap (Marzano, 2003).

Chapter II also reviews leadership solutions to close the achievement gap: (a) empowering parents as change agents, (b) moving from power over parents to relational power with parents to build collaboration, (c) adopting community-organizing approach, (d) building the capacity of underrepresented parents so they understand school systems and advocate for themselves, (e) ensuring excellent cross-cultural communication and understanding, (f)

facilitating and modeling team learning, (g) constructing knowledge through framing, (h) utilizing data to make decisions, and (i) sensemaking to challenge and motivate thinking.

Barriers and solutions were selected from the literature to provide context to the achievement gap at the national and local level.

### **Family–School Collaboration to Close the Achievement Gap**

Barrier 1 to family–school collaboration is that schools have all the power. Research indicates that people belonging to dominant cultures do not think that they have a distinct culture, and only people of color have distinct cultures (Schlechty, 1990). The White middle-class culture is prominent and dominant in schools to the point that it seems invisible. Stereotypical views of educators do not let them see parents as equal partners (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). The dominant assumption has been "just give us your children," which is often code for "be obedient to authority," "be on grade level," "be ready to learn," and "speak English as a first language" (Noguera, 2003). In this model, parents serve the educational system, since educators are the ones setting the pace and framing the discussion (Deschenes, Cuban & Tyack, 2001). This stereotype of good parents drives attitudes and behaviors, causing families to feel unwelcomed in many schools (Marzano, 2003). The number of solutions that can be used to improve parental involvement are ubiquitous, and schools need to work to remove unique obstacles that are impacting the students and families being served (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). Trusty, Mellin, and Herbert (2008) acknowledge that family and community involvement are positive influences on student achievement, but schools struggle to partner with families in meaningful ways. According to the authors, the most common obstacles that reduce family–school collaboration are cultural barriers and difficulties in accessing resources.

A solution to Barrier 1 is positive student–teacher relationships. Trusty et al. (2008) identify that positive student–teacher relationships and safe school environments are associated with higher student-reported grades. There is a strong positive correlation between family involvement and academic achievement (Trusty et al., 2008).

Barrier 2 to family–school collaboration is conflict of cultural values. Cultural barriers are a significant obstacle to family–school collaboration, especially when school staff in the District have limited training to work with diverse families; this is a significant barrier to closing the achievement gap, since European American middle-class culture impedes the academic success of underrepresented groups (Trusty et al., 2008).

As a result of tenuous relationships, conflict can lead to a lack of trust among schools, families, and communities; this is evidenced by teachers perceiving that parents do not care about what their child does and parents perceiving that schools are too fixated on testing (Trusty et al., 2008). This conflict of values does not serve the education of underrepresented students and perpetuates misunderstandings and a lack of trust. Schools struggle to maintain their social capital with families, which is necessary for building meaningful partnerships to close the achievement gap for underrepresented students.

When families or communities attempt to engage with schools, they are often met with a culture of education that views them through a deficit lens. Educators describe good parents as those who attend regular parent group meetings; volunteer to help raise money and help carry out school activities and show up at theater productions, award ceremonies, sporting events, and other important school-sponsored events (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). This perception of a good parent also includes responding quickly to any contact from the school about problems, supporting the school’s method of disciplining their children, treating the teachers or

administrators with respect and deference, and further disciplining students at home to reinforce school expectations (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). Most educators know that this is a false reality and parents at any school are far from this model of "good parents." There are two main problems with this model. First, it reinforces the notion that the school is primary and parents need to mold themselves into what the school wants. Second, it unconsciously assumes a European American middle-class cultural model that does not fit well with many of the schools' children, parents, and communities (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003).

Most educators, like most people, grow up and live in communities that reflect their background, and have only a few opportunities to interact with people from other racial, ethnic, language, and social-class groups (Banks, 2001). Despite changes in teacher preparation and professional development in recent decades, many teachers still have only a few or inconsistent opportunities to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to work effectively in culturally diverse educational communities.

A solution to Barrier 2 is building trust. Equity in education should be about bringing diverse people together and supporting their educational needs. There must be trust for this to occur. Dialogues must occur in psychologically safe places, so that the task-related conflict can ensure equity plans are implemented to close the achievement gap. To ensure understanding occurs with equity initiatives, building trust with all communities is essential to reduce relationship-related conflict. "Parental involvement, in almost any form, produces measurable gains in student achievement" (Dixon, 1992, p. 16; Marzano, 2003). David, Teddlie, and Reynolds (2000) highlighted the importance of the community by indicating that family involvement includes elements of community involvement.

LaRocque, Kleiman, and Darling (2011) identify that regardless of the origin or cause of the achievement gap, school improvement requires the collaboration of all families, since different groups have different concerns and perspectives regarding how to address the achievement of their students. Therefore, families have different needs and should not be treated the same.

Barrier 3 to family–school collaboration is cultural differences in kindergarten readiness. Reardon and Galindo (2009) identify that Latinx children have the least school readiness in their kindergarten year when compared to White and Black children. Limited English acquisition in combination with school curricula and instructional practices contributes to achievement gaps for Latinx students. A contributing factor may be that Latinx parents with limited English proficiency may face difficulty supporting academic learning in English (Reardon & Galindo, 2009). Additionally, Latinx families from other countries may be less familiar with the instructional practices and expectations of schools in the United States (Reardon & Galindo, 2009). Latinx students belonging to Mexican and Central American descent enter kindergarten with academic math scores approximately one standard deviation below European American students (Reardon & Galindo, 2009). Latinx students from Cuban, Puerto Rican, and South American origins begin kindergarten with scores approximately half a standard deviation below European American students. These demographic differences illustrate the wide range of achievement among Latinx students and profound differences within other demographic groups. Even with intragroup differences, Black and Latinx students have equally low achievement levels when compared to European American students (Reardon & Galindo, 2009). However, as Black and Latinx students move through school, they follow different achievement trajectories;

achievement gaps for Black students continue to grow, whereas achievement gaps between Latinx and European American students reduce (Reardon & Galindo, 2009).

A solution to Barrier 3 is investing in early childhood education. Heckman (2011) suggests that inequality in the educational development of human beings produces negative social and economic outcomes. Therefore, it makes sense to invest in early childhood education at the elementary level. Inequality in early childhood causes inequality in ability, achievement, educational success, and health outcomes (Heckman, 2011). Children who experience a high-quality education in the early grades develop more than just academic skills; they also develop character skills, such as attentiveness, impulse control, perseverance, and sociability (Heckman, 2011). The author identified that cognition and personality contribute to educational success and that personality is often ignored as a key determinant for educational success outcomes.

Barrier 4 to family–school collaboration is self-fulfilling stereotypes about student abilities and behaviors. Students from underrepresented groups consistently receive messages from educators about their "ability" and experience being behind academically for so long that they internalize these messages as their truth. Rosenthal and Jacobsen (1968) found that teachers' expectations are often a self-fulfilling prophecy. Saphier (2016) suggests "Students are profoundly influenced by the messages they get from the significant people in their lives about their ability." Teachers' beliefs about students' abilities may be unconsciously communicated through body language, tone of voice, and choice of words and behavior.

Morris and Perry (2016) discussed how the achievement gaps contribute to racial inequalities in employment, incarceration, and health in later adulthood. These gaps in achievement begin even before students enter kindergarten and progressively become larger as they move through school. One of the factors perpetuating achievement gaps is school-wide

discipline. Punishment varies considerably with race, and exclusionary forms of punishment that extract students from the classroom have detrimental effects on academic progress. School suspensions began to increase in the 1990s, and progress towards narrowing the achievement gap waned (Morris & Perry, 2016). This observation suggests that school-level processes continue to reproduce the racial achievement gaps. African American and Latinx students are significantly more susceptible to suspension when compared to Asian American and European American students. This is true for African Americans even when controlling for socioeconomic status (Morris & Perry, 2016). Morris and Perry found that students who were suspended scored substantially lower on end-of-year academic progress tests than those who were not. Moreover, students with a propensity towards school suspensions in previous years performed worse during the years they were suspended than during the years they were not (Morris & Perry, 2016).

Gregory and Mosely (2004) show that most disciplinary actions are initiated in classrooms by teachers and that because of cultural differences between educators and students, students of color are disciplined at much higher rates. Monroe (2016) elaborates on the topic of racial stereotype threat by saying that it is informed by preconceived ideas of the dominant culture about what students of color are like and how they behave.

A solution to Barrier 4 is professional development for culturally responsive teaching. To eliminate the achievement gap, Saphier (2016) suggests that educators should work to change the minds of students about their supposed low ability and persuade them to a different frame of thinking. This shift in thinking brings educators face to face with their beliefs about student capacity and their biases, racial assumptions, and doubts about students' abilities. Specific strategies for helping students develop a growth mindset are highly effective in combating students' low expectations and confidence (Saphier, 2016). Changing belief systems requires

consistent self-observance and self-reflection on the teachers' part so as to ensure they are consistently communicating high expectations to all students; this can be achieved through professional development. Professional development should focus on building teachers' cultural competency and encouraging classroom applications of culturally responsive teaching practices, which are critical in building bridges of understanding and authentic student–teacher relationships that support the closure of the achievement gap (Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010, p. 198; Saphier, 2016).

How teachers understand race impacts the maintenance or interruption of the achievement gap (Castro et al., 2010; Gregory & Mosely, 2004). Recent research on closing the achievement gap focuses on the attitudes and beliefs of teachers. Gregory and Mosley (2004) identify the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy in closing the achievement gap. Teachers must acknowledge race and culture and how racism and discrimination affect students. They are now encouraged to consider their own racial and cultural identity and how this shapes their approach to teaching (Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Miller & Mikulec, 2014).

Barrier 5 to family–school collaboration is racial inequities in school discipline. Morris & Perry (2016) discussed how the achievement gaps contribute to racial inequalities in employment, incarceration, and health in later adulthood. These gaps in achievement begin even before students enter kindergarten and progressively become larger as they move through school. One of the factors perpetuating achievement gaps is school-wide discipline. Punishment varies considerably with race, and exclusionary forms of punishment that extract students from the classroom have detrimental effects on academic progress. School suspensions began to increase in the 1990s, and progress towards narrowing down the achievement gap waned (Morris & Perry, 2016). This observation suggests that school-level processes continue to reproduce the



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A solution to Barrier 5 is creating psychological safety in parent–teacher dialogues. Walker (2016) identifies that positive teacher–parent interactions enhance student learning and engagement, and the opposite is true when parents and teachers fail to communicate. Parent–teacher interactions improve student outcomes by enhancing the teachers' perceptions of students and the students' perceptions of their teachers. Walker identifies that districts would benefit from understanding the tone of parents' engagement. Although it is not so important that districts assess the knowledge of parents, the way they engage or not with the District is important. With higher levels of established trust, parents are more likely to initiate communication with the districts and their dialogues are likely to be more productive. Based on the confidence that families and school professionals want the best for their children, trust requires both parties to be vulnerable with each other. Often, examining trust can damage it; so it must be examined with

caution. Schools with high trust are positively correlated with higher academic achievement (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004).

Cook, Shah, Brodsky, and Morizio (2017) identify that central focus of community dialogue should be on including conversations on what families feel is important. These forums should allow parents to share important topics of concern in their communities as they experience them. Voices must be heard so that ideas about equity can be expressed. Task-related conflict may occur, and this ensures that a dialogue of understanding can happen. If an exchange of idea morphs into personal attacks or relationship-related conflicts, trust diminishes.

To join a community with a shared vision and take action for change, families must feel they have a voice (Cook et al., 2017). Dialogues can strengthen partnership among school employees, families, and communities; however, these conversations may continue to be uncomfortable (Cook et al., 2017). Cook et al. (2017) identify the ways in which dialogues break down the barriers to family–school engagement. To shift traditional power dynamics, it is important to create a safe space in the community where experiences can be shared. The voices of communities of color often go unheard, which results in limited outreach (Cook et al., 2017).

Family–school collaboration increases student satisfaction with their education, which results in fewer disciplinary problems. Moreover, with increased family–school collaboration, parents become more aware of the academic needs of their children, they develop more positive attitudes towards teachers, and families develop higher educational aspirations for their children. All these factors contribute to closing the achievement gap. When teachers provide parents with specific ways to volunteer, parents are more likely to participate in their children’s education. LaRocque et al. (2011) identified that 67 percent of parents never meet teachers informally. Meeting parents regularly is crucial for educational achievement (LaRocque et al., 2011). If

teachers provide a variety of meeting times, there is a greater likelihood that parents will find time to attend parent–teacher conferences.

Barrier 6 to family–school collaboration is the inability of educators to engage with all parents. Research has extended our understanding of the role of parents and families in schooling beyond their role of reinforcing schools' cultural expectations (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Foster, Berger, & McLean, 1981). The research conducted by Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, and Davies (2007) trended towards a more inclusive role of families in schools and considered the impact of the home culture on schooling. Posey-Maddox (2017) identifies that school districts primarily interact with mothers and often negate the importance of fathers in their students' academic achievement.

LaRocque et al. (2011) found that teachers do not know how to use parents effectively to facilitate their children's education. Also, parents are not sure how to get involved in their children's education. This is particularly true for African American and Latinx families.

A solution to Barrier 6 is equitable parental involvement. Higher parental involvement is a strategy to close the achievement gaps for students. Fathers are an important part of their children's academic success. Posey-Maddox (2017) identifies that fathers of many underrepresented students predominantly take the role of helping their children with goal setting, reinforcing classroom learning, giving advice, being present, being aware of educator bias, and intervening on behalf of their children.

LaRocque et al. (2011) identifies that ongoing communication can build trust between parents and teachers. Higher levels of parental involvement have been associated with improved student attendance, higher graduation rates, higher reading and math scores, and less grade retention, which all contribute to closing the achievement gap (LaRocque et al., 2011).

Barrier 7 to family–school collaboration is inequitable access to technology. Valadez and Duran (2007) identify that highly resourced schools have more physical access to computers and Internet, which contributes to better student outcomes. This technology is not fully accessible to underrepresented groups. Although connection to the Internet has increased, some portions of the population still do not have the same level of digital access in this information age (Valadez & Duran, 2007). Valadez and Duran noted that Whites and Asian Americans have higher rates of computer and Internet access than Blacks and Latinos. The digital divide is not so much that groups have less access to the internet, but they do have different kind of access (Valadez & Duran, 2007). Students from low-income households often only have access to computers at school, while students from high-income households extend their learning to home, further contributing to the achievement gap.

A solution to Barrier 7 is financial accountability for learning improvement. The key leadership act would be to put the money where the rhetoric is by making achievement gaps a basic reference point for resource-related decisions (Halverson & Plecki, 2015). Leaders can organize schools by aligning resources for learning improvement. When resources are allocated, they need accountability systems to ensure they are used to address achievement gaps.

Barrier 8 to family–school collaboration is that the traditional structures minimize the capacity of building-level leadership. Unfortunately, owing to the competing interests of diverse communities, the interplay of governmental bodies and special interest groups has made reform efforts even more challenging. With the increase of diversity and mobility among families, school culture is rapidly changing, even for the most stable suburban and rural communities. Chubb and Moe (1991) argue that the political nature of public schools significantly impedes school reform and contributes to the achievement gap. Their research concluded that the most

effective schools were characterized by a high level of professional autonomy at the individual building level, and they advocated for privatization as the only way to achieve substantive school reform.

A solution to Barrier 8 is providing guidance at the state level, targeting the achievement gap initiatives (Spring, 1993).

Barrier 9 to family–school collaboration is that consensus decision-making slows the change. Action by consensus slows down the change process, and it can dilute the magnitude of the changes attempted (McAdams, 1997). This prolongs the closure of the achievement gap. School systems are not well suited to responding quickly to changing environments. The current structure encourages an incremental rather than a radical approach towards reforms. In an analysis of organizational structures, Mintzberg (1989) identifies five basic types of organizations; this model of professional bureaucracy most accurately identifies schools, since teachers perform the critical activities of the organization (Mintzberg, 1989). Mintzberg's professional bureaucracy is characterized by autonomy at the operations level. This model makes it challenging to make systematic changes. Teachers see principals and central office administrators as middle managers who ideally play a supportive and subordinate role in the actual instructional process. Teachers want autonomy and convincing them to change their instruction is a time-consuming process fraught with practical and political landmines (McAdams, 1996).

Madsen and Mabokela (2014) suggest that school districts are often influenced by how members socialize and how they fit within the new cultural values being established. This misalignment of values held by the members of the dominant culture can inhibit the transformation and block the momentum of change. This phenomenon is described by Fullan

(2011) as the implementation dip. This dip is marked by a decline in the productivity and morale of the dominant culture because of the tension and anxieties generated by educators, parents, and students attempting to deal with the unforeseen issues that emerge with integrating new values. This is typical when accountability initiatives are presented, and values of past practice are threatened. Some communities value political stability regardless of the needs of struggling minority groups (Grady & Bryant, 1991). This desire for the status quo will continue to perpetuate the achievement gap unless the right people at the right place and time create the synergy to exercise positive school reform and move past the implementation dip.

A solution to Barrier 9 is that principals must mitigate conflicts successfully before they develop strategies to build the school community. Madsen and Mabokela (2014) identify that leading diverse schools requires principals to understand how their participants are socialized and incorporated into the organization. Leaders must be able to construct groups in which all opinions are accepted, so that relationships within a collective are established (Madsen & Mabokela, 2014). In this environment, leaders must be conscious of their image while navigating diverse contexts to maintain their credibility and facilitate trust in their organization (Madsen & Mabokela, 2014). When educators build a culture of belonging where learners are valued and supported, the achievement gap closes (Du Plessis, 2019).

Barrier 10 to family–school collaboration is lack of incentive to change internal school governance. Teachers may have norms and values that are outdated with respect to the changing demographics. As demographics continue to shift and teaching practices do not address the needs of these groups, the achievement gap may widen. This problem is magnified when teachers are not given the time to collaborate (Madsen & Mabokela, 2014). Power structures in a school often gravitate towards seniority, which slows down the change processes (Madsen & Mabokela,

2014). Strong school cultures are resistant to change, since a hierarchy of power reinforces norms. Often, teachers are the suspects of data usage and equity initiatives, since it is presented in the context of an accountability framework. This means that if specific benchmarks are not met, sanctions are attached to performance. This is demonstrated in a study that was conducted on secondary school teachers. Teachers reported that they felt data was used as a sanctioning tool to fit predetermined decisions rather than as information to shape decisions (Ingram, Louis, & Schroeder, 2004).

A solution to Barrier 10 is to develop a learning culture. Research suggests that leaders can facilitate two sense-making cultures: an accountability culture where test scores are the focus and a learning culture where data identifies problems and monitors compliance. The second approach is defined as an organizational learning culture, which emphasizes student learning and institutional improvement (Schein, 2010). This approach has a long-term scope and includes principal and teacher voices in how systems are to be implemented.

### **Leadership to Close the Achievement Gap**

School leaders must engage parents who share systemic goals aimed at building relationships; this is positively correlated with academic achievement and the resulting closure of the achievement gap. This model of leadership stands in contrast to traditional partnerships that emphasize the family deficits (Ishimaru, 2014). In this model, superintendents must require the parent's involvement. When partnerships occur between school and community, student achievement is bolstered, since more resources are leveraged.

Leadership Solution 1 to close the achievement gap is empowering parents as change agents. Community outreach programs historically have been designed for White, middle-class normative populations. Typical parent involvement in public education assigns parents a passive

role in maintaining school culture, which in turn maintains the achievement gap. Instead, public education needs to move towards empowering parents as change agents who can transform public education. School leaders must build the “dual capacity” of parents and educators when working together to support student learning (Ishimaru, 2019).

Leadership Solution 2 to close the achievement gap is moving from power over parents to relational power with parents to build collaboration (Ishimaru, 2019). Schools usually assume families do not have the knowledge to improve their children's learning. However, a growing literature suggests families do have the knowledge and resources to transform practices in schools. Changing relationship interactions will transform the political context needed to sustain new practices; this in turn will close the achievement gap.

Leadership Solution 3 to close the achievement gap is a community-organizing approach. When families are viewed from a deficit perspective, they are often seen as part of the problem rather than as a resource to solve the problem (Ishimaru, 2014). In response to unsuccessful methods of engaging underrepresented families, a community-organizing approach may be effective in influencing decision-makers in institutions. This method of school reform challenges deficit notions of families by strengthening their capacity and leadership to cocreate learning environments (Ishimaru, 2014). Leadership is an important factor in the success of organizational reform. When families feel empowered to question educational practices and advocate for change, the political system of schools may change (Ishimaru, 2014). Adaptive challenges to family–school collaboration should be addressed to redesign family events, so that they work effectively for families.

Leadership Solution 4 to close the achievement gap is to build the capacity of underrepresented parents, so that they understand school systems and advocate for themselves.



Superintendents often frame their decisions about schools based on objective data while overlooking underrepresented families (Ishimaru, 2014). Instead, school leaders should view families as experts of their children's culture, native language, learning needs, and community context (Ishimaru, 2014). School leaders must build the capacity of families by teaching them about educational systems, how decisions are made in schools, and how to self-advocate. Educators must learn about their students' families and how to share leadership with them (Ishimaru, 2014). Social capital is necessary to accomplish this. Bonding with families and bridging differences is needed for wide-sweeping school reform (Ishimaru, 2014).

Leadership Solution 5 to close the achievement gap is to ensure there is excellent cross-cultural communication and understanding. Administrators do not adopt laissez-faire leadership, since subcultures protect their own interests (Schein, 2010). However, administrators can improve their practices as leaders when they acknowledge that culture is interconnected and intrinsically complex, not linear (Schein, 2010) and that there is not one factor for underachievement but multiple factors. Therefore, solutions must take this into consideration. Educators should acknowledge that even the concept of learning is heavily influenced by cultural assumptions (Schein, 2010).

Leadership Solution 6 to close the achievement gap is to facilitate and model team learning. This requires systems to think within their leadership group and exercise direct political leadership with the broader community (Glass, 1992). Leaders must be aware of the needs in their district and advocate to the school board for funding to address them. Superintendents must not only have a vision for their district but also must be able to continuously adapt their vision to the changing external environment (Schein, 2010).

Leadership Solution 7 to close the achievement gap is to construct knowledge through framing. Constructing knowledge through framing is an important leadership strategy that needs careful consideration when reforms are introduced and implemented. Framing is conceptualized as a persuading tactic intended to garner and maintain support for reform. Structuring the use of information allows educators to make decisions. If data use is to be a productive strategy in equity improvement, leaders and others need to explicitly define data use and articulate the processes that will produce concrete actions and outcomes. This calls for leaders to improve their ability to frame the sensemaking of policy messages, so that they resonate with local populations. Formal leaders and those in power have more opportunities to leverage and regulate behavior by shaping what is valued or discounted and what is privileged or suppressed (Coburn & Talbert, 2006; Firestone, Fitz, & Broadfoot, 1999). Leaders, given their position in the power structure, have the authority to guide and direct the sensemaking process.

Leadership Solution 8 to close the achievement gap is utilizing data to make decisions. Utilizing data-driven decision-making (DDDM) in concert with framing can create the right motivation to stimulate the action needed to inspire cultural change. DDDM refers to the systematic gathering and analysis of data to inform decisions (Earl & Katz, 2006; Marsh, Pane, & Hamilton, 2006). Leaders primarily focus on the technical and structural dimensions of data use and not enough on how "local leaders" strategically construct sensemaking. Sensemaking is defined as an active and dynamic process by which leaders and groups make meaning of experiences and ideas (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). Sahin (2004) argues that research on school change and policy implementation overemphasizes practices and behaviors such as data use and neglects the importance of changing the current school culture or the tacit thoughts and beliefs of the community members. Without a focus on tacit beliefs and assumptions held by

leaders and community, reforms often fail in their implementation (Coburn, Toure, & Yamashita, 2009; Datnow, Park, & Kennedy, 2008; Sahin, 2004). Without critical dialogue offering alternative views, the prevalent deficit model describing students' capabilities is reinforced and perpetuated (Lipman, 1997; Oaks, Wells, Jones, & Datnow, 1997).

Leadership Solution 9 to close the achievement gap requires sensemaking to challenge and motivate thinking. Datnow et al. (2008) recommends focusing on the strategic framing of data by district and school-level leaders. Sensemaking can challenge and motivate the thinking, leading to the closure of the achievement gap. Framing requires a deep understanding of existing practices and beliefs, as well as of possible solutions embedded within a new or existing theory of change (Coburn, 2001; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). Focusing on sensemaking as a process through which leaders use data for meaning-making in policy implementation can increase buy-in and credibility initiatives. To shift the culture through framing, the following core tasks must be articulated: (a) diagnostic framing; this involves defining the problem and assigning blame and/or responsibility, (b) prognostic framing; this involves articulating how the problem may be solved, including strategies for achieving goals, and (c) motivating framing; this requires the rationale for how action can be articulated (Benford & Snow, 2000). Although the District sets the tone and defines the institutional context of equity policy, building-level leaders are needed to frame the message and define the three core tasks as they apply to their students, teachers, and community. Local-level leadership is crucial, since it is the bridge that determines participant buy-in and equity implementation to close the achievement gap (Spillane et al., 2002).

### Summary

Chapter II reviews the history of the achievement gap and the history of family–school engagement to understand how school systems were first established and evolved to their current state. This fundamental understanding is critical, as leaders utilize language to inspire inclusivity and transformation. Chapter II reviews the 10 major barriers that perpetuate the achievement gap and the nine leadership solutions to close it. The following barriers were identified: Barrier # 1: schools have all the power; Barrier # 2: conflict of cultural values; Barrier # 3: cultural differences in kindergarten readiness; Barrier # 4: self-fulfilling stereotypes about student abilities and behaviors; Barrier # 5: racial inequities in school discipline; Barrier # 6: inability of educators to engage all parents; Barrier # 7: inequitable access to technology; Barrier # 8: traditional structures minimize the capacity of building-level leadership; Barrier # 9: consensus decision-making slows change; and Barrier # 10: lack of incentive to change internal school governance. Chapter II also reviewed Leadership Solutions to close the achievement gap, which were: Leadership Solution # 1: empowering parents as change agents; Leadership Solution # 2: moving from power over parents to relational power with parents to build collaboration; Leadership Solution # 3: a community organizing approach; Leadership Solution # 4: build the capacity of underrepresented parents so they understand school systems and advocate for themselves; Leadership Solution # 5: ensure there is excellent cross-cultural communication and understanding; Leadership Solution # 6: facilitate and model team learning; Leadership Solution # 7: construct knowledge through framing; Leadership Solution # 8: utilizing data to make decisions; Leadership Solution # 9: sensemaking to challenge and motivate thinking. Barriers and solutions were selected from the literature to provide context of the achievement gap. Chapter III reviews the research methodology for this study.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter contains the rationale for the methods that were used in this study and an overview of qualitative research methods. In this chapter, the SU student researchers present the design of the study and research questions and describe the documents being analyzed. The researchers conclude the chapter with a description of the organization and analysis of the data. This is a qualitative case study of the District, analyzing the impact of family–school collaboration and leadership on the efforts to close the achievement gap.

#### **Rationale**

The purpose of the qualitative research is to contextualize and interpret data in a naturalistic setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Qualitative researchers employ an iterative process to explore and explain a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Creswell (2013), the data should hold the key to the research questions. Researchers are the instruments in the qualitative research, focusing on the process by collecting and analyzing open-ended data, interpreting findings, and presenting interpretation. Qualitative research is optimal for developing detailed descriptions, integrating multiple perspectives on a subject or process, describing a process, learning how an event is interpreted, and bridging intersubjectivities (Weiss, 1995).

#### **Overview of the Problem and Research Questions**

In this overview, the achievement gap in the District is the identified problem and phenomenon of the study. Our research team hoped to discover barriers that prevent the narrowing down of the achievement gap, with family collaboration and leadership as strategies to

close it. Often, families feel like they do not have permission to engage with schools, and they become apprehensive about meeting school officials. Leaders must find ways to engage with families to improve family–school collaboration so as to close the achievement gap. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) identify that parents’ perceived effectiveness governs their efforts to collaborate with the school. Invitations and opportunities for involvement must be presented by the District so that families can engage as equal partners and provide the insight that will help the school create healthier cultures correlated with higher academic performance. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler note that parents develop beliefs and understandings regarding their roles when they collaborate with educators. Parents must believe that their insights are valued. Underrepresented groups may feel excluded and develop cultural-role expectations that limit their interaction with the District. It is important for all racial groups to have "a seat at the table"(see Appendix A). Parents who are treated as experts in how their children learn are more likely to engage with the school and provide information on how educators can support the children. To that end, the District wanted to identify how schools have reached out to families to develop inclusive partnerships. Documents were selected primarily on factors related to closing the achievement gaps at lower-performing schools, as suggested in the literature review in Chapter II.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the problems identified by the District, three questions guided this study:

Q 1. How does the leadership in the District describe their strategy for leveraging family–school collaboration to improve academic achievement?

Q 2. How do family–school collaboration/partnerships address the phenomenon known as the achievement gap in a highly resourced district?

Q 3. How can the District leverage family–school partnerships to improve academic achievement for all students, with a special focus on students most impacted by the achievement gap?

### **Research Perspective**

This qualitative study analyzed the District documents to identify how to improve relations between the District and its community for the purpose of closing the achievement gap. Qualitative research identifies data to generate specific solutions to problems (Stringer, 2014). Physical artifacts or documents can aid in the codification of articulated knowledge (Redding, Cannata, & Miller, 2018). District artifacts/documents must be analyzed, sorted into themes, and compared to the research literature to understand practices that close achievement gaps and those that maintain or widen them among schools. A document analysis reviews how family–school collaboration and leadership are leveraged within the individual school cultures to improve academic outcomes for all students, especially for underrepresented students. Depending on how family–school collaboration and leadership are leveraged within schools, they have the potential to narrow down the achievement gap.

The SU student researchers selected a phenomenological approach for this qualitative study. The phenomenon identified by the District was the achievement gap. SU student researchers considered using grounded theory as an inquiry method and accepted the District’s identified problem as the phenomenon of this study. A phenomenology is most often used when researchers conduct interviews; however, for the purposes of this study, researchers conducted a document analysis because of a lack of access to human subjects owing to COVID-19. A phenomenological approach focuses on the commonality of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Documents are read and reread, then organized for phrases and themes that are grouped to form

clusters of meaning (Creswell, 2013). Through this process, the researchers constructed universal meaning of the documents to understand the achievement gap occurring in the District.

### **Transformative Worldview**

In response to the District's Equity and Accountability Reform Policy implemented on March 5th, 2019, the SU student researchers utilized a transformative worldview for this document analysis. The transformative worldview focused on the District's initiative to "Foster strong partnerships with diverse groups of parents and stakeholders and increasing direct family engagement" (see Appendix A., p. 3). Mertens' (2010) summary of the key components of a transformative worldview includes (a) placing fundamental importance on the lived experiences of diverse groups who have been historically marginalized, (b) studying diverse groups and focusing on the inequalities based on gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class that result in asymmetric power relationships, and (c) utilizing a transformative worldview to link political and social actions to inequities. A transformative approach provides a worldview to challenge current systems and disrupt codified cultures that continue to produce racially predictable outcomes. Our research team suspects that families are disengaging and reporting a sense of non-belonging because of a myriad of issues that require sustained and focused qualitative discussions about race, equity, and discrimination. The transformative worldview does not avoid these conversations but instead welcomes them as a strategy for social change (Creswell, 2013).

### **Procedures and Data Collection**

The SU student researchers used emergent coding, pattern matching, and taxonomy as strategies to answer research questions. The transformative worldview aided researchers in identifying data to determine how the District can engage families to close the achievement gap. Various documents were categorized into themes and analyzed to determine if the factors in the



literature were present. The following types of documents were analyzed: school and district improvement plans, curriculum, disciplinary data, state assessments, demographic information, and intra-district communication. These documents or artifacts were analyzed in conjunction with the achievement gap literature to determine their specific prevalence and intensity (Creswell, 2013).

### **Confidentiality**

Our research team collected and analyzed the District documents that were available within the public domain while ensuring the confidentiality of the names and places through the use of pseudonyms. Confidentiality means that anyone who reviews the documents will not be able to identify the schools or professionals working there.

### **Data Analysis**

The SU student researchers coded documents based on first impressions and then reread them for labeling words and phrases that were connected to factors present in the achievement gap literature. Our research team looked for relevant artifacts/documents that contained information to answer the research questions directing this study. Repetition of factors being analyzed in the school documents to address the achievement gap were underlined and color-coded (Creswell, 2013). Attention was paid to the surprising elements. Any data that explicitly identified factors and themes in the achievement gap literature was categorized.

This process revealed the schools that engage in research-supported practices aimed at closing the achievement gap. Coding also identified the missing achievement gap practices (Creswell, 2013; Saldana & Omasta, 2016). Each major theme comprised barriers and solutions. Keywords or ideas were extracted from the documents and grouped under their respective themes (Creswell, 2013; Saldana & Omasta, 2016). These words and phrases revealed the

prevalence and intensity of barriers and solutions in specific schools. Words and phrases regarding the achievement gap barriers and solutions described the facets of each theme. This data should show the connections between themes (Creswell, 2013).

Coding should summarize the documents' key information that touches on family–school collaboration and leadership solutions to close the achievement gap. This procedure is part of a data segmenting process and is used to conceptualize and reduce data to fit into a format to generate substantive conclusions (Ivankova, 2015). Our research team used open coding as an initial inductive approach for capturing segments of data in the text (Ivankova, 2015). Textual coding comprises following two levels or steps: (a) Conducting a congruence audit between the District Annual Strategic Plan and two school improvement plans at the building level (including one low performing elementary school and one high performing elementary school). Then the top three codes at each school were compared to each other. (b) Scanning literature to compare barriers that perpetuate the achievement gap and leadership solutions that close it. Researchers coded each barrier and solution against District documents and school improvement plans. Each Barrier was coded and compared using key words predetermined by the researchers. The researchers posit that transformational leadership improves family–school collaboration, while autocratic leadership deteriorates it.

**Demographics.** The District demographics include: 64.6% White, 2.4% Black or African American, 25.6% Asian, 4.1% Two or More Races, 7% Hispanic or Latinx, and 60.8% White, not Hispanic or Latinx. These demographics give evidence of a very diverse district with unique needs depending on the communities it serves. Summit, the higher performing elementary, serves a less diverse population of approximately 670 students. The demographics include: 72% Asian, 0% Black, 3% Hispanic, 9% Two or more races, 16% White, 0% Native American and

0% Pacific Islander. Duel Elementary is a diverse community serving approximately 591 students. The demographics include: 55% Asian, 4% Black, 32% Hispanic, 2% Two or more races, 6% White, 0% Native American and 0% Pacific Islander.

### **Interpretive Bias**

Researchers were aware that the meaning they individually perceived of the information should not skew the themes identified. To minimize the effect of individual interpretive lenses, the researchers applied the verbatim principle to draw on the direct words within the text (Stringer, 2014). Each document should be analyzed separately and then in conjunction with other documents. Inductive coding allows researchers to systematically sort the coded text into categories, types, and relationships of meaning (Ivankova, 2015). This theme development uses the constant comparative method, which is iterative in nature and supports inductive coding (Ivankova, 2015). Our team compared the data from all the other sources in the study, segment by segment. New segments were compared to already categorized data (Ivankova, 2015). In this process, new relationships between categories may be discovered. Researchers conducted their own separate analyses as a method of triangulation to enhance the validity of this study (Creswell, 2013; Saldana & Omasta, 2016).

### **Trustworthiness**

Creswell (2013) explained, “When qualitative researchers locate evidence to document a code or theme in different sources of data, they are triangulating information and providing validity to their findings” (p. 251). The collaborative process of qualitative research allows for checks to ensure trustworthy outcomes (Stringer, 2014). These checks are designed to ensure researchers not only capture perspectives in the documents but also gain valid information

emerging from the research process (Stringer, 2014). These processes of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability enhance trustworthiness (Stringer, 2014).

### **Triangulation**

SU student researchers triangulated results by coding different types of documents. In this study, reliability and validity were achieved through the triangulation of data based on the consensus and conclusions extrapolated from the data. Triangulation was achieved through multiple perceptions, including the perceptions of researchers, primary sources, and secondary sources. Triangulation helps organize data and reduce data that cannot be triangulated (Creswell, 2013). Stringer (2014) identifies that the credibility of a study is enhanced when multiple perceptions of data are compared to validate the themes. The inclusion of multiple perceptions of data enables researchers to perceive and clarify the meaning. Credibility depends on the richness of the information gathered and the analytical abilities of the researchers (Patton, 1990). First, researchers code the documents individually, and then compare the codes; if the findings agree, researchers code them in their codebook (Saldana & Omasta, 2016); otherwise, researchers discuss how to recode or reevaluate what text should be included. This process establishes investigator triangulation (Saldana & Omasta, 2016). Documents are identified as social facts, which are produced, shared, and used in ways that are organized socially (Arkinson & Coffey, 1997; Hussein, 2009). Credibility is enhanced through the triangulation of data. Patton (1990) identifies four types of triangulation: (a) methods triangulation, (b) data triangulation, (c) triangulation through multiple analysts, and (d) theory triangulation. SU student researchers addressed credibility by making segments of raw data available for others to analyze (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 313–316).

Qualitative research relies on the researchers' interpretations. Many researchers suggest that there is no way to obtain pure objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Eisner, 1992). Patton (1990) believes that the terms "objectivity" and "subjectivity" have become "ideological ammunition in the paradigms debate." He prefers to "avoid using either word to stay out of futile debates about subjectivity versus objectivity." Instead, according to him, growing research is encouraging "empathic neutrality" (p. 55). While these words may appear contradictory, Patton points out that empathy "is a stance toward the people one encounters, while neutrality is a stance toward the findings" (p. 58). According to the author, a neutral researcher tries to be nonjudgmental and strives to report the findings in a balanced way; this involves providing an audit trail consisting of (a) raw data, (b) analysis notes, (c) reconstruction and synthesis products, (d) process notes, (e) personal notes, and (f) preliminary developmental information (pp. 320–321).

Qualitative research applies to a specific context, but this does not mean that aspects of the research cannot be applied to other studies (Stringer, 2014). Our team hopes to add to the research on family–school collaboration and leadership solutions to close the achievement gap in all communities. Culture is bound to a specific context, so it can be challenging to apply interpretations of one institution to the other; hence, the task lies in not generalizing across cases but within a case (Geertz, 1973).

### **Ethical Considerations and Researchers' Details**

The District is in the northwestern United States, serving middle to upper-class families. It is consistently recognized as a top-performing district, even though the underrepresented groups struggle to graduate on par with their White and Asian peers. The following researchers come to this study with approximately 30 years of experience in assisting the District. It is

important for researchers to identify their backgrounds, professional experiences, and beliefs so as to corroborate the foundation of the study.

**Researcher # 1.** I grew up in a middle-class family and attended private Christian school for K-12 education. I am a White male, and I am working towards my Doctorate in Educational Leadership. I recognize there are structural inequalities among groups in education and there is a need to close the achievement gap.

I see the value in this research, since it strongly resonates with my belief in the actualization of the individual. I believe every student should have an equal opportunity to reach their potential, regardless of their race, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, gender, etc. I am interested in improving graduation rates for all students, and I want to understand the etiology of the achievement gap to generate viable solutions.

I started my journey in the field of education when I finished my undergraduate degree in psychology and got a job as a paraeducator in special education. I worked with children who had emotional behavioral disorders. This experience taught me that children with special needs can make significant progress if they have someone who believes in them and provides an appropriate educational program. It also taught me that if children are nurtured and loved, they grow into individuals who make a significant contribution to the world.

I believe the individual is sacred and education is the means for each child to develop into a person who can think critically and make wise decisions. This belief in my potential and the potential of others is a driving force that stokes my passion.

While I worked as a paraeducator, I attained my Educational Specialist degree in School Psychology from SU. I have always been interested in measuring the potential of success and

obstacles to it. School psychology gave me the opportunity to test and analyze how teachers can support special education students on an IEP.

I have worked as a psychologist for six years; in that time, the most rewarding moments were when I successfully intervened to alter the course of a student's life. Knowing that this can be done for many students, enhances the feeling of reward.

I am passionate about systems and how they impact students. There continues to be an achievement gap in this country, and this problem cannot be easily solved. It requires an analysis of fundamental beliefs and a reeducation of pedagogical philosophy. Do we only educate the privileged or do we have an obligation to ensure every child develops into who he/she is meant to be? I believe the purpose of an equitable education is to ensure every child meets their potential.

**Researcher # 2.** My leadership values are grounded in serving school communities that value diversity, equity, and inclusion at the core of their mission and vision. As a leader, I believe we need to be transformational and visionary. I have spent more than 20 years working in diverse settings of K-12 education. I have served in many roles, including principal, career and technical director, dean of students, assistant principal, and teacher at the middle and elementary level. Throughout my career, I have worked in diverse settings, including working for eight years in a district that was designated as the most diverse school district in the United States (New York Times, 2011). Additionally, I have lived abroad for three years, working at the American School of Guatemala (ASG). At ASG, I worked as a Grade 5 teacher as well as served as a K-12 science liaison. During my tenure, I worked with Guatemalan and international teachers to align the science curriculum to the Next Generation Science Standards and helped transcend American values grounded in education. I also worked directly with the Teaching and Learning Department

to procure curriculum, provide professional development, and roll out a new Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEAM) initiative. While at ASG, I was trained as a Critical Friends Coach and received certification from Stanford University on *How to Teach Math for Teachers*.

I plan to graduate in August 2020, from SU, with a research focus on adult, postgraduate, and higher education. I currently hold a Master of Teaching and Bachelor of Arts degree with a concentration in Political Science, from the University of Puget Sound. I have a K-12 Principal endorsement issued through Pacific Lutheran University, and my research interests include improving organizational systems to serve our most marginalized populations.

I strongly believe that students of tomorrow will be part of a society that is more interdependent and globalized (Orzeata, 2012). The problems humanity needs to address are complex and will need critical, thoughtful, and creative system thinkers to tackle them (Kochler, 2000).

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

Our team declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this dissertation.

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### **Summary**

Chapter III contains the methodology used in this study. The qualitative document analysis was attempted to provide “a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility” (Eisner, 1992, p. 110). By examining information collected through different documents, SU student researchers attempted to corroborate the findings and reduce the impact of personal bias (Patton,



1990). Data comprised formal documents produced by the District: (a) The District Annual Strategic Plan, (b) The Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan, and (c) Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan. Pseudonyms were used for the names of the elementary schools. Data analysis included coding and comparing themes to generate meaning from the documents through the constant comparative method. These themes were categorized, prioritized, and used to answer the research questions. Trustworthiness was achieved by triangulating data and following specified coding procedures. Chapter IV presents the findings.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

Chapter four presents the findings of this qualitative comparative case study. The information gained from this document analysis informed the recommendations the researchers provided to the District to narrow the achievement gap for all students, with a special focus on underrepresented groups. Using a transformative worldview and leveraging the services of family–school collaboration, the researchers examined the congruence between what the District is mandated to do and what the District says they do, and confirmed the research-based solutions articulated at the building level to improve academic achievement. The following research questions were used to guide the research study:

Q 1. How does the leadership in the District describe their strategy for leveraging family school collaboration to improve academic achievement?

Q 2. How do family school collaboration/partnerships address the phenomenon known as the achievement gap in a highly resourced district?

Q 3. How can the District leverage family school partnerships to improve academic achievement for all students, with a special focus on students most impacted by the achievement gap?

#### **Summary of Research Design**

In partnership with a district that has substantial resources in the State of Washington, researchers conducted a qualitative comparative case study using document analysis to understand the barriers that maintain and perpetuate the achievement gap and the leadership solutions that close it. transformative worldview was the theoretical framework for this document analysis. Subsequently, leadership language was coded and compared with family

engagement practices to elevate underrepresented communities in order to close the achievement gap. These solutions to barriers and leadership solutions to close the achievement gap were outlined in the literature review, along with the context of family–school collaboration, history of the achievement gap, and power of language when leading organizational change. Discussions with the director of equity identified that the academic achievement and strategies to improve it for all students is the primary goal of the District. Documents were analyzed for congruence at the district level and individual building levels; subsequently, they were compared with the literature on family–school collaboration and leadership solutions to close the achievement gap.

### **Data Collection Process**

The researchers collected the District Annual Plan and two school improvement plans at the elementary level (including one high performing school and one low performing school, based on test scores). The District Annual Plan and school improvement plans are available on the District website. These documents were analyzed since they are updated annually with annual measurable goals, and they can be compared to determine if school practices are in alignment with District policies and the achievement gap literature. They outline the practices of the District to ensure improvement in academic achievement as well as the mission, vision, and strategies of each building. They are publicly available. Pseudonyms were used for the two elementary school improvement plans. The two school improvement plans were selected because of differing demographics and performance levels. Racial groups in the District have expressed different needs, which has created conflict in how resources are allocated to improve educational equity. These differences were analyzed at the district level and individual building level to understand how schools can adapt to the needs of different groups through the transformative worldview.

**The District.** The District includes 28 schools: 15 elementary schools, one Spanish immersion elementary school, one Chinese immersion elementary school, five regular middle schools, four regular high schools, and two district-wide choice schools (grades 6-12). The District Demographics include: 64.6% White, 2.4% Black or African American, 25.6% Asian, 4.1% Two or More Races, 7% Hispanic or Latinx, and 60.8% White, not Hispanic or Latinx. These demographics give evidence of a very diverse district with unique needs depending on the communities it serves. The researchers separately coded the District Annual Strategic Plan, comparing their codes to each other and the literature to recode if necessary. This need to recode occurred approximately four times per Barrier/Solution and Leadership Solution. There were 238 codes or references to the achievement gap literature that were coded in the District Annual Strategic Plan. This same procedure was used to code the following two elementary school improvement plans.

**Summit Elementary.** Summit, the higher performing elementary, serves a less diverse population of approximately 670 students. The demographics include: 72% Asian, 0% Black, 3% Hispanic, 9% Two or more races, 16% White, 0% Native American and 0% Pacific Islander. There were 74 codes referenced in the Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan that related to the literature.

**Duel Elementary.** Duel Elementary is a diverse community serving approximately 591 students. The demographics include: 55% Asian, 4% Black, 32% Hispanic, 2% Two or more races, 6% White, 0% Native American and 0% Pacific Islander. There were 153 codes identified in the Duel Elementary School Improvement Plan that related to the literature.

### **The Transformative Worldview**

The transformative worldview framework was used by the researchers to analyze and understand the documents selected for this comparative case study. This framework for sensemaking focused the attention of the researchers on the lived experiences of historically underrepresented diverse groups. Research was selected through literature review and compared to family–school collaboration barriers impacting educational outcomes. These barriers create asymmetric power relationships between families and the District and were viewed through the transformative worldview to understand language in public documents that may perpetuate the achievement gap. The transformative approach provided researchers with a worldview to challenge the leadership language in the District that perpetuates inequitable outcomes. The researchers suspect a lack of family–school collaboration in the District due to a lack of courageous conversations about race, equity, and discrimination. The transformative worldview does not avoid these conversations but instead welcomes them as a strategy for social change (Creswell, 2013).

### **Data Analysis**

This qualitative research was a comparative case study that was conducted using document analysis. Consequently, the instruments for data collection were the researchers themselves. Researchers did independent textual coding of all the documents and compared each other's findings (Bowden, 2009). These documents were coded based on first impressions and then reread for labeling of words and phrases. Coded words and phrases regarding achievement gap were categorized according to their respective solutions. Findings were compared as a component of triangulation. When findings agreed, the researchers coded documents in NVivo;

in case of disagreement, the researchers discussed to recode or reevaluate what text should be included (Saldana & Omasta, 2016)

Stringer (2014) suggests that when data is compared to validate themes, multiple perceptions of data enhance the credibility of a study. In this study, triangulation was achieved through the consensus and conclusions of the SU researchers. It facilitated the organization of data and reduced the data that could not be triangulated. Data was triangulated among two SU doctoral students and viewed through the transformative worldview. The researchers referenced the research literature to guide their analysis and corresponding recommendations, beginning with an analysis of the District Annual Plan to determine if school improvement plans were in alignment with District policies. Then the highest and lowest performing school improvement plans were analyzed for congruence.

The researchers read through the documents to gain a general idea of their content. Subsequently, they used the code-to-line method to select words or phrases related to the research questions. Researchers first coded individually and then together to reach a consensus for determining under which respective categories the codes should be placed. There were 19 categories, and some codes fell within many categories. This process allowed researchers to think through the patterns in the data, determine congruence, and identify recommendations based on solutions that were missing in the documents present in the literature review. An Excel spreadsheet was used to keep track of codes, which were later integrated in NVivo. Researchers used the constant comparative method to analyze documents separately as well as in conjunction, agreeing on 238 codes. These codes were checked and rechecked to determine if they were miscoded; then, they were analyzed to determine the themes that emerged.

## Findings

### District Documents

The documents selected for this analysis are important as the United States Department of Education indicates that they should meet specific requirements, including language that addresses students who are failing to meet requirements identified by the Federal Government. These documents included (a) District Annual Strategic Plan, (b) Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan, and (c) Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan. The District Annual Strategic Plan describes the District's initiatives, instructional focus, and objectives and lists various steps to be accomplished in the upcoming year. Similarly, the two individual school improvement plans were selected to compare the practices of a high performing elementary school with that of a lower performing elementary school, based on students' English performance scores on the 2019 Smarter Balanced Assessments.

In reviewing these three documents, the researchers used transformative worldview to understand family-school collaboration in order to identify barriers and solutions in the documents. The coded barriers and solutions are mentioned in barrier/solution format: (a) schools have all the power/positive student-teacher relationship, (b) conflict of cultural values/building trust, (c) cultural differences in kindergarten readiness/investing in early childhood education, (d) self-fulfilling stereotypes about student abilities and behaviors/professional development for culturally responsive teaching, (e) racial inequities in school discipline/psychological safety for parent-teacher dialogue, (f) inability of educators to engage all parents/equitable parent involvement, (g) inequitable access to technology/equitable access to technology, (h) traditional structures minimize the capacity of building-level leadership/guidance at the state level, targeting achievement gap initiatives, (i) consensus

decision-making slows change/successful conflict mitigation by principals before they develop strategies to build the school community, and (j) lack of incentive to change internal school governance/incentive to change internal school governance. The research team coded 238 references to the language directly related to barriers and solutions mentioned in the literature review.

### **Barrier 1 and its Solution**

**Schools have all the power/Positive student–teacher relationship.** A barrier to family–school collaboration is lack of positive student–teacher relationships (Trusty et al., 2008). The White middle-class culture is prominent and dominant in most schools to the point that it seems invisible, and people belonging to this class often do not see parents of color as equals. A solution to this barrier is to create positive student–teacher relationships and welcoming school environments (Trusty et al., 2008). Researchers coded 10.98% of this language in the three documents.

In the District Annual Strategic Plan, Positive Student–Teacher Relationship was referenced 11 times against total of 34 times in the three documents. Examples of the language coded include (a) embody a culture of shared leadership and collective responsibility, (b) our Breaking Out Of the Margins (BOOM) mentorship program has provided a powerful venue for our students to share their experiences, and (c) the Board passed *Policy 0130* Equity and Accountability to ensure that all students have equitable access to learning environments that support and honor students, staff, and families of all backgrounds.

In the Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan, researchers coded the language seven times against a total of 34 times in the three documents. Examples of the language coded include (a) our school mission was created in partnership with parents, teachers, and students, (b)



we recognize that nonacademic student learning and growth are key elements of student well-being and success, and (c) our staff is committed to ensuring students feel like they belong, and we support them.

In the Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan, researchers coded 16 references, i.e., 5.47% of references to positive student–teacher relationships. Examples of language coded from the Dual Elementary School Improvement plan include (a) facilitators use a student-centered coaching model, (b) facilitators will increase their expertise in student-centered coaching, and (c) talking circles have been integrated in most of our classrooms as a daily ritual for community building and problem-solving.

### **Barrier 2 and its Solution**

**Conflict of cultural values/Building trust.** Conflict of values is a significant obstacle to family–school collaboration, especially when school staff has limited training in working with diverse families (Trusty et al., 2008). To overcome conflicts of cultural values, schools must build a trusting inclusive culture to increase academic achievement (LaRocque et al., 2011). Building trust was referenced 60 times in the three documents.

The District Annual Strategic Plan referenced Building Trust 33 times against a total 60 times in the three documents. Examples of the language coded include (a) know students' individual stories, (b) engage in courageous conversations, and (c) implement a new process that involves more stakeholders to adopt culturally responsive materials.

The Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan referenced Building Trust seven out of 60 times. Examples of the language used to identify this code include (a) staff is committed to ensuring students feel like they belong, (b) meet each Wednesday to engage in a community

builder, a school-wide project, and a community service project, and (c) strengthen relationships with parents and families through a deeper understanding of their perspectives and needs.

Building Trust was referenced 20 times, i.e., 7.32% of the time, in the Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan. Examples of the language coded include (a) we have created a learning environment and community where students of different races, cultures, and abilities benefit from being educated together, (b) students from different language backgrounds learn together while instruction is systematically delivered in both Spanish and English, and (c) lessons include relationship building, teaching behavior expectations, and school-wide procedures.

### **Barrier 3 and its Solution**

**Cultural differences in kindergarten readiness/Investing in early childhood education.** To address effect of cultural differences in Kindergarten readiness, literature suggests investing in early childhood education (Heckman, 2011). References to investing in early childhood education were coded four times in the three documents.

Three references were seen in the District Annual Strategic Plan: (a) we are reviewing our resource allocation processes to determine ways to direct resources towards programs that will most support our students who have traditionally been marginalized or underserved, (b) additional teachers are allocated in grades K-3 at four Title I elementary schools to support student learning, and (c) embedded coaching and professional learning communities lead at our four Title I elementary schools.

In the Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan, one reference was coded about Investing in Early Childhood Education: (a) ELL facilitator will work with teachers to monitor ELPA data.

There were no references to Investing in Early Childhood Education in the Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan.

#### **Barrier 4 and its Solution**

**Self-Fulfilling stereotypes about student abilities and behaviors/Professional development for culturally responsive teaching.** Addressing self-fulfilling stereotypes about student abilities and behaviors requires a strategy of leveraging professional development that effectively implements culturally responsive teaching. Students from underrepresented groups continuously receive negative messages about their ability and need educators to be skilled in persuading them to adopt a growth mindset (Saphier, 2016). This shift in thinking pushes educators to consider their own beliefs about student capacity, biases, and racial assumptions (Saphier, 2016). Researchers coded 10.01% of this language in the three documents.

In the District Annual Strategic Plan, Professional Development for Culturally Responsive Teaching was referenced 19 out of 34 times. Examples of the language coded in the District Annual Strategic Plan include (a) provide coordinated professional development with the ELL department to implement culturally relevant teaching practices, (b) we will enter our third year of partnering with the SWIFT Education Center...focusing on transforming school cultures to build capacity for equity-based MTSS and inclusion, and (c) build the capacity for our educators to provide culturally relevant teaching and learning in ELA.

In the Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan, researchers coded the language five times, i.e., 1.59% of the time. Examples of the language coded include (a) teachers are active participants in professional learning opportunities for ELA, (b) coaching visits and classroom learning walks to analyze the implementation of balanced literacy and the common core shifts...communication is grounded in evidence from text and building knowledge through

non-fiction, and (c) implementing equitable and culturally responsive family engagement practices aligned with academic goals.

In Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan, 10 references were noted out of 34. Examples of the language coded include (a) Dual Elementary utilizes Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD) strategies to support all students, (b) staff members believe that it is our responsibility to eliminate the achievement gap and instructional racism at our school, and (c) our GSAs receive monthly training to ensure they are incorporating SEL and restorative practices into their daily interactions with students.

### **Barrier 5 and its Solution**

**Racial inequities in school discipline/Creating psychological safety in parent–teacher dialogue.** One of the factors perpetuating the achievement gaps is the systemic issues in school-wide discipline (Morris & Perry, 2016). To lower discipline incidents, educators need to strengthen relationships with parents. Parent–teacher interactions improve student outcomes by enhancing teachers' perceptions, thereby influencing the students' perception of their teachers (Walker, 2016). This shift requires educators to create psychologically safe settings for parents. Creating psychological safety for parents was coded 34 times in the three documents.

In the District Annual Strategic Plan, it was coded 10 times. Examples of the language coded include (a) embody a culture of shared leadership and collective accountability, (b) families, particularly those who have been the most marginalized, are more informed, better able to find support, and are more empowered to contribute to student success, and (c) develop and implement principal training for cohorts of schools to further family engagement.

There were 11 references, i.e., 3.47% of references, to Creating Psychological Safety in Parent–Teacher Dialogue in the Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan. Examples of

language coded include (a) we take a restorative approach to conflict, which ensures understanding of the impact of behavior and how to repair harm, (b) implement dedicated sense of belonging and positive behavior intervention supports (PBIS) teams to develop school-wide expectations, student leadership skills, appreciation, and respect for all community members and the expansion of school-wide relationships, and (c) we approach discipline as a learning opportunity using a restorative approach, and partner with families in the process.

The Dual Elementary School Improvement plan referenced the language 13 out of 34 times. Examples of the language coded include (a) we have created a learning environment and community where students of different races, cultures, and abilities benefit from being together, (b) we embrace the rich diversity of students and families and collaboratively maximize District and community resources to support an academically rigorous, culturally relevant, and nurturing learning environment, and (c) family events are well attended by families that represent the diversity of our community.

### **Barrier 6 and its Solution**

**Inability of educators to engage all parents/Equitable parent involvement.** For underrepresented groups, it is essential to include all members of the family unit to support positive student academic outcomes (LaRocque et al., 2011). Posey-Maddox (2017) identifies that school districts primarily interact with mothers and often negate the importance of fathers in their students' academic achievements. However, Posey-Maddox also identifies that fathers of many underrepresented students predominantly take the role of helping their children with goal setting, reinforcing classroom learning, giving advice, being present, being aware of educator bias, and intervening on behalf of their children. Equitable parent involvement was coded 13 times in the three documents.

The District Annual Strategic Plan referenced Equitable Parent Involvement 10 times in the three documents. Examples of the language coded include (a) engage with community partners in a way that makes them feel valued and aligns their services to school and student needs, (b) embody a culture of shared leadership and collective accountability, and (c) we plan to focus our efforts on engaging with families to build shared ownership and agency to influence and inform our work.

Language in the Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan referenced Equitable Parent Involvement two times: (a) implementing a dedicated Sense of Belonging and Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) teams to develop school-wide expectations, student leadership skills, appreciation, and respect for all community members and the expansion of school-wide relationships and (b) at least 20% of families in each subgroup will participate in the family engagement survey administered during winter 2020.

There is one reference in the Dual Elementary School Improvement plan to Equitable Parent Involvement: (a) we are honored to be a Spanish dual-language school, and we have created a learning environment and community where students of different races, cultures, and abilities benefit from being educated together.

### **Barrier 7 and its Solution**

**Inequitable access to technology/Equitable access to technology.** Students from underrepresented groups often do not have the same level of digital access as their White and Asian peers (Valadez & Duran, 2007). The digital divide is not so much that groups have less access to the internet, but they do have different kind of access (Valadez & Duran, 2007). Students from low-income households often only have access to computers at school, while

students from high-income households extend their learning to home, further contributing to the achievement gap. Equitable Access to technology was coded 14 times in the three documents.

The District Annual Strategic Plan referenced the language nine out of 14 times.

Examples of the language include (a) increase awareness of career opportunities in the computer science fields, so female students and students of color understand the many career opportunities available to them, (b) learn advanced skills in processing and applying information through the effective use of technology, and (c) students show proficiency in using technology to design solutions by completing a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) performance task.

The Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan referenced Equitable Access to Technology two times: (a) students will use technology to communicate, access information, share knowledge, and enhance learning and (b) students will apply technology to real-world learning experiences and learn digital citizenship skills.

The coded language was referenced three times, i.e., 1.27% of the time, in the Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan: (a) the delivery of the curriculum will be increasingly enhanced by the STEM (Science Technology Engineering Math) initiative, which prepares students for 21st-century skills using innovative, hands-on, inquiry-based methodology and technology tools, (b) integrate technology literacy and fluency as well as different experiences and knowledge to form reasoned judgments and solve problems, and (c) every student this year will develop their computer science skills and computational thinking by participating in weekly computer science lessons taught by a certificated computer science teacher.

**Barrier 8 and its Solution**

**Traditional structures minimize the capacity of building-level leadership/Guidance at the state level, targeting achievement gap initiatives.** Governmental bodies and local interest groups have made it challenging to effectively target resources, especially when communities are diverse, creating competition for resources that are perceived to be scarce (Chubb & Moe, 1991). With the increase in diversity and mobility among families, school culture is rapidly changing, even for the most stable suburban and rural communities. A solution to deal with the traditional structures is to follow the guidance at the state level that targets achievement gap initiatives explicitly. Guidance at state level, targeting achievement initiatives was coded 20 times in the three documents.

The language was identified 15 out of 20 times. Examples of the language coded in the District Annual Strategic Plan include (a) procedure 2320P using the Critical Criteria in order to eliminate inherent barriers in place for our most marginalized students, (b) implement a new process that involves more stakeholders to adopt culturally responsive materials that support the interests and instructional needs of students, and (c) select and cultivate a relationship with a lobbyist dedicated to serving our District's unique needs.

The language was coded one time in the Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan: (a) implement a better system to match resources and services in the community with identified student needs.

The researchers coded the language 4 out of 20 times in the Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan. Examples include (a) student services are available for students experiencing homelessness or living in foster care, (b) offers a K-5 Spanish Dual Language program where students from different language backgrounds learn together while instruction is systematically



delivered in both Spanish and English, and (c) as a recipient of federal funds through Title I, we are required to show how our school coordinates and integrates funding used at the school.

### **Barrier 9 and its Solution**

**Consensus decision-making slows change/Principals must mitigate conflicts successfully before they develop strategies to build the school community.** Action by consensus slows down the change process, and it can dilute the magnitude of the changes attempted (McAdams, 1997). This can prolong the closure of the achievement gap. Madsen and Mabokela (2014) indicate that when leading a diverse school, the principal must create a learning culture where there is an acceptance for all opinions, so that relationships within a collective are established. This requires principals to navigate conflicts and create learning cultures to disrupt cultures that are slow to adapt. Principals must mitigate conflicts successfully before they develop strategies to build the school community language was coded nine times in the three documents.

The District Annual Strategic Plan referenced the language five times. Examples of the language coded include (a) develop and implement principal training for cohorts of schools to further family engagement, (b) in the upcoming school year, we will enter our third year of partnership with the SWIFT Education Center, a national technical assistance center that focuses on transforming school cultures to build capacity for equity-based MTSS and inclusion, and (c) we are also reviewing our resource allocation processes to determine ways to direct resources towards programs and services that will most support our students who have traditionally been marginalized or underserved.

The Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan included the language three times, i.e., 1.06% of the time: (a) to support student growth and achievement for those performing

below grade level, our school community will meet the academic and non-academic needs in the following ways (Structural Components and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support), (b) students from vertical grade levels meet each Wednesday to engage in a community builder, a school-wide project, and a community service project, and (c) we are also committed to making a Principal Good News Call of the Day, where we call a parent, with the student present, to celebrate positive accomplishments.

There was no reference to the language in the Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan.

### **Barrier 10 and its Solution**

**Lack of incentive to change internal school governance/Incentive to change internal school governance.** Educators may have norms and values that are outdated with respect to the changing demographics. As demographics continue to shift and systems fail to adapt, the achievement gap may widen. This problem is magnified when teachers are not given the time to collaborate (Madsen & Mabokela, 2014). Power structures in a school often gravitate towards seniority, which slows down the change processes (Madsen & Mabokela, 2014). Research suggests that leaders can facilitate sense-making cultures, where data is used to identify problems and monitor compliance. To address this barrier, schools need to develop a learning culture (Schein, 2010). There were 17 references to incentive to change internal school governance in the three documents.

The District Annual Strategic Plan coded 15 references to language. Examples of the language coded include (a) work with community partners to educate and engage with our community and families on our legislative priorities and related issues (e.g., bond and levy elections), (b) a central component of the accountability structure outlined in the policy are a set

of critical criteria that we will use to review our programs and allocation of resources across those programs, and (c) the critical criteria ensure that we consider every student; serve all students and stakeholders; align with values, historical realities, and current contexts; and build in clear accountability to all of our designing, implementing, monitoring, and reporting.

The Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan coded two references of the language: (a) the TFI provides a measure of the extent to which school personnel are applying the core features of school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (SWPBIS) and (b) at least 20% of families in each subgroup will participate in the family engagement survey administered during winter 2020.

No reference was made to the language in the Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan.

### **Leadership Solution 1**

**Empowering parents as change agents.** Typically, parent involvement in public education assigns parents a passive role, which maintains the achievement gap. Instead, public education needs to empower parents as change agents by building the dual capacity of parents and educators to support student learning. In total, 15.97% of this language was coded in the three documents.

In the District Annual Strategic Plan, Empowering Parents as Change Agents was referenced 12 out of 35 times. Examples of the language coded include (a) MTSS enables school teams and educators to use data to target academic and behavior supports that meet student needs, (b) change our culture around collecting and using data, (c) using data to identify and implement strategies, and (d) how we will hold ourselves accountable.

In the Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan, researchers coded the language 12 times, i.e., 5.51% of the time. Examples include (a) collect student feedback on school climate and classroom culture, (b) two-way communication with families and community partners, (c) proactively identify students who may need additional or personalized supports, and (d) utilize a grade-level data team meeting structure to support data-based instructional decision-making.

In the Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan, researchers coded 11 references, i.e., 4.70% of the references to the language. Examples include (a) a comprehensive needs assessment, (b) assessing student learning and using data to determine needed interventions or acceleration, (c) monitor student sense of belonging, and (4) see how students are doing, then adjust strategies.

The annual plan exemplified transformative leadership language in the following coded text: How we will hold ourselves accountable. The Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan exemplified transformative leadership language in the following coded text: Two-way communication with families and community partners and their emphasis on student informed practices. The Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan exemplified transformative leadership language in the following coded text: See how students are doing, then adjust strategies. For first leadership solution, the District Annual Plan and individual school improvement plans emphasized transformative leadership approach in their language, which is closely connected to the transformative worldview and practices to close the achievement gap.

## **Leadership Solution 2**

**Moving from power over parents to relational power with parents to build collaboration.** Schools typically assume that parents do not have the knowledge to improve their children's learning. However, a growing literature suggests that families do have the knowledge

and resources that can transform practices in schools. Here, 9.83% of this language was coded in the three documents.

In the District Annual Strategic Plan, *Moving from Power Over Parents to Relational Power With Parents to Build Collaboration* was referenced 14 out of 27 times. Examples of the language coded include (a) embody a culture of shared leadership and collective accountability, (b) families, particularly those who have been traditionally marginalized, are more informed, better able to find support, and are more empowered to contribute to student success, (c) engage community partners as a resource in working with families to improve two-way communication to develop a strategy that balances community needs with district priorities.

In the Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan, researchers coded five references, i.e., 2.91% of the total references. Examples of the language coded include (a) education is the shared responsibility of families, educators, and community members, (b) strengthen relationships with parents and families through deeper understanding of their perspectives and needs, (c) improve two-way communication with families and community partners by implementing focus groups each semester to share information and solicit feedback, and (d) community building.

In the Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan, researchers coded eight references, i.e., 2.80% of the total references, of the language. Examples include (a) we partner with the greater Bellevue community to sustain programs that support our mission, (b) we value and respect the diversity of perspectives, knowledge, and abilities that all of our stakeholders bring to our schools, (c) we view bilingualism as an asset that directly benefits our learning community and will benefit society in the future by creating individuals who will be productive, respectful,

and supportive citizens, and (d) we have created a learning environment and community where students of different races, cultures, and abilities benefit from being educated together.

The annual plan exemplified transformative leadership language in the following coded text: Embody a culture of shared leadership and collective accountability. The Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan exemplified transformative leadership language in the following coded text: Education is the shared responsibility of families, educators, and community members. The Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan exemplified autocratic leadership language in the following coded text: We have created a learning environment and community where students of different races, cultures, and abilities benefit from being educated together. This exemplifies autocratic leadership language since the school has created the community and has decided that diverse groups are benefiting from it. This is principally autocratic leadership language since it is the school's initiative and the school is measuring its success.

### **Leadership Solution 3**

**A community organizing approach.** This notion of school reform challenges deficit notions of families by strengthening their capacity and leadership to co-create learning environments (Ishimaru, 2014). When families feel empowered to question educational practices and advocate for change, the political system of schools may change (Ishimaru, 2014). Here, 28.87% of this language was coded in the three documents.

In the District Annual Strategic Plan, a Community Organizing Approach was referenced 21 out of 71 times. Examples of the language coded include (a) engage with community partners in a way that makes them feel valued and aligns their services to school and student needs, (b) embody a culture of shared leadership and collective accountability, (c) families, particularly

those who have been traditionally marginalized, are more informed, better able to find support, and are more empowered to contribute to student success, and (d) develop and implement a communications plan to build understanding and support for our school district within our community.

In the Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan, researchers coded 11 references, i.e., 4.18% of the total references, to the language. Examples of the language coded include (a) our school mission was created in partnership with parents, teachers, and students, (b) we value and respect the diversity of perspectives, knowledge, and abilities that all our stakeholders bring with high family involvement and strong student achievement, and (c) expand opportunities for parents, local organizations, and members of the community to learn and support our work together.

In the Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan, the researchers coded 20 references, i.e., 9.27% of the total references. Examples include (a) we have created a learning environment and community where students of different races, cultures and abilities benefit from being educated together, (b) we embrace the rich diversity of students and families and collaboratively maximize district and community resources to support an academically rigorous, culturally relevant, and nurturing learning environment where students develop skills, confidence, and creativity to meaningfully engage in making the world a better place, (c) Elevating Student Voice Through Student Council: We have established a student council to provide students voices in the school redesign process, provide feedback on current systems and procedures, and to identify ways in which we can increase our students' sense of belonging, and (4) coordinate with community agencies to enhance support for students.

The annual plan exemplified transformative leadership language in the following coded text: Engage with community partners in a way that makes them feel valued and aligns their services to school and student needs. The Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan exemplified transformative leadership language in the following coded text: Expand opportunities for parents, local organizations, and members of the community to learn and support our work together. The Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan exemplified transformative leadership language in the following coded text: Elevating Student Voice Through Student Council: We have established a student council to provide students voices in the school redesign process, provide feedback on current systems and procedures, and to identify ways in which we can increase our students' sense of belonging.

#### **Leadership Solution 4**

**Build the capacity of underrepresented parents.** School leaders must build the capacity of families by teaching them about educational systems, how decisions are made in schools, and how to self-advocate. Educators must learn about their students' families and how to share leadership with them (Ishimaru, 2014). Here, 5.07% of this language was coded in the three documents.

In the District Annual Strategic Plan, the language was referenced six out of 14 times. Examples of the language coded include (a) families, particularly those who have been traditionally marginalized, are more informed, better able to find support, and are more empowered to contribute to student success, (b) conduct Parent Education Sessions to increase agency and participation, (c) work with community partners to educate and engage with our community and families on our legislative priorities and related issues (e.g., bond and levy elections).



In the Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan, researchers coded four references, i.e., 0.74% of the total references. Examples of the language coded include (a) build focus and common understanding around the strategies and programs we are implementing, (b) conduct Parent Education Sessions to increase agency and participation, and (c) focus our efforts on engaging with families to build shared-ownership and agency to influence and inform our work.

In the Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan, researchers coded four references, i.e., 5.07% of the references: (a) strong Staff-Parent Relationships: Our teachers and staff care deeply about our students, families, and community and are the greatest advocates for the community. Parents trust our staff and look to our staff for guidance and support for their children, (b) Superstar Wednesdays: Twice a year, we bring families to Stevenson to join their students in the classrooms to participate in a literacy, math or social/emotional learning lesson. Superstar Wednesdays begin with a family breakfast. The goal is for parents to have the opportunity to see learning in action and learn strategies that may be used at home to strengthen the school-home connection. Families then have the opportunity to meet with school administration to learn about the resources available at the school, (c) we are committed to ensuring that families, particularly those who have been traditionally marginalized, are more informed, better able to find support, and are more empowered to contribute to student success, and (d) Elevating Student Voice: This fall we will form a Stevenson Advisory Group. The Stevenson Advisory Group, consisting of staff, parents, and community members, will guide Stevenson Elementary in engaging a diversity of voice from among our community to co-create Stevenson's vision and mission through community engagement.

The annual plan exemplified transformative leadership language in the coded text: Work with community partners to educate and engage with our community and families on our

legislative priorities and related issues (e.g. bond and levy elections). The Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan exemplified autocratic leadership language in the following coded text: Build focus and common understanding around the strategies and programs we are implementing; conduct Parent Education Sessions to increase agency and participation; focus our efforts on engaging with families to build shared ownership and agency to influence and inform our work. This leadership language is autocratic, as it emphasizes the initiative of the school and what the school is going to do. It could become transformative, but it initially begins from top-down initiatives of the school. It does not share ownership with the community. The Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan exemplified transformative leadership language in the following coded text: Elevating Family Voice: This fall we will form a Stevenson Advisory Group. The Stevenson Advisory Group, consisting of staff, parents, and community members, will guide Stevenson Elementary in engaging a diversity of voice from among our community to co-create Stevenson's vision and mission through community engagement. This exemplifies transformative leadership language, as it emphasizes co-creating Stevenson's vision and mission with the community.

### **Leadership Solution 5**

#### **Ensure there is excellent cross-cultural communication and understanding.**

Administrators can improve their practices as leaders when they acknowledge that culture is interconnected and intrinsically complex, not linear (Schein, 2010). There is not one factor for underachievement but multiple factors. Hence, solutions must take this into consideration.

Educators should acknowledge that even the concept of learning is heavily influenced by cultural assumptions (Schein, 2010). Here, 9.33% of this language was coded in the three documents.

In the District Annual Strategic Plan, the language was referenced 14 out of 27 times. Examples of the language coded include (a) know students' individual stories, (b) engage in courageous conversations, (c) engage with community partners in a way that makes them feel valued and aligns their services to school and student needs, and (d) Focus on Families: Our district is incredibly diverse. In the coming year, we plan to focus our efforts on engaging with families to build shared-ownership and agency to influence and inform our work.

In the Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan, researchers coded one reference, i.e., 059% of the references: (a) Leadership Teams: implementing dedicated Sense of Belonging and Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) teams to develop school-wide expectations, student leadership skills, appreciation and respect for all community members and the expansion of school wide relationships

In the Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan, the researchers coded 12 references or 4.98% of Ensure there is Excellent Cross-Cultural Communication and Understanding. Examples include (a) We have created a learning environment and community where students of different races, cultures and abilities benefit from being educated together; (b) sociocultural competence; (c) We have established a student council to provide students voices in the school redesign process, provide feedback on current systems and procedures, and to identify ways in which we can increase our students' sense of belonging at Stevenson; (d) We value and respect the diversity of perspectives, knowledge, and abilities that all of our stakeholders bring to our schools.

The annual plan exemplified transformative leadership language in the following coded text: Engage with community partners in a way that makes them feel valued and aligns their services to school and student needs. The Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan

exemplified transformative leadership language in the following coded text: Leadership Teams: implementing dedicated Sense of Belonging and Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) teams to develop school-wide expectations, student leadership skills, appreciation and respect for all community members and the expansion of school wide relationships. The Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan exemplified transformative leadership language in the following coded text: We have established a student council to provide students voices in the school redesign process, provide feedback on current systems and procedures, and to identify ways in which we can increase our students' sense of belonging.

### **Leadership Solution 6**

**Facilitate and model team learning.** Leaders must be aware of the needs in their district and advocate to the school board for funding to address them. Here, 5.79% of this language was coded in the three documents.

In the District Annual Strategic Plan, Facilitate and Model Team Learning was referenced three times out of 12: (a) implement a new process that involves more stakeholders to adopt culturally responsive materials that support the interests and instructional needs of students, (b) achieve support for legislation and state regulations that enable us to better serve students, including, but not limited to, support for student mental health, efforts to keep our schools safe, and funding provisions and formulas that allow us to meet the needs of our learning community, and (c) we plan to build on those efforts and seek other ways for our students to inform our decision-making and program design.

In the Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan, researchers coded one reference, i.e., 0.20% of the references, to Facilitate and Model Team Learning: (a) a school-wide assembly.

In the Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan, researchers coded eight references, i.e., 4.37% of the references, to Facilitate and Model Team Learning. Examples of the language coded include (a) our dedicated teachers strive to be their best through collaboration and a commitment to engage in practices that support student access to a rigorous and engaging curriculum that ensures their academic and social success, (b) all staff members are supported and encouraged to collaborate as team—both in grade levels and as vertical groups—to create culturally responsive instruction that is important and relevant to our students, (c) elevating student and family voice, and (d) Universal Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Social Skills Instruction: Our teachers deliver universal SEL instruction to all students to ensure students develop socially and emotionally.

The annual plan exemplified transformative leadership language in the following coded text: Implement a new process that involves more stakeholders to adopt culturally responsive materials that support the interests and instructional needs of students. The Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan exemplified transformative leadership in the following coded text: a school-wide assembly. The Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan exemplified autocratic leadership language in the following coded text: Our dedicated teachers strive to be their best through collaboration and a commitment to engage in practices that supports student access to a rigorous and engaging curriculum that ensures their academic and social success.

### **Leadership Solution 7**

**Construct knowledge through framing.** Framing is conceptualized as a persuading tactic intended to garner and maintain support for reform. Structuring the use of information allows educators to make decisions. If data use is to be a productive strategy in equity improvement, leaders and others need to explicitly define data use and articulate the processes

that will produce concrete actions and outcomes. Here, 4.03% of this language was coded in the three documents.

In the District Annual Strategic Plan, Construct Knowledge through Framing was referenced four out of 13 times: (a) strategize with counselors and administrators to encourage underrepresented students to enroll, (b) instructional materials leverage, reflect, and affirm their unique experiences (e.g., social, racial, cultural, linguistic) and familial backgrounds of our Bellevue School District students and our broader society, (c) implement a new process that involves more stakeholders to adopt culturally responsive materials that support the interests and instructional needs of students, and (d) build communication tools and talking points to support our legislative efforts.

In the Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan, researchers coded zero references to Construct Knowledge through Framing.

In the Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan, researchers coded nine references, i.e., 2.66% of the references, to Construct Knowledge through Framing. Examples of the language coded include (a) Stevenson staff members believe that it is our responsibility to eliminate the achievement gap and institutional racism at our school, (b) Stevenson embraces the three tenets of dual language education, including bilingualism and biliteracy, high academic achievement in two languages, and sociocultural competence, (c) Stevenson is committed to meeting the needs of diverse emergent bilingual learners through an equitable dual language program, and (d) Facilitator Model: Stevenson has a facilitator model that decreases intervention and increases inclusion by providing differentiation and co-teaching. Each grade-level team, specialist team, and dual language team is assigned a facilitator. The facilitator supports the team in planning for instruction that is culturally relevant.

The annual plan exemplified transformative leadership language in the following coded text: Implement a new process that involves more stakeholders to adopt culturally responsive materials that support the interests and instructional needs of students. The Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan did not have a persuading tactic intended to garner and maintain support for reform. The Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan exemplified autocratic leadership language in the following coded text: Stevenson staff members believe that it is our responsibility to eliminate the achievement gap and institutional racism at our school. The school is taking on the responsibility to end institutionalized racism, rather than acknowledging a partnership with the community. This one-sided action is more in alignment with autocratic leadership.

### **Leadership Solution 8**

**Utilizing data to make decisions.** Utilizing data-driven decision-making (DDDM) in concert with framing can create the right motivation to stimulate the action needed to inspire cultural change. DDDM refers to the systematic gathering and analysis of data to inform decisions (Earl & Katz, 2006; Marsh et al., 2006). Here, 15.97% of this language was coded in the three documents.

In the District Annual Strategic Plan, Utilizing Data to Make Decisions was referenced 12 out of 35 times. Examples of the language coded include (a) MTSS enables school teams and educators to use data to target academic and behavior supports that meet student needs, (b) we have seen a noticeable change in how the leadership teams at these focus schools use data to set school-wide priorities and make decisions about how best to support student learning and social-emotional well-being, (c) we will be working to change our culture around collecting and using data to drive our decision-making, and (d) the district will collect and examine a body of

evidence to measure implementation and outcomes to see how students are doing, then adjust strategies and actions as needed to continue moving toward our goals.

In the Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan, researchers coded 12 references, i.e., 5.51% of the references, to Utilizing Data to Make Decisions. Examples of language coded include (a) Multi-tiered Systems and Supports: Utilize a grade-level data team meeting structure to support data-based instructional decision-making, (b) Guidance and Multi-Disciplinary Teams: Guidance and Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) meetings to determine research-based interventions to be delivered and progress monitored, (c) The Panorama Student Survey is a tool used to collect student feedback on school climate and classroom culture to help improve practice, and (d) Communication: Improve two-way communication with families and community partners by implementing focus groups each semester to share information and solicit feedback.

In the Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan, researchers coded 11 references, i.e., 4.70% of the references, to Utilize Data to Make Decisions. Examples of the language coded include (a) this plan is based on a comprehensive needs assessment of our school and programs, and includes active participation and input from building staff, students, families, parents and community members, (b) this District measures progress using Smarter Balanced and the STAR assessments, (c) while we celebrate growth in many areas, we continue to analyze our actions and implement the strategies identified below to close gaps that have been historically predictable in our school system, and (d) all classroom and support teachers will engage in our school-wide MTSS processes, meeting together throughout the year in Student Growth Meetings to monitor student growth and determine next steps for students that are not meeting learning targets for literacy.



The annual plan exemplified autocratic leadership in the following coded text: We have seen a noticeable change in how the leadership teams at these focus schools use data to set school-wide priorities and make decisions about how best to support student learning and social-emotional well-being; we will be working to change our culture around collecting and using data to drive our decision-making. This language is autocratic, as data is focused on school-wide practice and not community practice.

The Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan exemplified transformative leadership language in the following coded text: The Panorama Student Survey is a tool used to collect student feedback on school climate and classroom culture to help improve practice; Communication: Improve two-way communication with families and community partners by implementing focus groups each semester to share information and solicit feedback.

The Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan exemplified autocratic leadership language in the following coded text: While we celebrate growth in many areas, we continue to analyze our actions and implement the strategies identified below to close gaps that have been historically predictable in our school system. This statement specifies what the school is going to do to improve their practice. It does not mention community leaders or collaboration to improve practice.

### **Leadership Solution 9**

**Sensemaking to challenge and motivate thinking.** Sensemaking can challenge and motivate the thinking that leads to the closure of achievement gap. Framing requires a deep understanding of existing practices and beliefs, as well as of possible solutions embedded within a new or existing theory of change (Coburn, 2001; Spillane et al., 2002). Focusing on sensemaking as a process through which leaders use data for meaning-making in policy

implementation can increase buy-in and credibility initiatives. Here, 9.67% of this language was coded in the three documents.

In the District Annual Strategic Plan, Sensemaking to Challenge and Motivate Thinking was referenced 10 out of 20 times. Examples of language coded include (a) develop and implement a communications plan to build understanding and support for our school district within our community, (b) implement a new process that involves more stakeholders to adopt culturally responsive materials that support the interests and instructional needs of students, (c) the policy also outlines how we will hold ourselves accountable for achieving these commitments. A central component of the accountability structure outlined in the policy are a set of critical criteria that we will use to review our programs and allocation of resources across those programs, and (d) the critical criteria ensure that we consider each and every student; serve all students and stakeholders; align with values, historic realities, and current contexts; and build in clear accountability to all of our designing, implementing, monitoring, and reporting.

In the Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan, researchers coded zero references to Sensemaking to Challenge and Motivate Thinking.

In the Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan, researchers coded 10 references, i.e., 4.23% of the references, to Sensemaking to Challenge and Motivate Thinking. Examples of the language coded include (a) we view bilingualism as an asset that directly benefits our learning community and will benefit society in the future by creating individuals who will be productive, respectful and supportive citizens, (b) our dedicated teachers strive to be their best through collaboration and a commitment to engage in practices that supports student access to a rigorous and engaging curriculum that ensures their academic and social success, (c) we have established a student council to provide students voices in the school redesign process, provide feedback on

current systems and procedures, and to identify ways in which we can increase our students' sense of belonging, and (d) Elevating Family Voice.

The annual plan exemplified transformative leadership language in the following coded text: Develop and implement a communications plan to build understanding and support for our school district within our community; implement a new process that involves more stakeholders to adopt culturally responsive materials that support the interests and instructional needs of students.

The Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan did not exemplify any leadership language for this theme.

The Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan exemplified transformative leadership language in the following coded text: We have established a student council to provide students voices in the school redesign process, provide feedback on current systems and procedures, and to identify ways in which we can increase our students' sense of belonging; Elevating Family Voice.

### **Frequency of Codes**

Initially, the goal of comparing a low performing elementary school to a high performing elementary school was to investigate practices outlined in their improvement plans and assess for differences to understand effective practices and ineffective ones. However, after further investigation, researchers realized these schools were entirely different, based on the populations they served. Each building had to adapt their services to their unique populations. This understanding allowed researchers to adjust their criterion of significance, which was at or below 15 codes per barriers/solution or leadership solution depending on the needs of each specific

school. Researchers coded the District Annual Strategic Plan first. Then researchers coded the Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan and Duel Elementary School Improvement Plan.

**The District Annual Strategic Plan.** The District Annual Strategic Plan emphasized the following barriers/solutions or leadership solutions according to the following order of frequency: (1st) Building Trust, (2nd) A Community Organizing Approach, and (3rd) Professional Development for Culturally Responsive Teaching.

**The Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan.** The Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan emphasized the following barriers/solutions or leadership solutions according to the following order of frequency: (1st) Using Data to Make Ongoing Decisions, (2nd) Using a Community Organizing Approach, and (3rd) Creating Psychological Safety for Parent Teacher Dialogues.

**The Duel Elementary School Improvement Plan.** The Duel Elementary School Improvement Plan emphasized the following codes according to frequency: (1st) Utilize a Community Organizing Approach, (2nd) Build Trust, and (3rd) Develop Positive Student Teacher Relationships.

**Comparing frequency of codes.** The most frequently occurring barrier/solution or leadership solution in all three documents was Building Trust. The District and two elementary school improvement plans emphasized different barriers/solutions and leadership solutions because their populations and the needs of their populations were different. For example, the Duel elementary school is bilingual with a significant Latinx population. This school emphasized a community organizing approach to engage families who are not representative of their teachers or institution. The Summit elementary school emphasized data-based decision making to inform practices. This school is primarily composed of White and Asian families. These schools

adjusted their practices to build and maintain trust in their communities. Building Trust was the primary barrier/solution and leadership solution emphasized by the District.

### **Summary**

Chapter IV analyzed the congruence between the three selected documents, the barriers and solutions to family–school collaboration referenced in the documents, and the leadership solutions and corresponding leadership language to close the achievement gap. The documents were (a) District Annual Strategic Plan, (b) Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan, and (c) Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan. After an assessment of demographic differences between the District Annual Strategic Plan and two elementary school improvement plans, researchers identified that the populations being served at these locations had unique needs; these needs were addressed differently depending on the unique barriers at each school.

Recommendations should target the unique needs of each population, rather than adjusting practices to be in perfect alignment with the District Annual Strategic Plan. Researchers used 10 barriers and 10 solutions mentioned in the literature to guide coding, which included 238 references. The results indicated Conflicts of Value/Building Trust as the most referenced code in the three documents, with a total of 60 references. The least coded language was Cultural Differences in Kindergarten Readiness/Investment in Early Childhood Education; the text relating to the language was referenced only four times.

Additionally, the research team used the following leadership codes to identify the following leadership themes: (a) empowering parents as change agents, (b) moving from power over parents to relational power with parents, (c) adopting a community organizing approach, (d) building the capacity of underrepresented parents so they understand school systems and advocate for themselves, (e) ensuring there is excellent cross-cultural communication and

understanding, (f) facilitating and modeling team learning, (g) constructing knowledge through framing, and (h) utilizing data to make decisions. The researchers identified 227 references that were coded. This leadership language was connected to autocratic and transformative leadership. Chapter V details the findings and provides a discussion of this comparative case study analysis, so that recommendations can be made to the District.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Introduction**

In a speech, Edmonds (1979) declared that research has already provided us with more than enough information to educate every child, all that is lacking is our desire to do so. As Aristotle explained, praxis is action, but not just any action; praxis in this context is morally committed action to ensure all students are provided with a quality education. If we are to value every child, we must focus on all students and recognize that the educational problems in our communities cannot be addressed without taking a moral inventory of the history of these communities (Kendi, 2019). Centering every student requires that we design systems that take into consideration all students and families, without exception. The only way to undo the current racial hierarchy is to consistently identify and describe and then dismantle it (Kendi 2019). Segregationist Jefferson Davis proclaimed on the floor of the U.S Senate in 1860, “America was founded by white men for white men.” History is dueling with its undeniable antiracist progress, and an adaptation to remain true to its founding. Educators must acknowledge that unsuccessful students in our schools today reflect the history, leadership, and policies that have failed to serve them. It is not our children who need to assimilate into a dysfunctional system, it is the system that needs to innovate, adjust, and make room for our students (Kendi, 2019). History has proven

that systems and policies can adapt. We just have to care enough, be students of history, and push the system to take moral action to serve all families.

Rosa Parks is often portrayed as a “tired old woman” who wanted to sit down in a bus. In reality, she was a courageous woman determined to innovate. She nurtured her passion for months, learning the principles of civil disobedience at the Highlander Folk School. She believed in taking moral action to change the conditions of the environment around her. She resisted what many thought was normal. Those same forces of complacency exist today, and elements of social justice are needed to break free from the entrenched norms within schools, districts, and communities. Leaders must equip themselves with the language and principles to engage in sensitive discussions that create the opportunity for innovation. We are the beneficiaries of the legacy of those who refused to settle for the status quo. We are the architects of our students’ future. What will we maintain? How will we innovate? The following chapter is a discussion meant to remind us that we must wake up from our stupor and continue to innovate. The chapter presents the findings of this qualitative comparative case study. Also included are an overview of the study, discussion of the findings, implications for the District, suggestions for future research, the study’s strengths and limitations, and recommendations to build a partnership with families to raise academic achievement for all students.

### **Overview of the Study**

Complex issues, such as the achievement gap, need to be presented as a responsibility where all stakeholders in the community combine their expertise. This will require specific language to encourage all stakeholders in the process. Effective leaders do this by communicating in a way that motivates, challenges, and encourages cooperation through the

principles of transformative leadership. These linguistic messages become the contextual frameworks that are used to create the sensemaking needed to act.

Achievement gaps exist at every level of education, and between groups based on ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, physical or mental abilities, and income. Some achievement gaps have narrowed in the past 50 years, but the achievement gap persists in most schools for many reasons; this results in millions of students missing out on jobs and career opportunities (Pfeffer & Hertel, 2015). Schools have a moral responsibility to address systemic inequities that do harm to students and society.

As students of color become a majority in the District, structures limit equitable power sharing among different groups for institutional change. These structures include a lack of racial representation in teaching and administrative positions, which have been known to cause power imbalances in decision making and marginalize underrepresented groups. When schools are open to leveraging all the strengths of their communities, all students can benefit from the diversity of perspectives, which brings clarity, focus, and purpose (Banks, 2001).

Initiatives that focus on educational equity should focus on all districts, whether well-endowed with resources or not (Noguera, 2019). However, as Noguera (2003) explains, diverse communities "must be approached from a different perspective " (p. 7). School leaders must call attention to the weaknesses in schools, whether these are related to unresponsive leadership or the poor quality of teaching for underrepresented students (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Leaders in the District must work toward understanding their biases and presumptions, which impact community and school initiatives and the populations being served. The language utilized in the three documents used in this study is critical in that it motivates the community to work together to share power and resources. All members of the learning community must demonstrate active



support for change and improvement and take responsibility for the students who are not achieving.

The District is looking for ways to improve academic achievement for all students. Family–school collaboration is the primary strategy. Referring to a recent survey administered in the District, students and families reported they are at 60 percent in feeling a sense of belonging within the District. Du Plessis (2019) showed that when educators build a culture of belongingness where learners are valued and supported, the achievement gap is reduced. Researchers along with the District are looking for research-based strategies to close the achievement gap among all students, with a focus on underrepresented students. A major focus of this study is to understand the barriers that inhibit academic performance. The following research questions have guided this comparative case study:

Q 1. How does the leadership in the District describe their strategy for leveraging family–school collaboration to improve academic achievement?

Q 2. How does family–school collaboration/partnership address the phenomenon known as the achievement gap in a highly resourced district?

Q 3. How can the District leverage family–school partnerships to improve academic achievement for all students, with a special focus on students most impacted by the achievement gap?

The research team used a combination of different document analysis procedures to analyze school improvement plans produced by the District and two elementary schools. The coding of these documents produced 515 codes. The findings were analyzed and discussed

extensively by the researchers to understand the extent of alignment and further support the implications and recommendations for the District.

### **Discussion of Findings**

This study is in support of the District, as they look to leverage family–school collaboration as a strategy to close the achievement gap. The research team examined the alignment between the District Annual Strategic Plan and two elementary school improvement plans at different ends of the performance spectrum. Researchers also coded a literature review on the barriers and solutions typically associated with family school collaboration, that included 10 barriers and 10 solutions grounded in the research literature. The 10 barrier and 10 solution themes in the literature included: (a) Schools have all the Power / Positive Student–Teacher Relationships (b) Conflict of Cultural Values / Building Trust (c) Cultural Differences in Kindergarten Readiness / Investing in Early Childhood Education (d) Self-fulfilling Stereotypes about Student Abilities and Behaviors / Professional Development for Culturally Responsive Teaching (e) Racial Inequities in School Discipline / Creating Psychological Safety for Parent–Teacher Dialogue (f) Inability of Educators to Engage All Parents / Equitable Parent Involvement (g) Inequitable Access to Technology / Equitable Access to Technology (h) Traditional Structures Minimize the Capacity of Building Level Leadership / Guidance at the State Level Targeting Achievement Gap Initiatives (i) Consensus Decision Making Slows Change / Principals Must Mitigate Conflicts Successfully Before They Can Develop Strategies to Build the School Community and (j) Lack of Incentive to Change Internal School Governance / Incentive to Change Internal School Governance.

Additionally, the researchers coded nine themes that relate to the leadership solutions leveraging family–school collaboration to close the achievement gap. The emergent themes that

were coded included: (a) Empowering Parents as Change Agents; (b) Moving From Power Over Parents to Relational Power with Parents; (c) a Community Organizing Approach; (d) Building the Capacity of Underrepresented Parents so They Understand School Systems and Advocate for Themselves; (e) Ensuring There is Excellent Cross-Cultural Communication and Understanding; (f) Facilitating and Modeling Team learning; (g) Constructing Knowledge Through Framing; and (h) Utilizing Data to Make Decisions.

These themes discussed are linked to the research questions. These questions sought to provide a better understanding of the strategy of the District and how the leaders can leverage Family–School Collaboration practices to close the achievement gap.

### **Research Question One**

How does the leadership in the District describe their strategy for leveraging family–school collaboration to improve academic achievement?

The researchers analyzed three public domain documents that are presented to the community as the District’s strategy for improving academic achievement for all students. The District Annual Strategic Plan was analyzed, along with the Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan, and The Dual Language Elementary School Improvement Plan. In total, there were 515 codes identified in the three documents, each generated from the language that was coded into 10 barriers and 10 solutions, and nine leadership solutions to best leverage family–school collaboration to improve academic outcomes. The most salient codes identified in the three documents were: (a) Building Trust; (b) a Community Organizing Approach; and (c) Utilizing Data to Make Decisions. In the three documents, language referencing Building Trust was coded 60 times. Language referencing a Community Organizing Approach was coded 55 times, and language referencing Utilizing Data to Make Decisions was coded 40 times. The

frequency and intensity of such language used in the three documents led researchers to surmise that the District's strategy for family–school collaboration in improving academic achievement is to focus on:

1. Building Trust
2. Implementing a Community Organizing Approach
3. Collecting data and “adjusting based on results and learning” (District Annual Plan, p. 3).

The following is a review of the two elementary school improvement plans:

**Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan.** The language most often coded in the Summit Elementary School Improvement plan was: (a) Utilizing Data to Make Decisions; (b) a Community Organizing Approach; and (c) Creating Psychological Safety for Teacher Dialog. The researchers surmised that the Summit Elementary School’s strategy in improving academic achievement was to focus on:

1. Using Data to Make Ongoing Decisions
2. Using a Community Organizing Approach
3. Creating Psychological Safety for Parent Teacher Dialogues.

**Dual Language School Improvement Plan.** The language most often referenced in the Dual Language School Improvement Plan included: (a) a Community Organizing Approach; (b) Building Trust; and (c) Positive Teacher Relationships. The researchers surmised that the Dual Language School Improvement is using family–school collaboration to:

1. Utilize a Community Organizing Approach

## 2. Build Trust

## 3. Develop Positive Student Teacher Relationships.

What is missing from all three documents is actionable language as to how family–school collaboration will implement steps to support the most impacted groups in the District, which include Hispanic, African American, and Native students. The most impacted population are the homeless. While each plan generally speaks of Building Trust and/or Creating Psychological Safety, there should be a process that involves all stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, students, parents, and community leaders, outlining actionable steps. According to Collins (2000), the most successful organizations “create a culture wherein people have a tremendous opportunity to be heard.” In order to most effectively support these student groups, research indicates it is important for parents to be empowered as change agents. While there was language included in the District documents that referred to “two-way communication established between the family and community,” when and how frequently was not provided. Also, there were no details as to the framework or research-based strategy that would be used. Empowering Parents as Change Agents was coded 11 times, highlighting a need for the District to engage parents to increase communication. It may be interpreted that the documents analyzed in this study reach a theme of equality rather than equity. In seeking equity, the processes, structures, and ideologies must be explicitly targeted. The community needs to be made aware of the inequality, by naming it, and beginning to frame the work around addressing identified barriers. Racism as well as lack of financial resources create experiences that are not equal. An effective strategy requires language that highlights these discussions as unequal and motivates the entire learning community to address the identified inequality. To address race, and economics, Singleton and Linton (2006) promote the use of language that is concrete, so that

school leaders can effectively guide conversations that target and assist educators as well as the larger community on how to identify conscious and/or unconscious systems of entrenched institutional oppression.

It is essential that the District establish explicit language around race that allows for different groups to feel validated and welcome in an authentic discussion that is relevant to all groups and seeks to repair the damage caused by historic oppression. This dialog is essential for social learning to occur so a new culture can be formed. When schools name race as a strategy, dramatic academic improvement occurs (Singleton & Linton, 2006).

### **Research Question Two**

How does family–school collaboration/partnership address the phenomenon known as the achievement gap in a high resource district?

Through analysis of District documents, several themes emerged that may help the District understand how they can improve their research-based solutions to improve family–school collaboration to close the achievement gap.

When schools have all the power, it is difficult to build positive relationships with families. Institutions with a history founded in racism tend to operate from the top down, with Autocratic Leadership Language that supports families who fit within their framework. Unfortunately, this type of leadership language is not able to recognize the conflict of cultural values that causes unfair competition between groups, with Eurocentric and Asian interests having a disproportionate advantage in educational attainment compared to Latinx and African Americans who are marginalized by a historic legacy of institutionalized racism. Positive student–teacher relationships struggle to flourish as biased beliefs inhibit trust.

**Early childhood education.** Clearly, the most important educational attainment is early childhood education. It has the greatest long-term impact on educational progress (Heckman, 2011). Unfortunately, early childhood education was not addressed by the District in their Annual Plan or Elementary School Improvement Plans. Racial groups begin school at different levels of readiness, which perpetuates disparate education outcomes, contributing to the achievement gap. These differences in Kindergarten Readiness must be acknowledged and addressed by the District by investing in early childhood education.

**Culturally responsive teaching.** Students progress through their education at different levels of readiness, their beliefs about their abilities being reinforced by their teachers and internalized to produce predictable academic outcomes. These students are significantly influenced by messages which can be unconsciously communicated through teacher body language, tone of voice, and choice of words. Teachers must be trained in culturally responsive teaching, to reduce the effects of their bias when instructing students. Educators must be able to change the minds of students about their supposed poor ability and help them move to a different frame of thinking. Teachers must be able to engage with all parents to support the academic needs of their students. Unfortunately, teachers often do not know how to use parents effectively to facilitate the education of their children, which causes parents to be unsure of how to get involved in their child's education. This is particularly true for African American and Latinx families.

**Equitable parental engagement.** Posey-Maddox (2017) identifies that many fathers of underrepresented students take the predominant role in helping their children with goal setting and reinforcing classroom learning by giving advice, being present, being aware of educator bias, and intervening on behalf of their children. Often, parents take on different roles when

supporting their children. Therefore, educators must be able to engage both parents, which has been associated with improved student attendance, higher graduation rates, higher reading and math scores, and less grade retention, all of which contribute to closing the achievement gap (LaRocque et al., 2011). Donuts with Dads is a program that invites Fathers to school regularly to build relationships with teachers and other school staff (Brendel, 1998).

Language in the District documents neglected equitable parental involvement. In the Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan, equitable parental involvement was referenced only two times. In the Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan, equitable parental involvement was referenced only once. Leadership Language from the District Annual Plan must be adopted by the elementary schools to ensure there is equitable parental involvement.

**Cross cultural communication.** A significant barrier to family–school partnerships to address the achievement gap is a lack of cross-cultural communication and understanding. Cultural barriers are a significant obstacle to family–school collaboration, and they must be directly addressed with leadership language.

In the Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan, there was only one reference to ensuring excellent cross-cultural communication and understanding. These cultural barriers if unaddressed can lead to a lack of trust between families and schools, which is evidenced by teachers who perceive that parents do not care about what their child does, and parents who perceive that schools are too fixated on testing (Trusty et al., 2008).

These conflicts of values must be mitigated through framing leadership language so that school policies are filtered through sensemaking protocols. When families and communities attempt to engage with schools, they are often met with a culture of education that views them through a deficit lens. Schools interacting with families in this manner is autocratic to say the



least, because it does not recognize parents as equal partners and does not build their capacity to advocate for their children. Transformative Leadership Language is needed so that the voices of underrepresented families are raised to the level of teachers and administrators.

In the Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan, there was one reference coded, about facilitating and modeling team learning. This revealed a deficit in transformative leadership because communities are not working together to build consensus for systemic change. Instead, communities experience conflict when communicating because a framework of communication has not yet been established.

This reaction is most evident from the Asian community in the District. Historically, Asians are and have been perceived as the "model minority" and they represent a privileged demographic in the District due to their higher than average graduation rates and high entrance percentage into postsecondary education. Asians may feel they are giving up their educational advantages by accepting the equity initiative in the District. How money is allocated, especially for AP and college-preparatory tracks, will determine the willingness of high achieving groups to approve initiatives that offer funding for remedial courses. Leaders must adopt a respectful attitude when working with these communities who resist equity policies. This attitude allows them to teach others as well as learn from them. Humility is a quality of change leaders because they have deep confidence that the groups will figure it out (Fullan, 2011).

**Principals must mitigate conflict.** In the Dual Language School Improvement Plan, there were no references that principals must mitigate conflict successfully before they can develop strategies to build the school community. Leadership language did not address the role of principals in building trust. Principals must mitigate conflict successfully before they can develop strategies to build the school community. Madsen and Mabokela (2014) indicate that

when leading a diverse school, principals must create a learning culture where there is acceptance for all opinions, so relationships within a collective are established (Madsen & Mabokela, 2014). This requires principals to navigate conflict and create learning cultures to disrupt cultures that are slow to adapt. When trust is established, Autocratic Leadership Language can be used to frame changes. Until trust is established, Transformative Leadership Language must be used to facilitate understanding with underrepresented communities.

In the Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan, no references were coded for incentive to change internal school governance. Educators may have norms and values that are out of tune with changing demographics. As demographics continue to shift and systems fail to adapt, the achievement gap may widen. Research suggests that leaders can facilitate sense-making cultures where language is used to identify problems and monitor compliance.

Framing is a persuading tactic intended to garner and maintain support for reform. How leaders in the District use language and other conceptual tools is likely to be important in how local educators make decisions. If language is to be a productive strategy in advancing equity, leaders and others need to explicitly articulate the processes that will produce concrete actions and outcomes. This highlights the need for leaders to improve their ability to frame the sensemaking of policy messages so that they resonate with local populations. Effective communication with the community is paramount when framing district and school improvement plans with leadership language.

The Transformative Worldview focuses on the District's initiative to "Foster strong partnerships with diverse groups of parents and stakeholders and increase direct family engagement" (Appendix A. pg. 3). A transformative approach provides a worldview to challenge current systems and disrupt codified cultures that continue to produce racially predictable

outcomes. As evidenced from the Chapter Four coding analysis, District documents primarily use Transformative Leadership Language, which exemplifies the Transformative Worldview. However, Autocratic Leadership Language is used in the Annual Plan and Dual Elementary School Improvement Plans.

The Annual Plan exemplified Autocratic Leadership in the following coded text: We have seen a noticeable change in how the leadership teams at these focus schools use data to set school-wide priorities and make decisions about how best to support student learning and social-emotional well-being; We will be working to change our culture around collecting and using data to drive our decision making. This language is autocratic because it focuses on school-wide technical practices and not on community relational practices.

The Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan exemplified Autocratic Leadership Language in the following coded text: We have created a learning environment and community where students of different races, cultures, and abilities benefit from being educated together. This exemplifies Autocratic Leadership Language because the school has created the community and has decided diverse groups are benefiting. This is Autocratic Leadership Language as it is primarily the school's initiative and the school measuring their own success without community input.

The Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan exemplified Autocratic Leadership Language in the following coded text: Staff members believe that it is our responsibility to eliminate the achievement gap and institutional racism at our school. Here, the school is taking on the responsibility to end institutionalized racism, rather than acknowledging a partnership with the community. This one-sided action is more in alignment with Autocratic Leadership Language because it is not in collaboration with the community.

So, how does family–school collaboration/partnership address the phenomenon known as the achievement gap in a high resource district? It does so by emphasizing as of fundamental importance the lived experiences of diverse groups who have been historically marginalized and utilizing Transformative Leadership Language to ensure that all communities have equal power when making educational decisions that will impact long-term outcomes for students.

### **Research Question Three**

How can the District leverage family–school partnerships to improve academic achievement for all students, with a special focus on students most impacted by the achievement gap?

Districts fortunate enough to be in an economic position to provide qualified teachers, school supplies, textbooks, and computers are often perplexed that there is still an achievement gap between their highest and lowest performing students, as defined by race and economic stratification. The fact that financial resources alone are not the driving force for performance allows for greater scrutiny, reflection, and macro introspection. Unfortunately, knowledge and language are most influential when they reinforce the beliefs, ideologies, and assumptions of the people who exercise the most political and economic power. A deeper examination, of why underrepresented students continue to struggle, brings school systems face to face with established paradigms of knowledge and language used to create and maintain them. Challenging these prevailing theories about race and intelligence is at the heart of this debate. In order to combat the current status quo, research suggests the creation of Transformative Knowledge, to push back on the acceptance of the belief that things are as they should be (Banks, 2010). This Transformative Knowledge enables individuals and groups to acquire unique ways to conceptualize the world and develop language that differs in significant ways from mainstream

assumptions, conceptions, values, and epistemology. Knowledge and language are in many ways related to power. Groups with the most power within a society often construct knowledge that maintains their power and protects their self-interest. Community members outside this mainstream need to construct ways of seeing things that challenge the existing and institutionalized structure. In this District, these members are the families of those students who are viewed as outside the margins. These parents and students are uniquely socialized to provide a standpoint or “cultural eye”, which Collins (2000) terms as the outsider/within perspective. This perspective is what is needed and vital if a new culture of equity is to be developed where all students can thrive.

**Partnering with parents.** The District should keep in mind that there is a difference between telling parents what to do and allowing them to contribute as part of the decision-making process (Cook et al., 2017). Cook et al. (2017) identified that a central focus of community dialogues should be conversations about structural racism. These forums should allow families of color to tell their stories regarding their experiences with racism and oppression. The District Annual Strategic Plan identifies engaging in Courageous Conversations, a strategy for school systems to close the racial achievement gap (Singleton & Linton, 2006). While the strategy was mentioned, nowhere in the plans does it speak of how those conversations lead directly to goals or changes in practice (Cook et al., 2017). These dialogues have been shown to strengthen partnerships between school employees, families, and communities. However, it is not clear how these discussions translate into a change in culture (Cook et al., 2017). Cook et al. (2017) have identified the ways in which dialogue breaks down barriers to family–school engagement. It is important to create a safe space in the community where experiences of racism can be shared in order to shift traditional power dynamics. In many school

districts, the voices of communities of color often go unheard, which results in limited outreach to these families (Cook et al., 2017). Families must feel welcomed through sustained engagement during the implementation of the equity practices; language in the three plans did not seem to harness that momentum (Cook et al., 2017).

**Positive teacher–parent interactions.** Walker (2016) found that positive teacher–parent interactions enhance student learning and engagement. However, the opposite is true when parents and teachers fail to communicate. Parent–teacher interactions improve student outcomes by enhancing the perceptions teachers have of students or the perceptions students have of their teachers. Walker (2016) suggests that districts would benefit from understanding the tone of parents’ engagement. It is not so important that districts assess the knowledge of parents, as is the manner in which the latter are engaging or not engaging with the District. This is the information that should be present in school improvement plans. With goals measuring trust and engagement, schools can gauge the levels of trust they have established. With trust, parents are more likely to initiate communication with the school, and their dialog is more productive. It is important to acknowledge the theoretical underpinnings of these strategies. A change in behavior originates from a change in beliefs.

**Engaging fathers.** Research has extended our understanding of the role of parents and families in schooling beyond the relationship of reinforcing school cultural expectations (Foster et al., 1981; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). This research has trended toward a more inclusive role for families in schools and the impact of the home culture on schooling (Henerson, Morris, & Fitz-Gibbon, 1987; Henderson et al., 2007). Posey-Maddox (2017) points out that school districts primarily interact with Black mothers and often negate the importance of Black fathers in their students’ academic achievement. School districts have identified that parent involvement is a

strategy to close the opportunity gaps for both Black and White students. Fathers are an important part of their children's academic success. Posey-Maddox (2017) found black fathers predominantly taking the role of helping their children with goal setting, reinforcing classroom learning, giving advice, being present, being aware of educator bias, and intervening on behalf of their child. The role of fathers is important for all students.

**Empowering underrepresented groups.** One way to provide oversight and ensure effective management is to implement a model where decision making is monitored by minority interest groups who are appropriately incentivized (McCubbins & Schwartz, 1984). McCubbins and Schwartz (1984) describe this as “a fire alarm” paradigm, where monitors can intervene when leaders depart from school district directives. While McCubbins, Noll, and Weingast (1989) do not explicitly discuss schools in the literature, they provide a model that could be useful in ensuring that systems are being used to meet equity objectives at every level of the organization and to ensure leaders do not deviate from District initiatives.

Through empowering underrepresented interest groups with access to information and legitimate power to influence outcomes, these groups will begin to understand the negotiations and compromises that are required within the District. While resources are typically seen as human, curricular, and infrastructure, the soft resources such as better paid, better credentialed, and more experienced principals are just as important (Ko, 2006). These subtle factors have an impact on student outcomes and are not mentioned in the three documents analyzed by SU researchers. Underrepresented interest groups need to be involved at a deeper level to understand these nuances and idiosyncrasies so that they can influence student outcomes (Ko, 2006).

### **Implications**

The perpetuation of the achievement gap requires leaders to frame District policies through a Transformative Worldview using Transformative Leadership Language. This will require the District to put the money where the rhetoric is to close achievement gaps, and especially the technology gap, which continues to be most relevant during the COVID-19 crisis. Lastly, District leaders must be able to use sensemaking to challenge and motivate thinking within their community through courageous conversations that allow individuals to confront their beliefs that perpetuate institutionalized racism and the corresponding outcomes of inequitable academic achievement.

### **Recommendations for the District**

Based on the findings from this comparative case study, researchers developed three recommendations for the District to support its goal of increasing academic achievement for all students, and especially underrepresented students.

#### **Recommendation 1: Framing District Policies Through a Transformative Worldview by Using Transformative Leadership Language**

The first recommendation presented to the District is to ensure that District documents use Transformative Leadership Language to build family–school collaboration partnerships. Language is fundamental to how we view the world and serves as the bridge between the present and the possible future. When leaders use effective language, it influences thinking and emotions that can contribute to solving our most complex problems (Lindquist, 2009). Complex problems in a community need to be situated within an appropriate context that encourages all groups to



contribute their expertise (Mooney & Evans, 2018). This requires specific words and phrases that encourage all stakeholders in the process.

The District Annual Strategic Plan and Individual School Improvement Plans should involve school and district leaders, families, and community members; unfortunately, these participants do not have equal power in the decision-making process. This can lead to unequal development of District policies and school-wide practices that revert to traditional hierarchical leadership.

**Drawbacks of autocratic leadership.** Autocratic Leadership Language is hierarchical, authoritarian in nature, and exercises control over key decisions with minimal input from the community (Kiazad et al., 2010). This type of language was coded in the District Annual Strategic Plan in the following text: We have seen a noticeable change in how the leadership teams at these focus schools use data to set school-wide priorities and make decisions about how best to support student learning and social-emotional well-being. In this instance, data use is being implemented within the schools to facilitate decision making to support student learning and social-emotional well-being, and it is not being used to include decision making from the larger community. The following coded text is another example of Autocratic Leadership Language: We will be working to change our culture around collecting and using data to drive our decision making. This language is autocratic because data is focused on school-wide practice and not community practice. The Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan exemplified Autocratic Leadership Language in the following coded text: We have created a learning environment and community where students of different races, cultures, and abilities benefit from being educated together. This exemplifies Autocratic Leadership Language because the school creates the community and decides diverse groups are benefiting. This is principally

Autocratic Leadership Language because it is the school's initiative and the school will be measuring the community's success.

One way to provide oversight and ensure effective management of initiatives is to implement a model that is monitored by underrepresented interest groups who are appropriately incentivized (McCubbins & Schwartz 1984). McCubbins and Schwartz (1984) describe this as “a fire alarm” paradigm, where monitors can intervene when leaders depart from school district directives. The Annual Plan exemplifies this type of “fire alarm” paradigm in the following coded text: Embody a culture of shared leadership and collective accountability. The Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan exemplifies Autocratic Leadership Language in the following coded text: Staff members believe that it is our responsibility to eliminate the achievement gap and institutional racism at our school. The school here is taking on the responsibility to end institutionalized racism, rather than acknowledging a partnership with the community. This one-sided action is more in alignment with Autocratic Leadership Language. Autocratic Leadership rarely considers advice outside the traditional realms of decision-making power. Autocratic Leadership Language is concerned with the authoritarian organization's ideas (Kiazad et al., 2010). The drawback of this language is that it does not allow for input; leaders make unilateral decisions, they dictate work methods, trust is low, creativity is discouraged, and most decisions happen within the box (Kiazad et al., 2010).

The District is in the position to offer choices to parents, which can be likened to patriarchal authority offering choices to children; both are what the organization wants, and both serve autocratic outcomes with the illusion of choice. By offering choices, the District can avoid power struggles, which maintains its authority. Schools may rely on autocratic leadership

because it allows for quick decision making, whereas transformative leadership is community oriented and depends on consensus (Northouse, 2016).

The principal drawback of Autocratic Leadership is that it hurts morale and can lead to resentment in the community. This has occurred in all communities the District is serving, with emphasis on the Asian community and underrepresented groups composed primarily of African American and Latinx families. Family–school collaboration is the principal strategy that can be leveraged to address the barriers to student achievement in the District, because families have unique expertise that can aid District leaders in addressing the barriers to achievement.

**Benefits of transformational leadership.** Transformational Leadership relies upon change agents who are good role models to create a clear vision through articulation and empowerment of the community. This type of leadership language includes high standards and trusting relationships with the community (Northouse, 2016). Effective leaders do this by creating linguistic messages and embed them in their communication to prompt cognitive shifts that motivate, challenge, and cause groups to reflect on their entrenched worldviews (Foldy et al., 2008). These linguistic messages become the contextual frameworks used to create the sensemaking needed for action. In creating and exchanging meaning, good leaders translate psychological experiences into an explicit and communicative form that explains the why behind their decisions. This process of meaning-making helps diverse groups tackle complex problems, such as closing the achievement gap.

How leaders in the District use language to frame conversations is likely to be important in how local communities make sense of information. The District Annual Strategic Plan exemplified Transformative Leadership Language in the following coded text: Develop and implement a communications plan to build understanding and support for our school district

within our community. This communications plan considers the need for framing and sensemaking. The District Annual Strategic Plan exemplified Transformative Leadership Language in the following coded text: Implement a new process that involves more stakeholders to adopt culturally responsive materials that support the interests and instructional needs of students. This leadership language acknowledges the need for a new process that involves more stakeholders. Transformative Leadership and the Transformative Worldview empower community members to become change agents.

The Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan exemplified Transformative Leadership Language in the following coded text: Education is the shared responsibility of families, educators, and community members; Expand opportunities for parents, local organizations, and members of the community to learn and support our work together. If Transformative Leadership Language is to be a productive strategy in equity improvement, leaders and others need to explicitly define leadership language use and articulate the processes that will produce concrete actions and outcomes. This highlights the need for leaders to improve their ability to frame the sensemaking of policy documents so that they resonate with local populations. Effective communication with the community is paramount when framing District and School Improvement Plans with leadership language.

The Summit Elementary School Improvement Plan exemplified Transformative Leadership Language in the following coded text: Two-way communication with families and community partners and their emphasis on student informed practices. Two-way communication with the District should elevate family voice through Transformative Leadership Language. This type of language should "Foster strong partnerships with diverse groups of parents and stakeholders and increasingly direct family engagement" (Appendix A. pg. 3). Transformative

Leadership Language is like the Transformative Worldview in that it is meant to empower and raise up voices in the community. The Dual Elementary School Improvement Plan exemplified Transformative Leadership Language in the following coded text: Elevating Student Voice Through Student Council: We have established a student council to provide student voice in the school redesign process, provide feedback on current systems and procedures, and to identify ways in which we can increase our students' sense of belonging. To empower and raise up voices in the community, the District needs to be more explicit about how it communicates its messages and how that language leads to improving and increasing involvement of all families.

For the District to achieve internal integration, it must recognize that solutions for cultural change cannot be imposed; they must be the product of social learning (Schein, 2010). This social learning requires carefully framed Transformative Leadership Language in District documents. Administrators must be able to ask for help and accept it. School officials must have the opportunity to experiment with new ways of doing things, and there must be allowance for mistakes, reflection, and experimentation (Schein, 2010). When communicating messages, they must be framed in a manner that can be easily understood by the community. Physical documents can aid in the codification of articulated knowledge (Redding et al., 2018). These tools are important when improvement efforts begin.

District documents represent actionable values to address real needs. The District must define signature practices that will contribute to reform (Redding et al., 2018). They must get ready for equity change by reaching a point of understanding with their community that change is necessary (Schein, 2010). This also requires the District to move away from Autocratic Leadership Language that is harmful to underrepresented families and students.

Values, programs, and practices will require sustained dialogue over time. Consistent communication supports long-term change (Schein, 2010). The District must be mindful of different forms of cultural communication and the languages spoken in their communities. Resources, such as the District website and other outreach modalities, must accommodate such language. The District cannot be dependent on current leaders or policies. It must change the prevailing culture.

### **Recommendation 2: Put the Money Where the Rhetoric is to Close the Technology Gap**

Many households across the United States lack computers and high-speed internet at home. This digital divide does not allow the District to provide the same online education to every student during the COVID-19 pandemic. Inequitable access to technology has been a barrier to academic achievement, which continues to perpetuate the achievement gap during the current COVID-19 crisis. Even when high resource schools are equipped with technology, it does not ensure that all students have access, especially during a virus pandemic.

Even as connection to the Internet increases, some portions of the population do not have the same level of digital access in the information age (Valadez & Duran, 2007). Valadez notes that Whites and Asian Americans have higher rates of computer and internet access than Blacks and Latinos. The digital divide is not so much because groups have less access to the Internet, but that they have a different kind of access (Valadez & Duran, 2007). Students from lower-income households often only have access to computers at school, while students from high-income households extend their learning from home, further contributing to the achievement gap. A solution to the technology gap is to put the money where the rhetoric is by making the achievement gap a basic reference point for resource-related decisions (Halverson & Plecki, 2015). Leaders can organize schools by aligning resources for learning improvement. When

resources are allocated, they need accountability systems to ensure they are used to address achievement gaps.

Using technology to support parent involvement is also a good investment. Parents can be extremely busy with work, caring for loved ones, and working different hours of the day, and they can't always help their child with homework or attend conferences. Technology can help in that parents can visit websites and observe what students are doing. Parents can also contact teachers via email and websites to follow up on their students' progress. If the system is set up and parents are aware how to use it, they are also able to check attendance and grades and schedule a mutually convenient meeting (Nepo, 2017).

Money is always an issue in education, but an investment in technology can provide an enriching as well as a much more economically responsible experience. Students can take virtual field trips, use electronic textbooks, and access thousands of free online resources that can save the District thousands of dollars. Technology can provide teachers, parents, and students with excellent resources, new opportunities, and ways to collaborate that could save the District money in the long run.

### **Recommendation 3: Use Sensemaking to Challenge and Motivate Thinking Through Courageous Conversations**

Sensemaking is defined as an active and dynamic process by which leaders and groups make meaning of experiences and ideas (Weick et al., 2005). Datnow et al. (2008) suggest that through focusing on strategic framing of information, the district and school-level leaders can use sensemaking to challenge and motivate the thinking that leads to effective reform through changing culture. Framing requires a deep reflection on existing practices and beliefs, as well as possible solutions embedded within a new or existing theory of change (Coburn, 2001; Spillane

et al., 2002). Focusing on sensemaking theory as a process by which leaders use language as a meaning-making activity in policy implementation can increase buy-in and bring credibility to the initiatives. In order to shift or change the culture through framing, three core tasks must be articulated and shared (Benford & Snow, 2000). These core tasks include: “diagnostic framing”, this involves defining the problem and assigning blame and or responsibility; “prognostic framing”, this involves an articulation of how the problem may be solved, including strategies for achieving goals; “motivating framing”, this requires the rationale for how action can be articulated. Although the District sets the tone and defines the institutional context of equity policy, the building level leaders are required to frame the messages and define the three core tasks as they apply to their students, teachers, and community. The researchers suggest that local level leadership is crucial because the local leaders are the bridge that determines the degree of participant buy-in and implementation. For reform to make a difference, a complicated mix of frames, resources, capacities, and sensemaking must come together with the support of local leaders.

**Sensemaking using courageous conversations.** Using the strategy of Courageous Conversations can challenge and motivate the thinking that leads to racial understanding. As Wheatley (2011) has indicated, “Human conversations is the most ancient and easiest way to cultivate the conditions for change--personal change, community change, and organizational change.” Using Courageous Conversations for sensemaking provides a foundation for all other discussions (Singleton & Linton, 2006). By engaging in effective interracial dialog, racial understanding is increased substantially, allowing for deeper understanding of the existing practices and beliefs, as well as possible solutions (Spillane et al., 2002).



Researchers recommend two professional development resources that can support the School Board and District leaders in their efforts to create an antiracist culture, which strengthens trust among diverse families, leading to higher academic outcomes. The first recommendation is *Cultures Connecting, Addressing Race Relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Dr. Caprice Collins has over 20 years of experience in equity work, with the majority of her experience in Western Washington (see Appendix E). One of the trainings is *Leading Organizational Change in a Multicultural World*. This workshop is geared towards participants who want to learn strategies that lead to policy and infrastructure change. The program focuses on two critical aspects that lead to successful organizational change: (a) how to strategically plan for a culture of inclusion and respect through equity teamwork, and (b) how to build an organizational culture that matures through the process of having courageous conversations.

The second recommendation for equity work is SEED (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity). The national SEED project works with districts around the nation, developing leaders who drive personal, organizational, and societal change towards social justice (see Appendix E). SEED was started by founder Peggy McIntosh, author of the definitive paper, *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*. SEED provides a workshop that trains leaders to increase their awareness of systems of power, oppression, and privilege. Building leaders become SEED facilitators and are encouraged to adapt their learning to the communities they serve. During their immersive learning experience, SEED leaders learn multiple skills that enhance community relationship building. Those skills include personal reflection and testimony, listening to others' voices, and learning experientially and collectively how to understand the many intersectionalities of diversity. While these professional development recommendations will

support the District in its family engagement initiatives, cultural change must start at the top of the organization.

Recommendations to improve building leadership must start with the culture at the top. Board members, superintendents and building principals responsible for policy innovation must confront their own exclusionary leadership that normalizes academic underachievement for underrepresented students. Systemwide equity work demands leaders at the top take an antiracist approach and be willing to challenge the status quo afforded to those with power (Linton & Singleton, 2007). The work of addressing racist policy is a daunting task that cannot be confronted without the support of every member of the Board, equipped with a critical eye to spot autocratic language embedded in policies excluding underrepresented families. Transformative language is the lever that Board members must use to influence and shape the policies that select effective leaders for communities.

The Board and Superintendent must be fluent in identifying opportunities for transformative language in policy initiatives that create an antiracist culture, as identified by Kendi (2019) in the following points:

- Admit racial inequity is a problem of bad policy, not bad people.
- Identify racial inequity in all its intersections and manifestations.
- Investigate and uncover the racist policies causing inequity.
- Invent or find antiracist policy that can eliminate racial inequity.
- Figure out who or what groups have the power to institute antiracist policy.
- Disseminate and educate about uncovered racist policy and antiracist policy correctives.
- Work with sympathetic antiracist policymakers to institute the antiracist policy.

- Deploy antiracist power, to compel or drive from power, unsympathetic racist policymakers, in order to institute antiracist policy.
- Monitor closely to ensure the antiracist policy reduces and eliminates racial inequity.
- When policies fail, do not blame the people, start over and seek out new and more effective antiracist treatments until they work.
- Monitor closely to prevent new racist policy from being instituted.

Board members and the Superintendent must be courageous enough to model these steps, make policy corrections, and use sensemaking when necessary to innovate.

***District leaders.*** The superintendent as well as building principals must have a deep understanding of how to facilitate the conversations about equity for effective sensemaking. Fluency in interracial dialog is important for this discussion. Successful systemwide equity work demands that leaders at the highest levels be willing to speak up, be honest, and challenge the privileges afforded to certain groups in the district (Singleton & Linton, 2006). During the sensemaking process, leaders will uncover the unaddressed educational inequities present in the District. This recognition allows leaders to use the: (a) diagnostic frame; (b) prognostic frame; and (c) motivation frame to move equity work forward. After leaders engage in this work personally, they should identify how the unique needs of their students can be addressed to produce higher achievement. Those with significant institutional power have the highest potential for impact and it is critical that they are leveraging their institutional power to facilitate and model this sensemaking process, as well as exercising direct political leadership within the broader community (Glass, 1992). These interactions should be captured in the District documents and school improvement plans to build credibility. Through sensemaking, leaders

acknowledge the full spectrum of problems from multiple perspectives, thus gaining objectivity and credibility from underrepresented communities.

**Framing the discussion.** Constructing knowledge through framing is an important leadership tactic that needs careful consideration when transformation goals are attempted. Framing from sensemaking is a persuading tactic intended to garner and maintain support for equity goals. Framing the use of data will allow educators to make decisions. If data use is to be a productive strategy in equity improvement, leaders and others need to explicitly state the purpose of the data and articulate the processes that will produce concrete actions and outcomes. This highlights the need for leaders to improve their ability to frame the sensemaking of policy messages so that they resonate with local populations. Again, *Courageous Conversations* are useful in this process to build racial and equity knowledge. Formal leaders and those in power have more opportunities to leverage and regulate behavior by shaping what is valued or discounted and what is privileged or suppressed (Coburn, 2006; Firestone et al., 1999). Leaders, given their position in the power structure, have the authority to guide and direct this sensemaking process through framing their beliefs.

***Using data to frame the discussion.*** Utilizing data-driven decision making (DDDM) in concert with framing can create the right motivation to stimulate the action needed to inspire cultural change. Data-driven decision making refers to the systematic gathering and analyzing of data to inform decision making (Earl & Katz, 2002; Marsh et al., 2006). Leaders often only focus on the technical and structural dimensions of data usage and do not pay enough attention to how “local leaders” strategically construct sensemaking. Ingram et al. (2004) argue that research on school change and policy implementation tends to overemphasize practices and behaviors, such as data use, and neglect the importance of changing the current school culture or the tacit

thoughts and beliefs of members of the community. Without a focus on tacit beliefs and assumptions held by leaders and the community, reform efforts tend to fail (Datnow et al., 2008; Coburn et al., 2009; Ingram et al., 2004). Studies on successful reforms have found that without critical dialogue offering alternative views, the dominant deficit-model that is prevalent about students' capabilities is reinforced and perpetuated (Lipman, 1997; Oakes et al., 1997).

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

#### **Relational Leadership Research**

In the future, leaders will not only have to be effective strategists, but also rhetoricians who can energize communities through their words. Throughout this project a great deal of research explored the impact of transformative and autocratic language as a tool for improving academic outcomes. The researchers learned that the critical link in sensemaking and motivating groups is the language the leader uses to signal change. Additional research is needed to explore how language influences this relational process and the implications and applications for how specific language can be used as a transformational leadership strategy with underrepresented groups. Further development in this area of research can be useful in communities where the need for transformation is the deciding factor. Building trust and cooperation through relational transformative language would allow for greater collaboration in other spheres where foundations of equity need to be built.

**Families as leaders.** One major solution to raising achievement for underrepresented groups is to empower families to be leaders. In order to make this transition, schools may have to change their traditional methods of welcoming families. Senge (1990) asserts, "Learning organizations demand a new view of leadership" (p. 339). The researchers believe families could be those new leaders if given the right support and encouragement. More research into families as leaders

would extend this study and provide more insight into how to bring these leaders into schools to help create the culture where all students feel they belong.

**Technology research.** Amid COVID-19, the District as well as other learning institutions need to lean on technology to help support all students, especially students who cannot afford a personal computer or access to the Internet. Technology can be a “force multiplier” for teachers and parents. Instead of the teacher being the only source of support for students, technology can be leveraged to provide other learning opportunities for supporting students. Research into the websites, online tutorials, and other applications can bridge the gap of missing skills needed by many underrepresented students. A technology audit would allow for the District to gain a clear picture of what is missing and begin to build the infrastructure to provide every student with a device and programs that enhance their learning. Providing all underrepresented students with a device and access to the Internet is a great first step. Ensuring that program applications are tailored to the specific needs of students would put the District on the right path for narrowing the achievement gap.

### **Strengths**

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

**Extensive literature review.** The researchers worked on this project in collaboration with the District for over a year. Throughout this time, researchers conducted an extensive literature review on leadership, organizational theory, school climate and belonging, and the culture of success in a highly resourced District. Research focused on the District climate survey to understand family engagement. Then, it focused on the achievement gap, and the associated barriers/solutions that impact unrepresented student academic achievement. From there, researchers conducted an extensive literature review on leadership language, transformative

leadership, autocratic leadership, and organizational change. The knowledge gained from this project sharpened the researchers' focus as well as their understanding of the nuances impacting family support services in a high resource District.

**Document analysis.** Document analysis is an effective way of making sense of and synthesizing data contained in documents (Labuschagne, 2003). The technique allows researchers to take excerpts, quotations or entire passages, to create major themes to be analyzed. In this process, researchers drew upon three sources of information that helped to provide “a confluence of evidence that bred credibility” (Eisner, 1991, p. 110). Document analysis is also applicable in qualitative case study research in that it produces rich descriptions of data (Yin, 1994). Moreover, this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Document analysis allowed for quality research while observing social distancing guidelines.

**Credibility.** The researchers implemented various procedures to ensure credibility was maintained throughout this project. First, the research team engaged in identifying themes in the literature through the process of member-checking. Once themes were identified, they were assigned a code and used to identify language in District documents. The researchers went through the District documents at least four times, ensuring the language was accurately coded. Furthermore, researchers triangulated results with each member of the SU research team.

### **Limitations**

SU student researchers identified the following limitations for this comparative case study:

**Documents**

The documents selected for this comparative case study were limited to the District Annual Strategic Plan, and two school improvement plans at the elementary level. The documents were selected because they outline the annual plans/policies of the District. Therefore, the implications of this study are not generalizable to other studies. This is a limitation because the documents of this study are focused on a high resource district in Western Washington and are not generalizable to other districts.

**Researcher Bias**

The researchers were the primary research instruments. Consequently, there is a risk of researcher bias that may have impacted findings. This bias may have influenced how researchers selected and analyzed documents, despite following research-based procedures that are outlined in the methodology.

**Researcher Comments**

This comparative case study utilizing document analysis allowed researchers to engage with the achievement gap literature, leadership language, and organizational theory in a meaningful way.

This journey lasted over a year. It began with consultation with the Director of Equity, paired with theoretical research to understand organizational change. The District is experiencing changes, and conflict has erupted between groups who represent different interests. Researchers investigated these groups and a qualitative study was developed with a methodology to use focus groups to understand the sense of belonging these groups experience within the District.



**Covid-19**

The outbreak of COVID-19 impacted the possibility of researchers being able to access human subjects. A qualitative study utilizing document analysis was adopted to provide the same quality of research while simultaneously observing social distancing requirements. The researchers began their new methodology utilizing three public documents, which included the District Annual Strategic Plan and two individual school improvement plans. One of these plans related to a high performing elementary school and the other to a low performing elementary school, and both were compared to the District Annual Strategic Plan to assess for congruence.

Initially, the goal of comparing a low performing elementary school to a high performing elementary school was to investigate practices outlined in their improvement plans and assess for differences to understand effective practices and ineffective ones. After further investigation, The researchers realized that these schools were quite different, based on the populations they served. Each building had to adapt their services to their unique populations.

The refocusing of the research study emphasized leadership language that would enhance family–school collaboration to close the achievement gap. The researchers discovered that the District was utilizing Transformative Leadership Language in their documents, while still using some Autocratic Leadership Language. Autocratic Language is top down and does not recognize families as decision makers. When Autocratic Leadership Language is removed, schools become more effective at collaborating with parents, developing supporting relationships and ensuring that students achieve academically. When Transformative Leadership Language is included, it empowers communities to become change agents so they can represent themselves and work for better student outcomes.

Therefore, researchers embraced the changing parameters of their dissertation caused by the virus pandemic and worked with the District and Seattle University to provide a dissertation that would further the achievement gap literature.

### **Conclusion**

A high resource District is actively seeking to improve academic achievement for all students through family–school collaboration and leadership solutions. They have partnered with researchers to understand the barriers to and solutions for academic achievement for all students, especially those who are underrepresented. Recommendations for future practice encourage this District to partner with their community using Transformative Leadership Language so their actions will be in alignment with their equity initiative. The District must decide to create a community where all students feel they belong. To accomplish this, they must understand the importance of language and be courageous enough to use it to build trust in their community.

The purpose of this qualitative comparative case study is to identify congruent practices between the District and its elementary schools, if their practices are in alignment with the achievement gap literature, and how their improvement plans use language to build trust in their communities through transformative leadership. The research team used document analysis to examine public District documents to understand how District practices improve or limit academic achievement for all students, especially for those students who are underrepresented, and what research-based recommendations may enhance District practices to close the achievement gap. The Transformative Worldview frames this study, as researchers analyzed leadership language in the documents, formed conclusions based on their analysis, and followed these summations with recommendations to elevate community voices through leadership language.

The researchers used the first research question to analyze how the District leverages family–school collaboration to close the achievement gap when examining congruence between the District Annual Strategic Plan and elementary school improvement plans. The research team then used a similar method of document analysis when comparing the 10 barriers and 10 solutions to family–school collaboration of these improvement plans. Themes emerged that documented what the District was doing and what the District needed to do to improve. Nine leadership solutions were also compared to the District documents to identify what was already being implemented and what leadership solutions would enhance family–school collaboration partnerships. This language was used to answer the second and third research questions. Researchers transitioned to focus on leadership language when identifying how the District could leverage family–school collaboration through transformative leadership language.

The findings identified what family–school collaboration practices and leadership solutions were missing from the District Annual Strategic Plan and elementary school improvement plans. Actionable language was missing to address the most impacted groups within the District, which included Latinx, African American, and Native students. There was an absence of leadership language addressing the importance of early childhood education, which has the longest-term impact on educational progress (Heckman, 2011). Leadership language neglected the importance of equitable parental involvement, which is important for student development and academic achievement. District documents did not emphasize the importance of cross-cultural communication or the necessity for principals to mitigate conflict in their buildings. The District must address the need to partner with parents so there can be positive parent–teacher interaction, which is positively correlated with academic achievement (Walker,

2016). And lastly, the District must empower underrepresented groups through Transformative Leadership Language so that communities are represented, and their students are successful.

The researchers are making three recommendations for the District. The first is that the District frame their policies through a Transformative Worldview by using Transformative Leadership Language. The second is that the District put the money where the rhetoric is to close the technology gap, which has been, and continues to be significant during the COVID-19 crisis. The third recommendation is that the District use sensemaking to challenge and motivate thinking through Courageous Conversations.

As educators who are invested in closing the achievement gap, our research team offers the recommendations of this comparative case study to the District in the hope that these can be used to adjust District-wide practices to improve academic achievement for all students, and especially those students who are underrepresented. Families in the community must have “a seat at the table” when District policies are created. These families must be able to overcome barriers to family–school collaboration to be able to access education for their children. Moreover, Courageous Conversations must be had about racism and how racism effects educational outcomes for students, so that educators do no harm. The researchers recognize that there is an achievement gap that continues to persist despite efforts to close it, and as educators, we have the responsibility to address societal injustices by ensuring for students an equitable education.

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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 [REDACTED] 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

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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.

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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

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Policy 3210

Nondiscrimination

Legal References:

WA Administrative Code  
Chapter 392-190

Title 28A.640 RCW  
Title 28A.642 RCW

Equal educational  
opportunity-Unlawful  
Discrimination Prohibited  
Sexual Equality  
Discrimination Prohibition

**Adoption Date: 06.11.19**

**██████████ District**

**Revised:**

**APPENDIX B**

**Annual Plan 2019-2020**



# Annual Plan

2019-20

Final Version



Approved 9/17/19

### Executive Summary

In October 2018, we launched our five-year Strategic Plan. The plan outlines our new vision, mission, and values, which were co-designed by our Board, staff, community. It also introduced our six key priorities: 1) High-Quality Instruction; 2) Student Well-Being; 3) Exceptional Staff; 4) Climate and Culture; 5) Family and Community; 6) Organizational Alignment. We used these priorities as a guide during our first year of implementation to build focus and common understanding around the strategies and programs we are implementing to ensure our students are affirmed for who they are, inspired by their experiences, and have access to the individualized supports and services that will empower them to thrive. During that time, we also built clarity on what we plan to achieve by 2023, the final year of our plan. In that year, our learning community will:

- Know students' individual stories, strengths and aspirations
- Know how students' individual experiences reflect the health of our system on the whole
- Deliver high quality instruction that is standards-based and data-driven
- Engage in courageous conversations using tools and protocols to address barriers and challenges that our students face
- Build a positive culture and climate by living our values, recognizing the individual strengths of students and staff, and affirming and honoring the unique identities of our students, staff, and families
- Feel engaged, valued, and supported with sufficient resources
- Have a refined system for recruiting, supporting, and retaining exceptional staff
- Know how to engage with community partners in a way that makes them feel valued and aligns their services to school and student needs
- Embody a culture of shared leadership and collective accountability
- Align resource allocation with identified needs, priorities, and goals to improve the impact of our work

We know that achieving these goals will require deliberate and focused effort. We will also undertake this work in a budgetary climate where funding increases will be limited, requiring us to limit our efforts to the most impactful programs. This will require us to make difficult choices, including discontinuing previous work that although beneficial and valued, did not offer the same impact or continue to move us toward our vision for the future of our district.

With that in mind, in May 2019, we worked with our Board to co-design five results-oriented goals to focus our work going forward.

**Goal 1:** Students feel safe, affirmed and inspired to achieve high levels of **social-emotional well-being** regardless of background.

**Goal 2:** Students feel affirmed and inspired to achieve high levels of **academic success** and outcomes are not predicted by race or income.

**Goal 3:** Students effectively **problem solve and lead** for positive local and global change by developing global awareness and cultural competency, and learn advanced skills in processing and applying information through the effective use of technology and engineering.

**Goal 4:** The **culture** in the Bellevue School District is welcoming to all employees, attracting and retaining high quality, engaged staff.




**Goal 5:** **Families**, particularly those who have been traditionally marginalized, are more informed, better able to find support, and are more empowered to contribute to student success.

These goals do not supplant the priorities originally identified in the Strategic Plan, but rather use them as a guide for identifying the targeted results we would like to achieve.



Annual Plan 2019-20

The tables below identify the key strategies we will use to make progress toward our goals in the 2019-20 school year. They also provide information on how we plan to measure our success and monitor our progress toward that success.



Goal 1 Students feel safe, affirmed, and inspired to achieve high levels of <b>social-emotional well-being</b> regardless of background.   				
Strategic Plan Measures of Success (by 2023...)	Year 2 Targets	Outcome Monitoring and Reporting Timeline*	Internal Progress Monitoring (Plan, Study, and Adjust of PDSA)	Key Strategies
a) The percent of students reporting a positive school climate on the Panorama student survey will increase by at least 5 percentage points at each school level (elementary, middle, high) with no significant decreases in any subgroup (race, income, English Language Learners, and students with disabilities).  b) We will explore adding a measure of students' inspiration in Year 2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Increase the percent favorable on the Panorama student survey 'Sense of Belonging' domain by at least 4 percentage points in at least 3 schools without a significant drop at any other schools.</li> <li>➢ Will identify viable options for Measure (b)</li> </ul>	December ➢ School SIPs  January: ➢ Panorama change from Fall 2018 to Fall 2019 and Progress on strategies identified in SIP  April: ➢ Summary of how many schools are on track according to their individual SIP progress monitoring ➢ Options for Measure (b)	September: ➢ District reviews School SIPs to ensure goals and strategies are aligned to Annual Plan  November: ➢ District reviews Fall 2018 – Fall 2019 Panorama data and ensures district supports are allocated appropriately.  February: ➢ District reviews schools' progress on SIP strategies and goals and adjusts supports as needed ➢ District reviews data related to implementation of MHAT at select schools to inform potential expansion ➢ District reviews first draft of 2020-2023 SIPs  June:	Implement <b>MTSS Social, Emotional, Behavior</b> including:  ➢ Implement Cycles of Continuous Improvement using school, and subgroup data, and equity tools to monitor and adjust tiered supports for students.  ➢ Identify and share successful school strategies for increasing student sense of belonging as measured by the Panorama student survey and expand to other schools where appropriate.  ➢ Implement strategies at all schools based on results from PBIS School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET) reviews, Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) reviews, and other related data, including subgroup data.  ➢ Implement expanded standards-based social emotional learning (SEL) curriculum at all levels.

Approved 9/17/19




			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ District reviews PBIS Implementation Data School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET) and Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) for specific schools: District reviews annually</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Expand Tier 2 and 3 behavior and mental health supports, including the Mental Health Assistance Team (MHAT) at targeted schools</li> <li>➤ Develop and implement a system to utilize student voice to inform implementation of strategies that increase student learning in high school. (Graduation Success Team)</li> <li>➤ Expand strategies that affirm and inspire marginalized students, including structured mentorship programs.</li> </ul>
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Goal 2				
Students feel affirmed and inspired to achieve high levels of <b>academic success</b> and outcomes are not predicted by race or income.				
Strategic Plan Measures of Success (by 2023...)	Year 2 Targets	Outcome Monitoring and Reporting Timeline*	Internal Progress Monitoring (Plan, Study, and Adjust of PDSA)	Key Strategies
<p>c) At least 90% of the current Class of 2029 meet state standards in ELA and math by the end of 5<sup>th</sup> grade, while meeting WSIF goals for all subgroups (race, income, English language learners, and students with disabilities).</p> <p>d) At least 90% of the current Class of 2026 meet state standards in ELA and math by the end of 8<sup>th</sup> grade, while meeting WSIF goals for all subgroups (race, income, English language learners, and students with disabilities).</p> <p>e) At least 98% of the current Class of 2022 will graduate on time, unless their individual plan designates additional time (e.g. an intentional five or six-year path to graduation for students with disabilities or students learning English).</p> <p>f) At least 80% of our students receiving ELL services will be on track to</p>	<p>➤ At least 78% of the Class of 2029 (current 3<sup>rd</sup> graders) meet state standards in ELA and Math while meeting WSIF goals for all subgroups (race, income, English language learners, and students with disabilities) in that grade level in ELA and Math</p> <p>➤ At least 84% of class of 2026 (current 6<sup>th</sup> graders) meet state standards in ELA and 77% meet standard in Math Math while meeting WSIF goals for all subgroups (race, income, English language learners, and students with disabilities) in that grade level in ELA and Math</p> <p>➤ At least 91% of class of 2022 (current 10<sup>th</sup> graders) are on-track to graduation</p> <p>➤ At least 66% of students receiving ELL services will be on track to exit, up from 62% in 2018.</p> <p>➤ We will decrease the gap between the highest and lowest scoring racial subgroups on SBA ELA and Math by accelerating the growth for the lowest-scoring groups while maintaining or increasing</p>	<p>November:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Annual SBA Report and Targets for Year 2 (Strat Plan monitoring and updates to Annual Plan)</li> </ul> <p>December</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ School SIPs</li> </ul> <p>January:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Early Learning Plan</li> </ul> <p>March:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Fall-to-Winter Star Growth for targeted elementary and middle school students (any student below proficient in the fall on Star)</li> <li>➤ Fall-to-Winter progress for 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> grade students identified through Early Warning Indicators (attendance, behavior, grades)</li> </ul> <p>June:</p>	<p>September:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ District reviews SBA, Star data, and School SIPs to ensure goals and strategies are aligned to Annual Plan</li> </ul> <p>November:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ District reviews Early Warning Indicators for 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> graders and works with school leaders to ensure plans are in place to address students' needs</li> <li>➤ District reviews Fidelity Implementation Assessment (FIA) to assess implementation of MTSS components and identify barriers</li> <li>➤ District reviews classroom observations with School leaders during coaching visits and adjusts school strategies as necessary</li> </ul> <p>February:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ District reviews Early Warning Indicators for 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> graders and works with school leaders to adjust plans as necessary.</li> </ul>	<p>Implement MTSS Academic including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Implement Cycles of Continuous Improvement using school, and subgroup data, and equity tools to monitor and adjust tiered supports for students.</li> <li>➤ Implement interim assessments in select grade levels / courses to inform and strengthen standards-based, data-driven instruction.</li> <li>➤ Provide professional development to instructional leaders and educators on standards and assessments.</li> <li>➤ Pilot structured Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at four elementary schools</li> <li>➤ Develop the District Assessment Guidance Framework, including Dual Language in collaboration with ANet</li> <li>➤ Study and develop a plan for universal early learning opportunities.</li> </ul>

<p>exit those services within six years.</p> <p>g) On the SBA English Language Arts and math exams, the gap between our highest and lowest scoring racial subgroups in grades 3-5 and 6-8 will be reduced by at least half, by improving results for the lowest scoring groups while maintaining or increasing proficiency levels of the highest scoring groups.</p> <p>h) Students in grades K-12 will make a year's worth of growth. District will develop indicator measures in key grades and subjects, representing both elementary and secondary grades by the end of Year 3 and we will have baseline values by the end of Year 3.</p>	<p>proficiency levels of the highest-scoring groups:</p> <p>For grades 3-5, decrease the gap by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o ELA: 10%</li> <li>o Math: 11%</li> </ul> <p>For grades 6-8, decrease the gap by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o ELA: 8%</li> <li>o Math: 12%</li> </ul> <p>➤ Will identify viable options for Measure (h)</p>	<p>➤ Options for Measure (h)</p>	<p>➤ District reviews classroom observations with School leaders during coaching visits and adjusts school strategies as necessary</p> <p>➤ District reviews STAR data for targeted students and works with school leaders to adjust instructional plans as necessary</p> <p>April:</p> <p>➤ District reviews Early Warning Indicators for 8<sup>th</sup>-10 graders and works with school leaders to adjust plans as necessary</p> <p>➤ District reviews classroom observations with School leaders during coaching visits and adjusts school strategies as necessary</p> <p>June:</p> <p>➤ District reviews Fidelity Implementation Assessment (FIA) to assess implementation of MTSS components and identify barriers</p> <p>➤ District reviews Star data</p>	<p>➤ Initiate Data Insights project, leading to development of a data dashboard</p>
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Goal 3				
Students effectively <b>problem solve and lead</b> for positive local and global change by developing global awareness and cultural competency, and learn advanced skills in processing and applying information through the effective use of technology and engineering.				
		 		
Strategic Plan Measures of Success (by 2023...)	Year 2 Targets	Outcome Monitoring and Reporting Timeline*	Internal Progress Monitoring (Plan, Study, and Adjust of PDSA)	Key Strategies
i) At least 90% of students show proficiency in global awareness and cultural competence by completing a Performance Task in 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 6 <sup>th</sup> , and 12 <sup>th</sup> grade. j) At least 90% of elementary students show proficiency in computer science by completing a performance task and assessment in 4 <sup>th</sup> grade. Baseline available in June 2020. k) At least 90% of students show proficiency in using technology to design solutions by completing a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) performance task in 10 <sup>th</sup> grade and in one other grade from K-8. Additional grade level will be selected by October 2019. Baseline available in June 2020.	> At least 75% of students in pilot showing successful completion of the global awareness and cultural competence performance task > At least 75% of 4 <sup>th</sup> grade students in participating elementary schools will demonstrate proficiency in computer science ( <i>measurement tool TBD</i> ) > At least 75% of students in pilot schools show proficiency in using technology to design solutions by completing a STEM performance task in select grade levels.	June: > Baseline data on the % of students proficient on the Performance Task > Summary of learnings from first year implementation of Computer Science and next steps for 2020-21 > Summary of learnings from technology design solutions	February: > District reviews the implementation and results of 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade performance tasks > District reviews the implementation of and results of computer science performance tasks > District reviews the implementation of technology design solutions April > District reviews the implementation and results of 6 <sup>th</sup> grade performance tasks > District reviews the implementation of computer science > District reviews the implementation of technology design solutions June: > District reviews the implementation of 12 <sup>th</sup> grade Performance Tasks > District reviews the implementation of computer science	> Implement civic-focused and culturally relevant social studies curriculum that expands cultural competence and global awareness. Pilot performance tasks in 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 6 <sup>th</sup> , and 12 <sup>th</sup> grade. > Implement computer science at five elementary schools (four schools using computer science specialists and one school using computer science facilitator) > Develop STEM performance tasks that use technology to design solutions in select grade levels

			➤ District reviews the implementation of technology design solutions	
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Goal 4				
The <b>culture</b> in the ██████ School District is welcoming to all employees, attracting and retaining high quality, engaged staff.				
  				
Strategic Plan Measures of Success (by 2023...)	Year 2 Targets	Outcome Monitoring and Reporting Timeline*	Internal Progress Monitoring (Plan, Study, and Adjust of PDSA)	Key Strategies
l) At least 70% of staff report high levels of engagement on our staff engagement index. (Baseline in February 2020)  m) Reduce the rate of attrition for all staff within the first five years of employment by 10%.	➤ Baseline measure for (l) to be established via a staff survey by February 11, 2020  ➤ Decrease staff attrition, for all employees hired within the past 5 years, by 10%	November: ➤ Staff Attrition Report  March: ➤ Staff Engagement Index	September: ➤ Review 2018-19 data  February: ➤ Review baseline Staff Engagement Data ( <i>survey window scheduled for Jan 14-28</i> )  April/May: ➤ Determine positions needed to be hired from outside ➤ Monitors staff attrition throughout the year	➤ Build leadership capacity to create a positive organizational culture where staff and students thrive.  ➤ Create opportunities for staff to be empowered to lead colleague engagement for the purpose of supporting students.  ➤ Affirm staff of color and maximize opportunities for positive impact of staff of color who serve in our schools

Goal 5				
<p>Families, particularly those who have been traditionally marginalized, are more informed, better able to find support, and are more empowered to contribute to student success.</p>				
				
Strategic Plan Measures of Success (by 2023...)	Year 2 Targets	Outcome Monitoring and Reporting Timeline*	Internal Progress Monitoring (Plan, Study, and Adjust of PDSA)	Key Strategies
<p>n) At least ___% of families report they feel informed, supported, and empowered to contribute to their student's success as measured by the Family Satisfaction Survey, and subgroup gaps will be reduced by ___ percentage points (baseline/subgroups to be established and goals set by June 30, 2020)</p> <p>o) An additional measure of success will be added and assessed in year two (i.e. 2019-20) to measure central office customer service satisfaction rates. This measure will be refined for years three through five. Measure will be piloted in Transportation and Human Resources during the '19-'20 school year. Pilot will begin in November.</p>	<p>p) 20% Family Satisfaction Survey Participation Rate for each subgroup (by race).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Will develop baseline and target measures for measure (n)</li> <li>➢ Will develop a measure for (o) and run a pilot</li> </ul>	<p>November:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Measure (o) and pilot plan</li> </ul> <p>December</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ School SIPs</li> </ul> <p>April:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Findings from Family Engagement Survey</li> <li>➢ Baseline and target for measure (n)</li> <li>➢ Measure (o) and pilot results</li> </ul>	<p>August:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Study results of Family Engagement Pilot</li> </ul> <p>October</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ District to define Success Criteria for Customer Service Satisfaction rates</li> <li>➢ Review Language Access Plan progress</li> </ul> <p>November</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Field test new family survey questions</li> </ul> <p>February</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ District reviews Family Engagement Survey results and participation rates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Engage community partners as a resource in working with families to improve two-way communication</li> <li>➢ Implement language access plan to ensure that information is available in multiple languages</li> <li>➢ Develop and implement principal training for cohorts of schools to further family engagement</li> <li>➢ Provide Culture of Service training for additional staff</li> <li>➢ Conduct Parent Education Sessions to increase agency and participation</li> <li>➢ Integrate Family and Community Engagement in School Improvement Plans</li> <li>➢ Improve the Family Connection Center intake process for families requesting services</li> </ul>

Tier 2 Department/Program Goals for 2019-20

Department/Program: Advanced Learning	
Results-Oriented Goal	Key Strategies/Projects
At least 40% increase in the number of students in grades K-4 from underserved subgroups (i.e. Black and Hispanic), who are participating in advanced learning domain-specific services.	<p>Expand domain-specific identification to 4<sup>th</sup> grade, utilizing student performance data as well observational data related to key indicators of highly capable students from culturally, linguistically and economically diverse backgrounds.</p> <p>Provide coordinated professional development with the ELL Department to implement culturally relevant teaching practices.</p> <p>Build the capacity of our educators to provide culturally relevant teaching and learning in ELA.</p>

Department/Program: Athletics and Activities	
Results-Oriented Goal	Key Strategies/Projects
<p>At least 50% of parents/guardians complete the athletics participation survey at the end of each sport season (fall, winter, and spring), up from 0% to 50% during the 2018-2019 school year.</p> <p>At least 50% of students complete the athletics participation survey at the end of each sport season (fall, winter, and spring),</p>	<p>Set aside time at scheduled practices, early release Wednesdays, and/or equipment return to have participating athletes complete the survey.</p> <p>Schedule time during post-season gathering to have parents/guardians complete the survey.</p> <p>Send electronic and/or phone reminders to participating athletes and parents/guardians to complete the post-season survey.</p> <p>Reduce the number of questions on the survey to those deemed most critical to reduce the time it takes to complete the survey, encouraging greater completion.</p>

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<p>up from 0% to 30% during the 2018-2019 school year.</p> <p>All parents and students participating in the program know the results and follow-up actions.</p>	
<p>Increase the number of students participating in optional (out-of-state and overnight) field trip opportunities at the district's high needs' schools at the middle and high school levels by 50 students, 20 at the middle school and 30 at the high school.</p>	<p>Review and educate school-based leaders, advisors, and/or students on field trip opportunities accessed at each of our middle and high schools, raising awareness and interest.</p> <p>Review and revise Administrative Procedure 2320P using the Critical Criteria in order to eliminate inherent barriers in place for our most marginalized students.</p> <p>Refine education and training opportunities for all district schools regarding Policy and Procedure 2320: Field Trips to proactively provide training and guidance for those intending to support and/or sponsor field trips for their programs.</p> <p>Meet with select school-based advisors to discuss unique opportunities available to our students (i.e., AVID student engaging in college tours, affinity groups engaging in leadership training, etc.).</p> <p>Increase the number of optional (out-of-state and overnight) field trips at the middle and high schools.</p> <p>Review funding process for field trips and determine if additional resources are required based on an analysis of field trip data.</p>
<p>At least 90% of high school coaches and advisors participate in the comprehensive training program (common core purpose of Athletics and Activities, anti-bullying, conflict competence, conflict of interest, equity and accountability, etc.), up from 52% participation rate in the 2018-2019 school year.</p>	<p>Develop multiple avenues for in-person and on-line training options for District coaches and advisors</p> <p>Expand current in-person trainings to include two additional seasonal trainings</p> <p>Send written reminder to each coach/advisor that has not yet completed the training prior to the start of their season</p> <p>Individual follow up with each coach/advisor that has not yet completed the training despite receiving a written reminder, solidifying a date for the training</p>

<b>Department/Program:</b> Career and Technical Education (CTE)	
<b>Results-Oriented Goal</b>	<b>Key Strategies/Projects</b>
At least 10% more under-represented subgroups of students (females, Black, Hispanic, Multi-Ethnic) will enroll in Middle School Computer Science this year.	<p>Increase awareness of career opportunities in the computer science fields so female students and students of color understand the many career opportunities available to them.</p> <p>Provide students (grades 5,6, and 7) with guest speakers, field trips to industry work places, workshops and through the monthly CTE Spotlight.</p> <p>Strategize with counselors and administrators to encourage under-represented students to enroll.</p>

<b>Department/Program:</b> Communications	
<b>Results-Oriented Goal</b>	<b>Key Strategies/Projects</b>
The broader community understands and supports district initiatives and programs, as measured through a community survey, reactions on social media, and website traffic.	<p>Develop and implement a communications plan to inform staff and community about the successes and challenges the district faces in achieving strategic plan goals.</p> <p>Develop and implement a communications plan to build understanding and support for our school district within our community.</p> <p>Develop talking points for key issues and programs in our district.</p>

<b>Department/Program:</b> Community Development	
<b>Results-Oriented Goal</b>	<b>Key Strategies/Projects</b>
Students participating in mentoring will show a significant increase in their On-Track to Graduate progress from the previous year. At least 40% more students will participate in mentoring at our high schools.	<p>Regular facilitated convenings of community partner mentor providers focused on increasing the number of mentors and building common understanding of mentoring needs of students.</p> <p>Develop additional outreach to increase the number of mentors and student participation in mentoring programs.</p> <p>Increase group mentoring opportunities for students of color at all high schools. (Baseline for 2018-19: Ten/ students per high school.)</p>

Department/Program: Counseling	
Results-Oriented Goal	Key Strategies/Projects
<p>100% of students in 10<sup>th</sup> grade will be screened for mental health support needs. Every student identified for tier 3 mental health intervention will be provided services.*</p> <p><i>*Families may choose to opt out.</i></p>	<p>Implement the Behavior Intervention Monitoring Assessment System (BIMAS-2) mental health screener in all 10<sup>th</sup> grade health classes.</p> <p>Initial consultation with all students that screen through based upon the recommendations from BIMAS-2.</p> <p>Provide interventions through modular Cognitive Behavioral Therapy or Dialectical Behavioral Therapy for all students that show need.</p> <p>Refer to outside services for all students that show need.</p>
<p>Every 11<sup>th</sup> grade student has an understanding of the college application and financial aid processes for post-secondary education programs. (measurement tool TBD and baseline established by June 2020).</p> <p>Every 10<sup>th</sup> grade student will have a class schedule that supports their post-secondary plan.</p> <p>100% of current 9<sup>th</sup> graders who are not on track to graduate will develop a plan to get back on-track with 1:1 counseling support.</p> <p><b>9<sup>th</sup> Graders on Track:</b> The percent of first-time ninth grade students who earned credit for all attempted courses. This does not include withdrawals. "All attempted courses" include any credit-bearing class, including .5 credit mentoring or tutoring classes.</p>	<p>Collect baseline data and develop a plan for students to ensure all students understand the provided information.</p> <p>Develop a consistent mechanism for revision of the HSBP in all high schools prior to the course request/registration window.</p>

Department/Program: Curriculum	
Results-Oriented Goal	Key Strategies/Projects
Students in US History courses in 5 <sup>th</sup> , 8 <sup>th</sup> , and 11 <sup>th</sup> grade courses will report that instructional materials leverage, reflect, and affirm their unique experiences (e.g. social, racial, cultural, linguistic), and familial backgrounds of our [redacted] school District students and our broader society.	<p>New curriculum materials and lessons developed, adopted and/or updated to be more culturally responsive. (Focus courses are 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade US History)</p> <p>Implement a new process that involves more stakeholders to adopt culturally responsive materials that support the interests and instructional needs of students.</p> <p>We will conduct a short survey and/or focus groups for the 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students to measure student engagement.</p>

Department/Program: Extended Learning	
Results-Oriented Goal	Key Strategies/Projects
70% of students that attend the after-school program each quarter will show improved attendance in school compared to each student's last year's attendance rate.	<p>100% of our students in Title I elementary schools are offered enrichment opportunities after school.</p> <p>Partner with local community organizations to provide enrichment opportunities in academics, social-emotional learning, STEM, sports and the arts in all three trimesters in ten-week sessions.</p> <p>Prioritize access for students with highest identified needs.</p> <p>Student baseline data (last year's % or # of absences) will be generated once we identify which students are participating. Target goal is less than 10 absences for students in our targeted subgroups.</p>

Department/Program: Facilities	
Results-Oriented Goal	Key Strategies/Projects
<p>Fewer escalations from community groups and school teams regarding booking and use of district facilities.</p> <p>PTSA will report that they are satisfied with the facility reservation process in 2019-20.</p>	<p>Review Policy 4260 and associated procedures to develop a strategy that balances community needs with district priorities.</p> <p>Survey of community organizations, including PTSA Council, on issues with community use.</p> <p>Summary of findings and recommendations and baseline data established by February 2020.</p>

	Form an advisory committee comprised of principals and community members to develop recommendations for community use of facilities.
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<b>Department/Program:</b> Finance and Budgeting	
<b>Results-Oriented Goal</b>	<b>Key Strategies/Projects</b>
By the end of the 2019-20 school year, budgeting processes are mapped to Strategic Goals making it easier and more accurate to increase or decrease investments in specific initiatives or programs.	Our Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) System which supports finance, accounting, budgeting, payroll, purchasing and human resources is over 30 years old. During 2019/2020, we will conduct a needs analysis, issue a request for proposal, select a software partner, and begin the implementation of a new system.

<b>Department/Program:</b> Instructional Technology	
<b>Results-Oriented Goal</b>	<b>Key Strategies/Projects</b>
The <i>1:1 Laptop Program Review in Secondary Schools</i> report will be available by November, 2019. Outcomes will be defined based on findings. Bring any goal(s) coming out of the Review to the Board in November.	Utilize the <i>1:1 Laptop Program Review in Secondary Schools</i> conducted in Spring 2019 to inform next steps. Based on the findings from the report, identify which recommendations will be implemented.

<b>Department/Program:</b> Legislative / Government Affairs	
<b>Results-Oriented Goal</b>	<b>Key Strategies/Projects</b>
Passage of legislation, during this session or subsequent sessions, that reflects our priorities and enhances our ability to serve each and every one of our students.	Select and cultivate a relationship with a lobbyist dedicated to serving our district’s unique needs (completed by September 2019).  Develop and implement a communications and engagement plan to share our story and build understanding of our needs with state officials, including our local legislators and the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

	<p>Build partnerships with other district leaders, local officials, and state leaders to craft innovative ways to serve our students more effectively, particularly in areas like student mental health, special education, multi-lingual learnings, and school safety.</p> <p>Work with community partners to educate and engage with our community and families on our legislative priorities and related issues (e.g. bond and levy elections).</p> <p>Achieve support for legislation and state regulations that enable us to better serve students, including, but not limited to, support for student mental health, efforts to keep our schools safe, and funding provisions and formulas that allow us to meet the needs of our learning community.</p> <p>Build communication tools and talking points to support our legislative efforts.</p>
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<b>Department/Program:</b> Nursing	
<b>Results-Oriented Goal</b>	<b>Key Strategies/Projects</b>
Decrease by 20% the number of students with life threatening conditions that do not meet the requirements for school attendance by the first day of school for the 2019-20 school year (from 60 to 48 students).	<p>Increase the safety of students with life threatening conditions by ensuring that they have current treatment orders and medications by the first day of school annually.</p> <p>Provide training to local health professionals to change their treatment orders to align to state timeline requirements.</p> <p>Collect and store medications over the summer instead of returning them at the end of the school year.</p> <p>Partner with community agencies for advocacy, medication vouchers, etc.</p>

<b>Department/Program:</b> Nutrition Services	
<b>Results-Oriented Goal</b>	<b>Key Strategies/Projects</b>
At least 1% more of eligible students for free and reduced priced meals participate in this program.	<p>Increase participation of free and reduced meal eligible students for breakfast and lunch.</p> <p>Create access to meals opportunities for students beyond the current hours in the cafeteria (i.e., vending machines at secondary schools)</p>

	<p>Participation of the school breakfast and lunch program by low income students will increase during the 2019/2020 school year.</p> <p><b>Breakfast:</b>                  2018/2019 -                  Participation of Free eligible students: 19.16%                  Participation of Reduced Eligible Students: 12.07%</p> <p><b>2019/2020 Goals:</b>                  Participation of Free Eligible Students: 20.16%                  Participation of Reduced Eligible Students: 13.07%</p> <p><b>Lunch:</b>                  2018/2019 -                  Participation of Free eligible students: 60.16%                  Participation of Reduced Eligible Students: 51.84%</p> <p><b>2019/2020 Goals:</b>                  Participation of Free Eligible Students: 61.1%                  Participation of Reduced Eligible Students: 52.84%</p> <p>Nutrition Services utilizes multiple software applications for application processing, Point of Sale (POS), payment and nutritional analysis services to families.</p> <p>During 2019/2020, we will conduct a needs analysis, issue a request for proposal, select a software partner, and begin the implementation of a new system</p>
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<b>Department/Program:</b> Security		
<b>Results-Oriented Goal</b>	<b>Key Strategies/Projects</b>	<b>Year 2 Targets</b>
Students, staff, or community members will be able to locate and access any automated external defibrillator (AED) within three minutes from any location in our buildings;	<p>Replace and standardize all AEDs in every building.</p> <p>During 2019, we had an independent assessment of our Automated Electronic Defibrillator (AED) status. The results were the district was lacking in the quantity needed, consistency of placement, and consistency of</p>	

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<p>and, any students, staff, or community members who experience relevant medical episodes on our campuses will successfully access the AEDs.</p>	<p>brand, make and model. During the coming school year, we will begin replacing and adding AEDs at buildings throughout the District with a brand that is consistent with those used by Bellevue PD and Fire.</p>
<p>Increase school safety by requiring individuals without access cards to enter through the main entrance and use the electronic visitor management system.</p> <p>Reduce the number of unauthorized persons in our buildings.</p> <p>There will be no disproportionate reduction in school access by any of our families or groups of families.</p>	<p>Determine policy and procedure needs for implementing employee and student badging.</p> <p>Build clarity and expectations for all employees to wear district-issued badges in all district facilities.</p> <p>Complete research on student badging by November 2019.</p> <p>Implement an electronic visitor system to provide better information regarding who is in our buildings at any given time.</p> <p>Complete the installation of additional proximity card readers at identified secondary schools (International, Interlake, Tyee, and Chinook) to further secure our buildings.</p> <p>By the end of the 2019-20 school year, all schools will be utilizing the electronic visitor management system and will ensure that all of their exterior doors are locked during school hours. Access to school buildings will be limited to the main entry door. These actions will significantly limit the ability of unauthorized persons from accessing our school sites.</p> <p>At least 75 random audits will be conducted by Safety and Security Department personnel to ensure compliance with the use of the electronic visitor management system, that exterior doors are not being propped open, and that no unauthorized persons are found in our school building sites.</p>
<p>Students participating in life safety classes report feeling prepared to deal with emergency conditions.</p>	<p>Expand student life-safety training pilot program. Provide additional life safety classes: CPR/AED; Active Threat Response; Fire Safety and Suppression; Disaster Medical and Triage; Search and Rescue and Building Damage Assessment; Public Trauma/First Aid; Suspicious Activity Reporting and the Importance of Drills; and Social Media and the Law.</p> <p>Use information from pilot program, in partnership with Bellevue PD and Fire, to determine how we expand the program to other schools.</p>



Department/Program: Special Education	
Results-Oriented Goal	Key Strategies/Projects
<p>At least 5% more of Black and Hispanic students will have access to the least restrictive environment. (Current baseline for Black students is 60% and 58% for Hispanic students.)</p> <p>All subgroups of students receiving Special Education services will meet or exceed the 2020 target set by the state.</p>	<p>Expand "continuum of services" that identifies different services, models, and settings where specially designed instruction can be provided to a student to meet their goals and needs. To the greatest extent possible, services are provided through a student's home school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustain implementation of a continuum of services at Stevenson, Wilburton, and Chinook.</li> <li>• Begin continuum of services implementation at Enatai and ██████ High.</li> <li>• Begin readiness work at Clyde Hill, Phantom Lake, Odle, Highland, and all high schools.</li> </ul>
<p>Improve quality of least restrictive environment as measured by the Membership and Participation Rubric. Baseline to be established by November, 2019.</p> <p>Will progress monitor using membership and participation rubric three times. Will have baseline data in fall for creating a specific goal for spring. Measure quality and quantity of experience in the general education setting.</p>	<p>Create the enabling context (i.e. a high-quality least restrictive environment) for students receiving special education services in their neighborhood school using the Membership and Participation rubric as a guide. Our theory of action is:</p> <p><b>IF...</b>                      ...students are authentic members of learning communities (<b>membership</b>)</p> <p><b>AND...</b>                      ...can participate in general education instruction, social opportunities, and routines (<b>participation</b>)</p> <p><b>THEN...</b>                      Students will experience improved outcomes in academic, social-emotional, and behavioral areas. (<b>learning</b>)</p>

Department/Program: Transportation	
Results-Oriented Goal	Key Strategies/Projects
<p>At least 80% of parents interacting with the Transportation Department through the K-12 Insights program report satisfaction with the interaction.</p>	<p>Implement student monitoring system: Students will be given an ID card that will be scanned as they enter and exit the bus. The system will alert the driver if the student is not a regular rider or is getting off at an unassigned bus stop.</p>

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	<p>Implement enhanced parent communication system: Parents can sign up to receive alerts for when the bus is nearing their stop, or to receive an alert any time a bus is running 10 or more minutes behind schedule.</p> <p>Pilot a tool that tracks customer satisfaction with Transportation Dept services and interactions.</p> <p>Train bus drivers on student management and improve school bus camera systems to assist bus drivers with student management and investigate conduct issues.</p> <p>This year we are putting new systems in place to track data and establish baselines, so that we can set specific goals and monitor progress.</p>
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Reporting Calendar

The following chart organizes the reports listed above by month for each goal:

Month	Report	Goal Alignment
September		
October		
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Annual SBA Report and Targets for Year 2 (Strat Plan monitoring and updates to Annual Plan)</li> <li>➤ Staff Attrition Report</li> <li>➤ Measure (o) and pilot plan</li> </ul>	<p>Goal 2</p> <p>Goal 4</p> <p>Goal 5</p>
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 2019-20 School Improvement Plans</li> </ul>	Goals 1, 2, 5
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Panorama change from Fall 2018 to Fall 2019 and Progress on strategies identified in SIP</li> <li>➤ Early Learning Plan</li> </ul>	<p>Goal 1</p> <p>Goal 2</p>
February		
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Fall-to-Winter Star Growth for targeted elementary and middle school students</li> <li>➤ Fall-to-Winter growth for 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students identified through Early Warning Index</li> <li>➤ Staff Engagement Index</li> </ul>	<p>Goal 2</p> <p>Goal 2</p> <p>Goal 4</p>
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Summary of how many schools are on track according to their individual SIP progress monitoring</li> <li>➤ Findings from Family Engagement Survey</li> <li>➤ Options for Measure (b)</li> <li>➤ Baseline and target for Measure (n)</li> <li>➤ Measure (o) and pilot results</li> </ul>	<p>Goal 1</p> <p>Goal 5</p> <p>Goal 1</p> <p>Goal 5</p> <p>Goal 5</p>

May		
June	> Baseline data on the % of students proficient on the Performance Task	Goal 3
	> Summary of learnings from first year implementation of Computer Science and next steps for 2020-21	Goal 3
	> Summary of learnings from technology design solutions	Goal 3
	> Options for Measure (h)	Goal 2



(See Strategic Plan Goal Table)

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Washington School Improvement Framework (WSIF) Targets

**Washington School District 2020 WSIF Targets (DRAFT 8/2/2019)**

Terms are defined at the bottom of this document.

GRADES K-5	English Language Arts Proficiency <i>(State goal = 90% by 2027)</i>				Math Proficiency <i>(State goal = 90% by 2027)</i>				English Learners On Track <i>(State goal = 77% by 2027)</i>			
	2018 Student Count	2018 Actual	2020 State Target	2020 BSD Target	2018 Student Count	2018 Actual	2020 State Target	2020 BSD Target	2018 Student Count	2018 Actual	2020 State Target	2020 BSD Target
ALL	4,446	76%	79%	79%	4,456	74%	78%	78%	1,385	66%	68%	68%
Asian	1,838	87%	87%	88%	1,845	89%	89%	90%	692	76%	76%	77%
Black/ African American	123	43%	54%	54%	123	41%	52%	52%	26	77%	77%	78%
Hispanic/ Latino of any race(s)	556	45%	55%	55%	556	39%	51%	51%	404	43%	50%	50%
Two or More Races	431	77%	80%	80%	429	72%	76%	76%	47	77%	77%	78%
White	1,474	78%	80%	80%	1,479	73%	77%	77%	210	73%	74%	74%
English Language Learners	538	29%	42%	42%	550	40%	51%	51%	1,385	66%	68%	68%
Students with Disabilities	368	41%	52%	52%	371	36%	48%	48%	143	35%	44%	44%
Low-Income	852	42%	53%	53%	858	38%	49%	49%	573	47%	53%	53%

GRADES 6-8	English Language Arts Proficiency <i>(State goal = 90% by 2027)</i>				Math Proficiency <i>(State goal = 90% by 2027)</i>				English Learners On Track <i>(State goal = 77% by 2027)</i>			
	2018 Student Count	2018 Actual	2020 State Target	2020 BSD Target	2018 Student Count	2018 Actual	2020 State Target	2020 BSD Target	2018 Student Count	2018 Actual	2020 State Target	2020 BSD Target
ALL	4,509	79%	81%	81%	4,515	73%	77%	77%	272	49%	55%	55%
Asian	1,771	88%	89%	89%	1,782	88%	88%	89%	110	66%	69%	69%
Black/ African American	125	46%	55%	55%	125	29%	42%	42%	*	*	*	*
Hispanic/ Latino of any race(s)	494	57%	64%	64%	490	39%	50%	50%	114	26%	38%	38%
Two or More Races	411	81%	83%	83%	411	76%	79%	79%	*	*	*	*
White	1,684	78%	81%	81%	1,683	71%	75%	75%	37	70%	72%	72%
English Language Learners	263	24%	39%	39%	271	38%	49%	49%	272	49%	55%	55%
Students with Disabilities	325	29%	42%	42%	324	26%	40%	40%	61	21%	34%	34%
Low-Income	768	50%	59%	59%	765	37%	49%	49%	164	35%	44%	44%

GRADES 9-12	English Language Arts Proficiency <i>(State goal = 90% by 2027)</i>				Math Proficiency <i>(State goal = 90% by 2027)</i>				English Learners On Track <i>(State goal = 72% by 2027)</i>				Graduation Rate <i>(State goal=90% by 2027)</i>			
	2018 Student Count	2018 Actual	2020 State Target	2020 BSD Target	2018 Student Count	2018 Actual	2020 State Target	2020 BSD Target	2018 Student Count	2018 Actual	2020 State Target	2020 BSD Target	2018 Student Count	2018 Actual	2020 State Target	2020 BSD Target
ALL	1,131	85%	86%	86%	1,134	75%	78%	78%	243	58%	63%	63%	1,589	92.7	92.1	93.2
Asian	610	90%	90%	91%	613	88%	88%	89%	173	71%	72%	72%	572	94.9	93.8	95.4
Black/ African American	47	60%	66%	66%	47	32%	45%	45%	*	*	*	*	34	82.4	84.1	84.1
Hispanic/ Latino of any race(s)	168	57%	64%	64%	167	35%	47%	47%	102	29%	40%	40%	144	82.6	84.2	84.2
Two or More Races	143	86%	87%	87%	143	74%	78%	78%	*	*	*	*	151	92.7	92.1	93.2
White	641	90%	90%	91%	642	77%	80%	80%	35	77%	77%	78%	685	93.7	92.9	94.2
English Language Learners	105	24%	39%	39%	108	35%	47%	47%	330	58%	62%	62%	132	75	78.3	78.3
Students with Disabilities	125	39%	50%	50%	124	25%	39%	39%	64	23%	35%	35%	154	64.9	70.5	70.5
Low-income	308	58%	65%	65%	307	41%	52%	52%	193	45%	52%	52%	361	85.7	85.1	85.1

\*Data are suppressed when group sizes are below 20, in order to protect student privacy, including for American Indian/Alaskan Natives and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islanders.

GRADES 6-8	English Language Arts Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP)		Math Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP)		Regular Attendance	
	2018 Student Count	2018 Actual	2018 Student Count	2018 Actual	2018 Student Count	2018 Actual
ALL	4,127	54	4,144	50	4,799	96%
Asian	1,629	61	1,645	58	1,883	98%
Black/ African American	110	44.5	111	41	140	94%
Hispanic/ Latino of any race(s)	455	49	454	43	560	93%
Two or More Races	380	52.5	381	46	431	94%
White	1,531	49	1,531	45	1,758	94%
English Language Learners	166	55	184	50	381	92%
Students with Disabilities	275	43	272	39	394	89%
Low-Income	699	47	699	42	869	91%
GRADES 9-12	Regular Attendance		Dual Credit		9th Graders On Track	
	2018 Student Count	2018 Actual	2018 Student Count	2018 Actual	2018 Student Count	2018 Actual
ALL	4,806	94%	4,733	90%	1,187	87%
Asian	2,456	96%	2,453	92%	619	95%
Black/ African American	214	94%	211	85%	48	65%
Hispanic/ Latino of any race(s)	756	92%	738	82%	198	69%
Two or More Races	581	93%	577	88%	147	86%
White	2,792	92%	2,734	90%	679	86%
English Language Learners	480	93%	488	77%	120	69%
Students with Disabilities	609	87%	564	69%	149	66%
Low-Income	1,342	90%	1,327	82%	321	64%

**Note:** Group sizes for American Indian/Alaskan Natives and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islanders are below 20, so data are suppressed to preserve student privacy.

**DEFINITIONS:** The following definitions come from OSPI's website, for more information see <https://www.k12.wa.us/policy-funding/grants-grant-management/every-student-succeeds-act-essa-implementation/washington-0>

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**ELA and Math Proficiency:** The percentage of students, grades 3-8 and 11, that score level 3 or level 4 in English Language Arts (ELA) or Mathematics on the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA) or Washington Access to Instruction & Measurement Alternative Assessment (WA-AIM).

**Student Growth:** Median Student Growth Percentile (MSGP) of all students in the school. The median represents how the middle student in a school or student group grew in comparison to their academic peers. Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs) compare growth of students across the state with similar test score histories. SGPs require two test scores to determine how many scale points a student grew compared to how their peers grew. High schools don't get SGPs because of the gap between 8th and 11th grades.

**English Learners on Track:** The percent of students who took the English Language Progress Assessment for the 21st Century (ELPA21) that showed enough progress to transition out of language development services within 6 years. Students are included if they have two ELPA21 test results or transitioned out of services their first year.

**Regular Attendance:** The percent of students enrolled for 90 calendar days or more throughout the school year, who are present for at least 90% of school days, or missing fewer than an average of 2 days per month. This includes excused and unexcused absences, and any absence where a student misses 50% or more of the school day. A student's total days enrolled are added together and divided by the number of absences. If there are less than 2 absences on average per 30 days enrolled, that student is considered regularly attending. If there are an average of 2 or more absences, that student is considered chronically absent.

**9th Graders on Track:** The percent of first-time ninth grade students who earned credit for all attempted courses. This does not include withdrawals. "All attempted courses" include any credit-bearing class, including .5 credit mentoring or tutoring classes.

**Dual Credit:** Among all enrolled students in grades 9-12, the percent of students who completed a dual credit course. See OSPI's web page for further information on dual credit program options in Washington at <http://www.k12.wa.us/DualCredit/Resources.aspx>. This measure does not take into consideration a student's final grade in the course or attainment of college credits, as this information isn't collected by OSPI at this time.





### Our Approach

Our Annual Plan provides information on the work we plan to do in the 2019-20 school year to achieve these goals by 2023. For the most part, our key strategies for next year are not new, but rather build on the foundational work we completed in 2018-19 to bring our priorities to life. The major difference for the upcoming year will be our effort to implement a smaller number of programs with fidelity, rather than a larger number of programs to varying degrees of success. By becoming more focused in our approach, we believe we will achieve greater impact for our students.

Building a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) focused on both social-emotional and academic success continues to be central to our work. When implemented with fidelity, MTSS enables school teams and educators to use data to target academic and behavior supports that meet student needs. In the upcoming school year, we will enter our third year of partnership with the SWIFT Education Center, a national technical assistance center that focuses on transforming school cultures to build capacity for equity-based MTSS and inclusion. For the last two years, all our school teams have received foundational leadership training in using the SWIFT tools for transformation. A small cohort of our schools, four in 2017-18 and six in 2018-19, worked more closely with a coach from the SWIFT Center to more fully implement those tools. In those schools, we have seen a noticeable change in how the leadership teams at these focus schools use data to set schoolwide priorities and make decisions about how best to support student learning and social-emotional well-being. We are encouraged by the progress at these schools and plan to continue the SWIFT partnership for the 2019-20 school year. In their research, SWIFT has found that it takes three to five years for school teams to truly transform and that full transformation is needed to impact student outcomes.

Implementing MTSS is a multi-year, multi-phase effort. In 2019-20, we will be focusing on Continuous Cycles of Improvement, which are foundational to the MTSS process and will support our accountability processes at the school and district levels. Continuous Cycles of Improvement are structured around four distinct phases: 1) Plan; 2) Do; 3) Study; 4) Adjust. We expect all schools and district departments to use Continuous Cycles of Improvement to identify their goals, monitor progress, and use data to adjust if needed to achieve desired outcomes. Implementing these cycles will require both technical and adaptive changes. On the technical side we are developing tools, including a model for Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and a data dashboard to ensure teams have quality data to inform their monitoring process. From an adaptive perspective, we will be working to change our culture around collecting and using data to drive our decision-making.

In addition to work we are doing to support how teams at our schools are using data to identify and implement strategies for student learning, we are also continuing to develop cross-district efforts in several areas of importance to our students:

- **Behavioral and Mental Health Supports:** We have seen an increasing need for improved mental health supports for students. Promising results were achieved this year through a high school pilot of a Mental Health Assistance Team (MHAT). MHAT will expand in the upcoming year to additional secondary schools, with the goal of implementing at all secondary schools over the next two years. over the next two years.
- **Incorporating Student Voice:** Our BOOM mentorship program has provided a powerful venue for our students to share their experiences and to offer feedback on how we can build affirming and inspiring learning environments for each and every one of our students. We plan to build on those efforts and seek other ways for our students to inform our decision-making and program design.
- **Focus on Families:** Our district is incredibly diverse. In the coming year, we plan to focus our efforts on engaging with families to build shared-ownership and agency to influence and inform our work.

- **Creators of Their Future World:** We're excited to bring our vision to life through the strategic plan.

We are also reviewing our resource allocation processes to determine ways to direct resources towards programs and services that will most support our students who have traditionally been marginalized or underserved. For example, in 2019-20, we will enhance learning by adding the following resources:

- **At our four Title I elementary schools:**
  - Additional teachers allocated in grades K-3 to support student learning, interventions and enrichment, provide embedded coaching and professional learning, and serve as a Professional Learning Community (PLC) leads at our four Title elementary schools
  - Additional planning time to be used by teachers to participate in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)
  - Computer science specialists to provide students with rigorous, enriching learning experiences that will introduce them to computer science concepts at an early age
  - Before or after school computer science opportunities, such as coding and robotics
- **At our high-needs secondary schools:**
  - Additional staffing of Spanish-speaking educators with subject-matter expertise to co-teach in select core content areas
  - Additional interventionists to support students who are off-track

Implement continuous cycles of improvement at all levels throughout the organization, using the Plan, Do, Study, Adjust (PDSA) model.

At the school level, leaders will...

- **Plan**
  - Use a variety of data to identify strengths, define the problem/opportunity, and establish the aim
  - Based on the data, set implementation and outcome SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) Goals aligned to district Goals
  - Define "what success will look like" and "how will we know"
  - Determine strategy or practice to implement
  - Identify capacity needs to effectively implement the practice or strategy (e.g. training, coaching, on-going support needed to implement with fidelity)
- **Do**
  - Implement the tool, process, or change
  - Collect both process (i.e. implementation) and outcome data
- **Study**
  - Examine collected data
  - Consider both fidelity of implementation and effectiveness of tool, process, or change to reach desired outcomes
- **Adjust**
  - Based on results, integrate all learning generated throughout the process
  - Make adjustments to targets, formulate new theories or predictions, make changes to overarching aim of the continuous improvement work
  - Modify any tools or processes as necessary or strengthen fidelity of implementation

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- Repeat the cycle based on what has been learned

At the district level, we will...

- Plan
  - Use district-wide data to identify strengths, opportunities, and “problems of practice” that need to be addressed at the district/system level
  - Use goals and strategies stated in SIPs to determine how to align district support for schools
  - Identify success criteria and progress monitoring measures to use in the study phase to evaluate our effectiveness
  - Determine what practices/support/strategies we will implement
- Do
  - Implement
  - Collect data
- Study
  - Examine implementation and outcome data at key times throughout the year to monitor progress
- Adjust
  - Based on results and learning, adjust as needed
  - Repeat the cycle

Throughout the year, in partnership with school leaders, the district will collect and examine a body of evidence to measure implementation and outcomes to see how students are doing, then adjust strategies and actions as needed to continue moving toward our goals.

#### Equity and Accountability

On June 11, 2019, the Board passed [Policy 0130 Equity and Accountability](#). Policy 0130 outlines the commitments that both the Board and District are making to ensure that all ██████ students have equitable access to learning environments that support and honor students, staff and families of all backgrounds. The policy also outlines how we will hold ourselves accountable for achieving these commitments.

A central component of the accountability structure outlined in the policy are a set of critical criteria that we will use to review our programs and allocation of resources across those programs. The critical criteria ensure that we consider each and every student; serve all students and stakeholders; align with values, historic realities, and current contexts; and build in clear accountability to all of our designing, implementing, monitoring, and reporting. A full list of the critical criteria can be found in Procedure 0130P-A.

**APPENDIX C**

**DUEL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

## ██████████ Elementary

2019-2020



SCHOOL PRINCIPAL:

██████████

*The mission of the ██████████ School 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.*



# ██████████ Elementary

## 2019-2020 School Improvement Plan

At ██████████ we are committed to ensuring school is safe (physically and emotionally), learning is happening, and we have fun. Our school mission was created in partnership with parents, teachers and students.

Our work in serving every student, every day in every classroom is grounded in our process of continuous improvement. Working with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, we use nine characteristics of successful schools to guide our work.

**THE NINE CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOLS**

- 1 · Developing a clear and shared focus · 2 · Maintaining high standards and expectations for all students
- 3 · Using effective school leadership · 4 · Engaging in high levels of collaboration and communication
- 5 · Providing curriculum, instruction and assessments aligned with state standards · 6 · Ensuring frequent monitoring of learning and teaching · 7 · Delivering focused professional development · 8 · Maintaining a supportive learning environment · 9 · Promoting high levels of family and community involvement

Included in this school improvement plan are details to share the current focus at ██████████ as well as outline our strengths and opportunities for the year ahead. In addition to promoting continuous improvement of student achievement of the state learning goals, we recognize that nonacademic student learning and growth are key elements of student well-being and success. This plan is based on a comprehensive needs assessment of our school and programs, and included active participation and input from building staff, students, families, parents and community members.

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Profile .....	Page 4-5
School Goals & Key Performance Indicators .....	Pages 6-10

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***Safe. Learning. Fun!***

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

**SCHOOL BACKGROUND****Instructional Program Overview**

■■■■■ is a high achieving elementary school serving approximately 670 students. Students receive a cohesive academic curriculum aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The core instructional program includes reading, writing, math, science, social studies, and social emotional learning. We are in our second year of a four-year partnership with the Achievement Network (ANet). ANet works alongside school leadership teams to strengthen school-wide understanding of the CCSS and how instruction directly affects student success in meeting the high rigor of these standards.

*We affirm the uniqueness of each student, recognize their individual needs and celebrate our collective community as ONE ■■■■■*

In addition to the 28 homeroom classes, students attend a specialist period four times per week in art, music, library, and physical education. ■■■■■ is one of four schools in the district that houses a self-contained program for students receiving advanced learning services. Our staff is committed to ensuring students feel like they belong, and we support an inclusion model through our Special Education and English

Language Learning (ELL) programs. In addition, our after-school enrichment programs further support students. We affirm the uniqueness of each student, recognize their individual needs and celebrate our collective community as ONE ■■■■■

**Safe. Learning. Fun!**

It's important that ■■■■■ students and staff experience these three things regularly at school.

- To ensure safety, we stay current with state required emergency drills and training for staff as well as teach common expectations for all areas of our school. Emotional safety is equally important. In addition to our Social Emotional Learning curriculum, we take a restorative approach to conflict which ensures understanding of the impact of behavior and how to repair harm.
- Students come to school to learn and as educators we ask the following questions: *What is it we want students to learn? How do we know they learned it? What do we do when they don't learn? What do we do when they do learn? What, if anything, in our practice needs to change?*
- Finally, we strive to ensure students and staff find joy and have fun throughout their time at school.

■■■■■ introduced something new last year to increase our students sense of belonging. Wednesdays are special in that the day begins with either a school-wide assembly or ■■■■■ families. ■■■■■ Families consist of approximately 18 students across vertical grades, kindergarten through fifth. In our effort to build positive relationships, in addition to students, most families include a specialist, general school assistant, office staff member, custodian or a kitchen staff. All families are led by a certified teacher for 30 minutes and engage in activities such as community building, read-a-louds, community service projects, craft activities, and games.

■■■■■ believes that education is the shared responsibility of families, educators and community members and we value and respect the diversity of perspectives, knowledge and abilities that all our stakeholders bring. As a school community, we are shaping creators of our future world. The families of our students are essential partners in supporting student academic and social emotional development. We embrace a culture of service, in partnership with families and the community to ensure all students succeed in school and life.



2018-19 SCHOOL PROFILE  
 [Redacted] Elementary School

School Overview

[Redacted] serves a diverse student population of approximately 670 students. We are "ONE [Redacted]" and pride ourselves in providing a safe, learning, and fun environment for our school community. Our staff is dedicated to our Bellevue School District's vision of affirming and inspiring each and every student to learn and thrive as creators of their future world.

Programs Offered

Advanced Learning

School & Student Characteristics <sup>1</sup>

	SCHOOL	DISTRICT <sup>2</sup>
Enrollment	660	496
National Board Certified Teachers	36%	28%
Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Meals	5%	18%
Receiving Special Education Services	2%	6%
English Language Learners	18%	24%
First Language Other Than English	45%	42%
Mobility Rate <sup>3</sup>	10%	14%

Racial Diversity



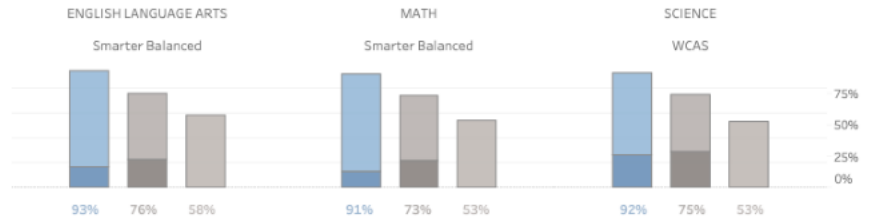
- 72% Asian
- 0% Black
- 3% Hispanic
- 9% Two or more races
- 16% White
- N/A Native American
- N/A Pacific Islander

Attendance & Discipline

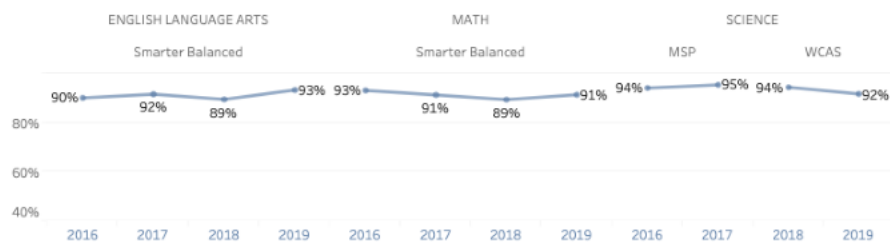
	SCHOOL	DISTRICT
Average Attendance Rate	97%	95%
Students with < 10 Absences Per Year	85%	72%
Students with 18+ Absences Per Year	3%	7%
Suspension Rate <sup>4</sup>	0.0%	0.6%

Summary of Student Achievement

State Assessment Results for Grades 3-5 (Spring 2019)  
 Percentage of Students Meeting /Exceeding Standards



State Assessment Results for Grades 3-5 in the Last Four Years  
 Percentage of Students Meeting Standards





## Glossary

### National Board Certified Teachers

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards offers a voluntary certification process for teachers to show that they have met the organization's standards for effective teaching. Teachers who apply go through a lengthy and rigorous screening process to obtain certification.

### Science Assessments - WCAS/MSP

WCAS stands for Washington Comprehensive Assessment of Science, first administered in Spring 2018 to students state-wide in grades 5, 8 and 11. The WCAS replaces the WA State MSP science assessment. The WCAS is aligned to Next Generation Science Standards, which emphasize engineering and technology. The standards were adopted by the state in 2013. For more information see [www.k12.wa.us/assessment/StateTesting/default.aspx](http://www.k12.wa.us/assessment/StateTesting/default.aspx).

### Smarter Balanced

Starting in 2014-15, Washington State adopted the Smarter Balanced exams to assess student learning in English language arts and math in grades 3-8 and 10-11. These computer-based exams are aligned to the state's Common Core learning standards. For more information see [www.k12.wa.us/assessment/StateTesting/default.aspx](http://www.k12.wa.us/assessment/StateTesting/default.aspx).

### Special Education Services

Neighborhood schools provide a continuum of special education services. We provide specialty centers as well:

- \* **Cascade** program for students who benefit from behavioral supports due to emotional stressors.
- \* **Evergreen** program to serve young adults (ages 18-21) with disabilities.
- \* **Olympic** program to support students on the autism spectrum.
- \* **Pacific** program for students with significant developmental and intellectual disabilities.
- \* **PALS** (Preschool Age Learning) preschool to provide early intervention services for children with special needs (ages 3-5), together with typically developing peers.

## End Notes

- 1 **School and Student Characteristics**  
Data are from October 1, 2018 unless otherwise specified.
- 2 **District Average**  
The district averages displayed here are the averages for district elementary schools.
- 3 **Mobility Rate**  
The percent of students who entered or withdrew from the school between October 1 and June 15, based on October 1 enrollment.
- 4 **Suspension Rate**  
The percent of students who received at least one in-school or out-of-school suspension or were expelled over the course of the school year.
- 5 **State Assessment Results**  
State pass rate percentages combine "Meets Standard" and "Exceeds Standard."

### High Quality Instruction

#### English Language Arts (ELA) SMART GOAL

##### Smarter Balanced Spring 2019 ELA by Level

English Language Arts: SBA Proficiency Rates and Goals: Grades 3-5				
Group	2018	2019		2020
	Actual	Target	Actual	Target
All Students	90%	91%	93%	94%
Asian	92%	93%	94%	95%
Black	*	*	*	*
Hispanic	70%	72%	*	*
Two or More Races	84%	85%	95%	96%
White	88%	89%	92%	93%
Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Meals	59%	62%	78%	80%
Students with Disabilities	50%	54%	85%	86%
English Language Learners	25%	32%	47%	52%

English Language Arts: SBA Proficiency Rates and Goals: Grade 3*				
Group	2018	2019		2020
	Actual	Target	Actual	Target
All Students	90%	91%	93%	94%
Asian	90%	91%	93%	94%
Black	*	*	*	*
Hispanic	*	*	*	*
Two or More Races	100%	100%	100%	100%
White	87%	88%	*	*
Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Meals	*	*	*	*
Students with Disabilities	*	*	*	*
English Language Learners	27%	34%	73%	75%

\*Grade 3 Actuals are not cohort data but based on students in grade 3 of each year

By the end of the 2019-20 school year at least 94% of Class of 2029 (current 3<sup>rd</sup> graders) will meet standards in ELA, while meeting WSIF goals for all subgroups.

We will decrease the gap between our highest and lowest achieving racial subgroups in ELA grades 3-5 by accelerating the growth for the lowest-scoring groups while maintaining or increasing proficiency levels of the highest scoring groups.

Goal: Decrease the gap from 3% in 2019 to 2.6% in 2020.

#### Our strengths in the goal area:

- **Professional Learning:** Teachers are active participants in professional learning opportunities for ELA.
- **Achievement Network (ANet) Partnership:** We are in year two of our Achievement Network (ANet) partnership. In year one we focused on ELA standards-based instruction. Year two will continue this work and expand into math standards-based instruction as well.
- **Master Schedule:** Our master schedule allows for 90-minute literacy blocks, 30-minute intervention/differentiation blocks and common planning time.
- **Instructional Resources:** Supplementary ELA resources available to support student learning.
- **Classified Staff Support:** Our PTSA supports teacher-to-student ratio with funding to hire instructional aides.

**Key performance indicators for the 2019-20 School Year include:**

- DIBELS and TRC Assessments in grades K-2: These assessments are administered three times per year as both a universal screener and progress monitoring tool.
- STAR Reading and Math Assessments: STAR is used as a universal screener and progress monitoring tool. These are short assessments in reading and math that are administered to all students each fall and spring. The assessments are computer adaptive, which means they adjust to each answer that students provide. Results from STAR assessments are accurate predictors of the Smarter Balanced Assessments so that educators can use Star scores to identify students in jeopardy of missing reading and math yearly progress goals in time to make meaningful adjustments to instruction.
- Smarter Balanced Assessments (SBA): Starting in 2014-15, Washington State adopted the Smarter Balanced Assessments to assess student learning in English Language Arts and Math in grades 3-8 and 10-11. These computer-based exams are aligned to the state's Common Core learning standards.
- Achievement Network Interim Assessments: These assessments measure students' proficiency on standards in reading and math. We will utilize these assessments to improve instruction and student learning.
- English Language Proficiency Assessments (ELPA): The ELPA assessment is designed to assess the English language proficiency of students receiving English Language Development services in schools in Washington State. To monitor the growth of our Multi-language learners our ELL facilitator will work with teachers to monitor ELPA data.

**To support student growth and achievement for those performing below grade level, our school community will meet the academic and non-academic needs in the following ways (Structural Components and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support):**

- Embedded Professional Learning: Coaching visits and classroom learning walks to analyze the implementation of balanced literacy and the common core shifts (regular practice with complex text, communication grounded in evidence from text and building knowledge through non-fiction).
- Multi-tiered Systems and Supports: Utilize a grade-level data team meeting structure to support data-based instructional decision making, scheduled in 4-6-week cycles that are in alignment with grade level assessments. Teams will monitor data for all students and particularly for students who are performing below standard. Data will be used to guide classroom-based instruction as well as interventions.
- Guidance and Multi-Disciplinary Teams: Guidance and Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) meetings to determine researched based interventions to be delivered and progress monitored.
- Cycles of Continuous Improvement: All teachers will use a comprehensive assessment system and the PDSA (Plan, Do, Study, Adapt) to support student growth and achievement.
- Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum: Teachers will use the district adopted literacy curriculum and ensure students are exposed to culturally responsive text.
- Balanced Literacy Implementation: All classroom teachers will use a balanced literacy approach with a knowledge of standards and academic language acquisition strategies. This includes access to and regular practice with complex text and opportunities to read, write and speak grounded in text evidence, both literary and informational.
- Technology Integration: Students will use technology to communicate, access information, share knowledge, and enhance learning. Additionally, students will apply technology to real-world learning experiences and learn digital citizenship skills.

**Math SMART GOAL****Smarter Balanced Spring 2019 Math by Level**

Math: SBA Proficiency Rates and Goals: Grades 3-5				
Group	2018	2019		2020
	Actual	Target	Actual	Target
All Students	90%	91%	91%	92%
Asian	93%	94%	94%	95%
Black	*	*	*	*
Hispanic	80%	81%	*	*
Two or More Races	84%	85%	90%	91%
White	83%	84%	84%	85%
Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Meals	59%	62%	70%	73%
Students with Disabilities	57%	61%	75%	77%
English Language Learners	50%	54%	56%	60%

Math: SBA Proficiency Rates and Goals: Grade 3*				
Group	2018	2019		2020
	Actual	Target	Actual	Target
All Students	90%	91%	92%	93%
Asian	93%	94%	93%	94%
Black	*	*	*	*
Hispanic	*	*	*	*
Two or More Races	100%	100%	100%	100%
White	83%	84%	*	*
Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Meals	*	*	*	*
Students with Disabilities	*	*	*	*
English Language Learners	53%	57%	80%	81%

\*Grade 3 Actuals are not cohort data but based on students in grade 3 of each year

By the end of the 2019-20 school year, at least 93% of Class of 2029 (current 3<sup>rd</sup> graders) will meet state standards in MATH, while meeting WSIF goals for all subgroups.

We will decrease the gap between our highest and lowest achieving racial subgroups in Math grades 3-5 by accelerating the growth for the lowest-scoring groups while maintaining or increasing proficiency levels of the highest scoring groups. Goal: Decrease the gap from 10% in 2019 to 9% in 2020.

**Our strengths in the goal area:**

- **Professional Learning:** Teachers are active participants in professional learning opportunities for Math.
- **Achievement Network (ANet) Partnership:** We are in year two of our Achievement Network (ANet) partnership which will provide an additional focus, during our 2019-20 school year, on math standards.
- **Master Schedule:** Our master schedule allows for 60-minute math blocks, 30-minute intervention/differentiation blocks and common planning time.
- **Instructional Resources:** Supplementary resources available in mathematics to support student learning.
- **Classified Staff Support:** Our PTSA supports teacher-to-student ratio with funding to hire instructional aides.

**Key performance indicators for the 2019-20 School Year include:**

- **STAR Reading and Math Assessments:** STAR is used as a universal screener and progress monitoring tool. These are short assessments in reading and math that are administered to all students each fall and spring. The assessments are computer adaptive, which means they adjust to each answer that students provide. Results from STAR assessments are accurate predictors of the Smarter Balanced Assessments so that educators can use Star scores to identify students in jeopardy of missing reading and math yearly progress goals in time to make meaningful adjustments to instruction.
- **Smarter Balanced Assessments (SBA):** Starting in 2014-15, Washington State adopted the Smarter Balanced Assessments to assess student learning in English Language Arts and Math in grades 3-8 and 10-11. These computer-based exams are aligned to the state's Common Core learning standards.
- **Achievement Network Interim Assessments:** These assessments measure students' proficiency on standards in reading and math. We will utilize these assessments to improve instruction and student learning.

**To support student growth and achievement for those performing below grade level, our school community will meet the academic and non-academic needs in the following ways (Structural Components and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support):**

- **Embedded Professional Learning:** Coaching visits and classroom learning walks to ensure the implementation of a rigorous math block which includes conceptual understanding, procedural skills and fluency, and application.
- **Multi-tiered Systems and Supports:** Utilize a grade-level data team meeting structure to support data-based instructional decision making, scheduled in 6-week cycles. Team time includes review of benchmarking and progress monitoring data for all students and especially for students who are currently performing below grade level standard.
- **Guidance and Multi-Disciplinary Teams:** Guidance and Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) meetings to determine researched based interventions to be delivered and progress monitored.
- **Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum:** All teachers will use the district adopted Math curriculum and ensure students are exposed to culturally responsive practices.
- **Standards-based Instruction:** All classroom teachers will use knowledge of standards and academic language acquisition strategies. Additionally, students will have greater *focus* on fewer topics, *coherent* topics and thinking across grade levels and *rigor* (conceptual understanding, procedure skill and fluency and application).
- **Cycles of Continuous Improvement:** All teachers will use a comprehensive assessment system and the PDSA (Plan, Do, Study, Adapt) to support student growth and achievement.
- **Technology Integration:** Students will use technology to communicate, access information, share knowledge, and enhance learning. Additionally, students will apply technology to real-world learning experiences and learn digital citizenship skills.

**Student Well-Being****SMART GOAL:**

By the end of the 2019-20 school year we will increase student sense of belonging on the Panorama Survey from 74% in fall 2018 to 75% in fall 2019.

**Our strengths in the goal area:**

- **Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Curriculum:** All teachers will implement Second Step and RULER as part of our universal Tier I district adopted SEL curriculum.
- **Leadership Teams:** Somerset is implementing dedicated *Sense of Belonging* and *Positive Behavior Intervention Supports* (PBIS) teams to develop school wide expectations, student leadership skills, appreciation and respect for all community members and the expansion of school wide relationships.
- **Restorative Practices:** We approach discipline as a learning opportunity, using a restorative approach and partner with families in the process. Students are taught how to solve problems and use conflict resolution strategies.

**Key Performance Indicators for the 2019-20 School Year include:**

- **Panorama Student Survey:** The Panorama Student Survey is a tool used to collect student feedback on school climate and classroom culture to help improve practice. Individual student responses are confidential. Individual teacher reports are only accessible to that teacher. Students take the survey online. The survey includes multiple parts: a school climate survey and two teacher surveys. Students fill out the two teacher surveys for teachers randomly selected from their schedules.
- **Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI):** The TFI provides a measure of the extent to which school personnel are applying the core features of school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (SWPBIS). The TFI is divided into three sections: Tier 1: Universal SWPBIS Features; Tier 2: Targeted SWPBIS Features; and, Tier 3: Intensive SWPBIS Features. The TFI is conducted by an outside evaluator.
- **Social Emotional Learning Screener:** In the fall, staff will administer the DESSA Mini, a social emotional screener, to proactively identify students who may need additional or personalized supports with social emotional learning.

**To support student growth and achievement for those performing below grade level, our school community will meet the academic and non-academic needs in the following ways (Structural Components and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support):**

- **Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS):** We are refining our school-wide focus and creating [REDACTED] STARS which will be taught for all learning environments. In fall 2019 we introduced the STARS acronym (Safe, Trustworthy, Accepting, Respectful, Solve Problems) to support student understanding and practice of common area expectations. Students will be recognized for demonstrating these expectations and increment goals will be celebrated school-wide. The DESSA mini is utilized to identify students who need additional support and interventions are matched to individual students.
- **Social-Emotional Learning (SEL):** All teachers will deliver research-based universal SEL instruction in their classrooms to all students as evidenced by the SEL look-for document and create plans for implementation improvement based on strengths and areas for growth.
- **Bullying Prevention:** All students will receive Bullying Prevention Unit lessons (BPU), required for their grade level and delivered by certificated staff member in fall 2019.
- **Restorative Practices:** Staff will use a restorative practices approach to student discipline in the classroom, on the playground and in other common areas.
- **Community Building:** We will continue [REDACTED] **Families** where students from vertical grade levels meet each Wednesday to engage in a community builder, a school-wide project, and a community service project. A certified teacher leads each family and all [REDACTED] staff are assigned to a family (office staff, custodians, GSA's, kitchen staff, etc.). Additionally, for the 2019-2020 school year, our administration is committed to celebrating monthly birthdays with students, on the stage during lunches. We are also committed to making a **Principal Good News Call of the Day** where we call a parent, with the student present, to celebrate positive accomplishments.

**Family and Community Engagement****SMART GOAL:**

By the end of the 2019-20 school year, at least 20% of families in each subgroup will participate in the family engagement survey administered during winter 2020.

**Our strengths in this area:**

- **Family Engagement:** Somerset is a community with high family involvement and strong student achievement.
- **PTSA Partnership:** We have an active PTSA committed to curriculum enhancement supporting teacher's instruction.

**Key Performance Indicators:**

- Family Engagement Survey
- PTSA survey
- Participation of parents, particularly by different population groups, in school teams, school activities, and focus groups.

**Strategies:**

- Parent Engagement Opportunities: Expand opportunities for parents, local organizations, and members of the community to learn and support our work together (PBIS and Sense of Belonging representation).
- Relationship Building: Strengthen relationships with parents and families through deeper understanding of their perspectives and needs.
- Communication: Improve two-way communication with families and community partners by implementing focus groups each semester to share information and solicit feedback.
- Community Partnership: Implement a better system to match resources and services in the community with identified student needs.
- Equity & Inclusion: Implementing equitable and culturally responsive family engagement practices aligned with academic goals.

**APPENDIX D**

**SUMMIT ELEMNTARY SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN**



# [REDACTED] Elementary SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN



2019-2020



**SCHOOL PRINCIPAL:**

[REDACTED]  
*The mission of the [REDACTED] 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.*

# ██████████ Elementary School

## 2019-2020 School Improvement Plan

At ██████████ we are committed to the district’s mission and vision.

Our work in serving every student, every day in every classroom is grounded in an idea of continuous improvement. Working with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, we use nine characteristics of successful schools to guide our work.

**THE NINE CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOLS**

- 1 · Developing a clear and shared focus · 2 · Maintaining high standards and expectations for all students
- 3 · Using effective school leadership · 4 · Engaging in high levels of collaboration and communication · 5
- Providing curriculum, instruction and assessments aligned with state standards · 6 · Ensuring frequent monitoring of learning and teaching · 7 · Delivering focused professional development · 8 · Maintaining a supportive learning environment · 9 · Promoting high levels of family and community involvement

Included in this school improvement plan are details to share the current focus at ██████████ as well as outline our strengths and opportunities for the year ahead. In addition to promoting continuous improvement of student achievement of the state learning goals, we recognize that nonacademic student learning and growth are key elements of student well-being and success. This plan is based on a comprehensive needs assessment of our school and programs, and included active participation and input from building staff, students, families, parents and community members.

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School Goals & Key Performance Indicators .....	Page 7
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***To Affirm and Inspire Each and Every Student to Learn and Thrive***

## SCHOOL BACKGROUND

### Instructional Program Overview

At [REDACTED] we are honored to be a Spanish dual language school and we have created a learning environment and community where students of different races, cultures and abilities benefit from being educated together. We view bilingualism as an asset that directly benefits our learning community and will benefit society in the future by creating individuals who will be productive, respectful and supportive citizens. We provide an intellectually stimulating, culturally relevant, nurturing environment where students develop skills, confidence, and creativity to meaningfully engage in making the world a better place. Our dedicated teachers strive to be their best through collaboration and a commitment to engage in practices that supports student access to a rigorous and engaging curriculum that ensures their academic and social success.

[REDACTED] offers a K-5 Spanish Dual Language program where students from different language backgrounds learn together while instruction is systematically delivered in both Spanish and English. The Spanish Dual Language Program is ideal for any student. Young children gain language faster with near native like language skills and learning a language at a young age increases cognitive development. [REDACTED] utilizes Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD) strategies to support all students. GLAD provides differentiation to meet the needs of each student and develops academic language through linguistic structures that enable students to participate in context-rich discourse. GLAD enables students to use critical thinking to engage with the content through 21st century skills including collaboration, inquiry, and academic vocabulary. This approach allows all students, including our students who receive English language learner (ELL) services (58% of our students) and our students who speak a first language other than English (73% of our students), to access grade level content. Over the course of the next two years, the delivery of the curriculum will be increasingly enhanced by the STEM (Science Technology Engineering Science) initiative, which prepares students for 21st century skills using innovative, hands-on, inquiry-based methodology and technology tools.

[REDACTED] staff members believe that it is our responsibility to eliminate the achievement gap and institutional racism at our school. Our support system for our students is comprehensive and reflects our commitment to achievement and wellness. Our academic team includes five instructional facilitators with expertise in instruction, reading, ELL and dual language. We also have two guidance counselors. Together, this team works with individual teachers and teams of teachers to ensure that the district's curriculum is delivered based on the needs of our students. [REDACTED] has an onsite Family Connection Center (FCC) that is staffed by one district employee and two community members. Together, they work with families to ensure they have access to district and community resources and to ensure families have their basic needs met. They also provide enrichment opportunities for students by bringing the community to the school and the students to the community. In addition, we partner with the greater [REDACTED] community to sustain programs that support our mission. These partnerships help us to enhance our students' connectedness to school through partnerships with the City of [REDACTED] Rainier Athletes, and Jubilee Reach to offer programs such as Girls on the Run, robotics, chess, language classes and art classes, and soccer.

The state of Washington measures progress using the Smarter Balanced Assessment. This District measures progress using Smarter Balanced and the STAR assessments. Based on language acquisition research, it takes approximately 5-7 years before students have the language skills to be "proficient" on such assessment. The state of Washington provides emerging bilinguals one year to be proficient. Research suggests that students enrolled in dual language programs typically do not "meet standard" on English based assessments until they are in middle school; however, their achievement continues to accelerate, eventually outperforming their peers by the time they graduate from high school. [REDACTED] students who have transitioned out of the ELL program show a very strong proficiency when they are 2+ years out of the program with over a 70% proficient rate. Students who transitioned in 2014 had an 80% proficiency rate.

[REDACTED] embraces the three tenets of dual language education, including bilingualism and biliteracy, high academic achievement in two languages, and sociocultural competence. [REDACTED] is committed to meeting the needs of diverse emergent bilingual learners through an equitable dual language program. [REDACTED] is a Spanish two-way dual language school that includes classes taught using a 90/10 language allocation model. The dual language model values the concept of additive bilingualism, in which students acquire a second language without the replacement of their home language and culture.



2018-19 SCHOOL PROFILE  
Stevenson Elementary School

School Overview

At Stevenson, we embrace the rich diversity of students and families and collaboratively maximize district and community resources to support an academically rigorous, culturally relevant, nurturing learning environment where students develop skills, confidence, and creativity to meaningfully engage in making the world a better place.

Programs Offered

Spanish Dual Language, Continuum of special education services, including preschool

Racial Diversity



- 55% Asian
- 4% Black
- 31% Hispanic
- 2% Two or more races
- 6% White
- N/A Native American
- N/A Pacific Islander

School & Student Characteristics <sup>1</sup>

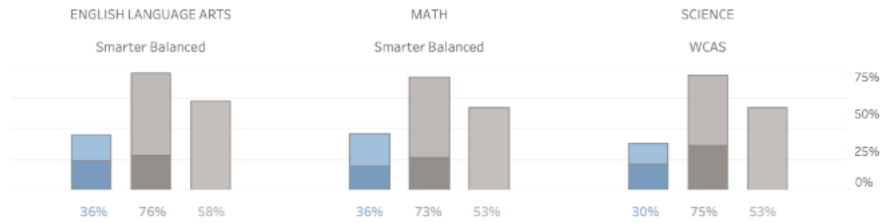
	SCHOOL	DISTRICT <sup>2</sup>
Enrollment	591	496
National Board Certified Teachers	8%	28%
Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Meals	44%	18%
Receiving Special Education Services	6%	6%
English Language Learners	58%	24%
First Language Other Than English	73%	42%
Mobility Rate <sup>3</sup>	27%	14%

Attendance & Discipline

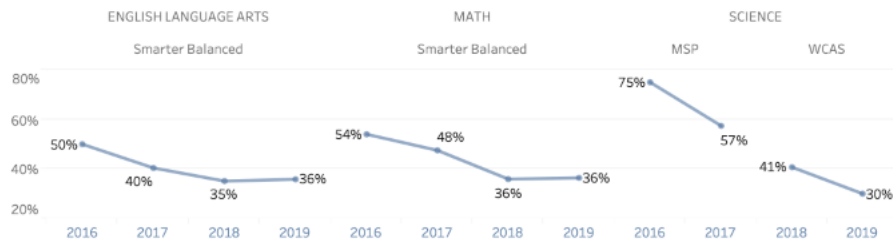
	SCHOOL	DISTRICT
Average Attendance Rate	88%	95%
Students with < 10 Absences Per Year	60%	72%
Students with 18+ Absences Per Year	17%	7%
Suspension Rate <sup>4</sup>	0.0%	0.6%

Summary of Student Achievement

State Assessment Results for Grades 3-5 (Spring 2019)  
Percentage of Students Meeting/Exceeding Standards



State Assessment Results for Grades 3-5 in the Last Four Years  
Percentage of Students Meeting Standards



## Glossary

### National Board Certified Teachers

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards offers a voluntary certification process for teachers to show that they have met the organization's standards for effective teaching. Teachers who apply go through a lengthy and rigorous screening process to obtain certification.

### Science Assessments - WCAS/MSP

WCAS stands for Washington Comprehensive Assessment of Science, first administered in Spring 2018 to students state-wide in grades 5, 8 and 11. The WCAS replaces the WA State MSP science assessment. The WCAS is aligned to Next Generation Science Standards, which emphasize engineering and technology. The standards were adopted by the state in 2013. For more information see [www.k12.wa.us/assessment/StateTesting/default.aspx](http://www.k12.wa.us/assessment/StateTesting/default.aspx).

### Smarter Balanced

Starting in 2014-15, Washington State adopted the Smarter Balanced exams to assess student learning in English language arts and math in grades 3-8 and 10-11. These computer-based exams are aligned to the state's Common Core learning standards. For more information see [www.k12.wa.us/assessment/StateTesting/default.aspx](http://www.k12.wa.us/assessment/StateTesting/default.aspx).

### Special Education Services

Neighborhood schools provide a continuum of special education services. We provide specialty centers as well:

\* **Cascade** program for students who benefit from behavioral supports due to emotional stressors.

\* **Evergreen** program to serve young adults (ages 18-21) with disabilities.

\* **Olympic** program to support students on the autism spectrum.

\* **Pacific** program for students with significant developmental and intellectual disabilities.

\* **PALS (Preschool Age Learning)** preschool to provide early intervention services for children with special needs (ages 3-5), together with typically developing peers.

## End Notes

- 1 **School and Student Characteristics**  
Data are from October 1, 2018 unless otherwise specified.
- 2 **District Average**  
The district averages displayed here are the averages for district elementary schools.
- 3 **Mobility Rate**  
The percent of students who entered or withdrew from the school between October 1 and June 15, based on October 1 enrollment.
- 4 **Suspension Rate**  
The percent of students who received at least one in-school or out-of-school suspension or were expelled over the course of the school year.
- 5 **State Assessment Results**  
State pass rate percentages combine "Meets Standard" and "Exceeds Standard."

## WELL-ROUNDED EDUCATION

### School Goals & Key Strategies

██████████ provides opportunities for every student to develop the knowledge and skills essential to:

- Read with comprehension, write effectively, and communicate successfully in a variety of ways and settings and with a variety of audiences.
- Know and apply the core concepts and principles of mathematics; social, physical, and life sciences; civics and history, including different cultures and participation in representative government; geography; arts; and health and fitness.
- Think analytically, logically, and creatively, and to integrate technology literacy and fluency as well as different experiences and knowledge to form reasoned judgments and solve problems.
- Understand the importance of work and finance and how performance, effort, and decisions directly affect future career and educational opportunities.

Educators at ██████████ provide the foundation for our academic program and conditions for student learning. With the use of instructional coaches, we support all teachers to provide high quality and culturally relevant instructional practices. Additional program support is provided to those students that need assistance. Student services are available for students experiencing homelessness or living in foster care. We offer additional academic assistance and staff professional development through our office of multilingual services, special education, learning assistance program and Title I departments. Focusing on our key priority areas, we have set the following growth and improvement goals in partnership with our parents, students and staff.

## High Quality Instruction

### Spanish Language Arts (SLA)

#### Student Outcome SMART Goals for SLA:

- At least 84% of our 3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grade dual language students will meet standards in SLA as measured by the Evaluación del desarrollo de la lectura " (EDL2) assessment, while meeting the goals noted below by subgroups.

The table below shows ██████████ goal and growth towards all sub groups meeting SLA proficiency. We continue to analyze our actions and implement the strategies identified below to close gaps that have been historically predictable in our school system.

**Spanish Language Arts: Proficiency Rates and Goals: Grade 3-5**

Group	2018		2019		2020	
	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target
All students:	73%	78%	76%	84%		
Native Spanish Speakers:	70%	75%	75%	83%		
ELL:	65%	70%	70%	77%		
Non-ELL:	100%	100%	100%	100%		

### English Language Arts (ELA)

#### Student Outcome SMART Goals:

- At least 42% of Class of 2029 (current 3rd graders) will meet state standards in ELA, while meeting WSIF goals for all subgroups.
- We will decrease the gap between our highest and lowest achieving racial subgroups in ELA grades 3-5 by accelerating the growth for the lowest-scoring groups while maintaining or increasing proficiency levels of the highest scoring groups.
  - Goal: Decrease the gap from 56% in 2019 to 49% in 2020.

The tables below show ██████████ goal and growth towards all sub groups meeting ELA proficiency. Boxes with an asterisk indicate subgroups where the number of students is not large enough to be shared publicly. Boxes that are highlighted in yellow indicate areas where ██████████ met its sub group goals. While we celebrate growth in many areas, we continue to analyze our actions and implement the strategies identified below to close gaps that have been historically predictable in our school system. Our combined data for grades 3-5 illuminates longer term trends compared to the grade 3 data and serves as the data source for our gap closing goal.

**English Language Arts: SBA Proficiency Rates and Goals: Grade 3\***

Group	2018		2019		2020	
	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target
All Students	33%	39%	35%	42%	42%	42%
Asian	50%	54%	71%	73%	73%	73%
Black	*	*	*	*	*	*
Hispanic	16%	24%	7%	17%	17%	17%
Two or More Races	*	*	*	*	*	*
White	*	*	*	*	*	*
Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Meals	12%	21%	13%	23%	23%	23%
Students with Disabilities	*	*	*	*	*	*
English Language Learners	11%	20%	18%	27%	27%	27%

\*Grade 3 Actuals are not cohort data but based on students in grade 3 of each year

**English Language Arts: SBA Proficiency Rates and Goals: Grades 3-5**

Group	2018		2019		2020	
	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target
All Students	36%	42%	36%	43%	43%	43%
Asian	53%	57%	62%	66%	66%	66%
Black	50%	54%	33%	40%	40%	40%
Hispanic	19%	27%	15%	24%	24%	24%
Two or More Races	*	*	*	*	*	*
White	39%	45%	33%	40%	40%	40%
Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Meals	22%	30%	18%	27%	27%	27%
Students with Disabilities	27%	34%	5%	16%	16%	16%
English Language Learners	9%	18%	14%	24%	24%	24%

## Mathematics

### Student Outcome SMART Goals:

- At least 48% of Class of 2029 (current 3rd graders) will meet state standards in MATH, while meeting WSIF goals for all subgroups.
- We will decrease the gap between our highest and lowest achieving racial subgroups in Math grades 3-5 by accelerating the growth for the lowest-scoring groups while maintaining or increasing proficiency levels of the highest scoring groups.
  - Goal: Decrease the gap from 48% in 2019 to 42% in 2020.

The tables below show ██████████'s goal and growth towards all sub groups meeting MATH proficiency. Boxes with an asterisk indicate subgroups where the number of students is not large enough to be shared publicly. Boxes that are highlighted in yellow indicate areas where ██████████ met its sub group goals. While we celebrate growth in many areas, we continue to analyze our actions and implement the strategies identified below to close gaps that have been historically



**Key Performance Indicators:**

- ██████████ Elementary is a school of diverse learners. We use assessments aligned to the development of bilingualism and biliteracy within the dual language model. To progress monitor the growth and success for dual language learners and English language learners:
  - Reading proficiency rates for dual language students in grades k-2 will increase by 10% using the Sistema assessment
  - Reading proficiency rates for dual language students in grades 3-5 will increase by 10% using the EDL2 assessment
  - 80% of emerging and progressing ELL students will grow on the composite scores by 200 points on the ELPA 21 assessment
  - All classroom teachers will use math running records or math interviews in order to deeply understand each individual student's math skills, strengths and next steps for growth.

**Key Improvement Strategies:**

*To support student growth and achievement for those performing at, above or below grade level, our school community will meet the academic and non-academic needs in the following ways:*

- Co-teachers in Grades K-3: This year, we have a full-time co-teacher in each grade from K-3. Co-teachers will support the grade level's Professional Learning Community in conducting "cycles of improvement" that involve assessing student learning and using data to determine needed interventions or acceleration. Co-teachers will work alongside classroom teachers to provide direct instruction to students including intervention, scaffolding, and extensions based on student data.
- Staff-wide Professional Learning & Professional Learning Communities (PLCs): The professional focus for the 2019-2020 school year is for staff to deepen their understanding of math and literacy instruction to ensure rigor and relevance. All staff members are supported and encouraged to collaborate as team - both in grade levels and as vertical groups - to create culturally responsive instruction that is important and relevant to our students. Through PLCs, teams will unpack the standards and implement cycles of improvement. Staff will use their understanding of the standards to ensure that curriculum is aligned to the standards and reflects the diversity of our classrooms across countries, races and religions.
- Meeting Student Needs Through MTSS: All classroom and support teachers will engage in our school-wide MTSS processes, meeting together throughout the year in Student Growth Meetings to monitor student growth and determine next steps for students that are not meeting learning targets for literacy. MTSS ensures all students have access to rigorous universal instruction (Tier 1), and then receive any additional (Tier 2) or personalized (Tier 3) interventions as needed and determined by school assessments.
- Facilitator Support & Coaching: ELL Facilitators will conduct student observations using the Academic Language Development Observation Feedback Tool. The observation identifies what skills ELL students are demonstrating to assist the teacher in providing the appropriate supports. Grade Level Facilitators will collaborate with classroom teachers to plan scaffolded language acquisition for students and provide co-teaching to increase the academic growth of students.
- Computer Science for Every Student: Every Stevenson student this year will develop their computer science skills and computational thinking by participating in weekly computer science lessons taught by a certificated computer science teacher. This innovative, interdisciplinary learning opportunity will connect to literacy, math and social/emotional learning.

## Student Well-Being

**Student Outcome SMART Goals:**

- We will increase student sense of belonging on the Panorama Survey from 69% in fall 2018 to 74% in fall 2019.

**Our Strengths in This Goal Area:**

- Positive Behavior and Intervention Supports (PBIS): Stevenson has a high-functioning PBIS team. PBIS is a proactive, team-based framework for creating and sustaining safe and effective schools. Emphasis is placed on



prevention of problem behavior, development of pro-social skills, and the use of data-based problem solving for addressing existing behavior concerns.

- **Talking Circles (Community Circles):** In order to build stronger community among students and with the classroom teachers, talking circles have been integrated in most of our classrooms as a daily ritual for community building and problem solving.
- **Community Building at the Beginning of the Year:** Classroom teachers deliver common, community-building lessons at the beginning of the year. The lessons include relationship building, teaching behavior expectations and schoolwide procedures. This was particularly important with our move to the new [REDACTED] building. The lessons also support our language learners by providing opportunities for speaking and listening.
- **Preventing Bullying at [REDACTED]:** All students will receive evidenced-based bullying prevention lessons (BPU) delivered by certificated by building staff.
- **Enhanced Behavior Expertise and Supports for Students:** This year, [REDACTED] added a second full-time counselor to support students with their social emotional development. We also have PBIS specialists (certificated and classified) who oversee school-wide PBIS systems such as before school, breakfast, lunch, recess and after-school. They facilitate restorative conversations and use pro-active support with students with high social emotional needs. [REDACTED] has also added a full-time psychologist to provide behavior and child psychology expertise in the building.

#### Key Performance Indicators:

- **Grades 3-5:** We will use panorama data to monitor student sense of belonging.
- **Grades K-5:** We will conduct focus groups to better understand and monitor primary age students' sense of belonging.
- **Grades K-5:** 100% of the classroom teachers will complete the DESSA mini survey on each student in the fall 2019. This survey serves as a screener for students who may be at risk of social emotional challenges that potentially impede learning and lifelong success. Using data from the survey informs and/or confirms other data (behavioral, anecdotal, etc.) that indicate need for interventions. Teachers will use the MTSS team to identify social/emotional goals and interventions for students exhibit high SEL needs. Part of this MTSS process will include the teachers completing the DESSA full.

#### Key Improvement Strategies:

*To support student growth and achievement for those performing at, above or below grade level, our school community will meet the social emotional and student well-being needs in the following ways:*

- **Elevating Student Voice Through Student Council:** We have established a student council to provide student voice in the school redesign process, provide feedback on current systems and procedures, and to identify ways in which we can increase our students' sense of belonging at [REDACTED].
- **After School Enrichment:** This year, the [REDACTED] school District Early and Extended Learning Department is providing student enrichment opportunities after school. Students at [REDACTED] on a sliding pay scale, will have opportunities to participate in engaging enrichment classes that will enhance the students' overall education and provide increased opportunities for a well-rounded education. One goal of this program is to increase students' sense of belonging at school.
- **Enhancing Safety with General School Assistants:** [REDACTED] recruits and hires strong General Support Assistants (GSAs) to provide student safety at lunch and at recess and academic support for students during class. Our GSAs receive monthly training to ensure they are incorporating SEL strategies and restorative practices into their daily interactions with students.
- **Universal Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Social Skills Instruction:** Our teachers deliver universal SEL instruction to all students to ensure students develop socially and emotionally. Second Step social skills curriculum will be taught/re-taught in collaboration and consultation with the school counselor. Students in grades 3-5 will utilize the RULER social/emotional curriculum. This curriculum utilizes strategies to help students recognize and regulate their emotions.
- **Additional and Personalized Support for Students:** Counselors will provide small group lessons and individual supports on an ongoing basis based on student needs as identified during our MTSS meetings. Identified

students will participate in the check-in/check-out program. The program consists of students checking in daily with an adult at the start of the school to receive their goal sheet and start their day with an interaction with an adult they are connected to. Teachers provide feedback on the goal sheet throughout the day. At the end of the day, the students check out with an adult to celebrate their success and establish goals for the following school day. The tertiary team, comprising of the admin, psychologist, counselor and behavior specialists, will meet weekly to review the needs and supports in place for some students with high social emotional needs. The team works with parents and care-givers to support these students. The team will use the iBest program and pilot a comprehensive MTSS approach to behavior with 5th grade students.

- **Community Partnership:** School counselors and other staff will coordinate with community agencies to enhance supports for students. Community agencies, including Sea Mar, Jubilee Reach, Big Brothers and Big Sisters, Rainier Athletes, YMCA and [REDACTED] Boys and Girls Club, have been involved in providing Tier 2 and Tier 3 counseling and supports to some of our students as needed.

### Family and Community Engagement

We believe that education is the shared responsibility of families, educators, and community members. We value and respect the diversity of perspectives, knowledge, and abilities that all of our stakeholders bring to our schools. We believe that the families of our students are essential partners in supporting student academic and social-emotional development. We believe that community partners play an important role in providing services, resources, and a network of support to our most vulnerable families. Our educators, administrators, and school staff embrace a culture of service focused on working together with families and the community to ensure all students succeed in school and life.

#### Family and Community SMART Goals:

- At least 20% of families in each sub-group will participate in the family engagement survey administered during winter 2020.

#### Our Strengths in This Goal Area:

- **Family Connections Center:** [REDACTED] has a vibrant Family Connections Center (FCC) with a full time Family Engagement Specialist and a part-time employee from the City of [REDACTED] who collaborate to support our community. The FCC connects families to school and community resources.
- **Strong Family Participation in School Events:** [REDACTED] family events are well attended by families that represent the diversity of our community.
- **Strong Staff-Parent Relationships:** Our teachers and staff care deeply about our students, families and community and are the greatest advocates for the community. Parents trust our staff and look to our staff for guidance and support for their children.
- **Superstar Wednesdays:** Twice a year, we bring families to [REDACTED] to join their students in the classrooms to participate in a literacy, math or social/emotional learning lesson. Superstar Wednesdays begins with a family breakfast. The goal is for parents to have the opportunity to see learning in action and learn strategies that may be used at home to strengthen the school/home connection. Families then have the opportunity to meet with school administration to learn about the resources available at the school.

#### Key Performance Indicators:

- Participation of parents in school activities, particularly by our diverse family sub-groups.

#### Key Improvement Strategies:

*We are committed to ensuring that families, particularly those who have been traditionally marginalized, are more informed, better able to find support, and are more empowered to contribute to student success by:*

- **Family Event Planning:** [REDACTED] as a Family Event Planning Team that will plan community engagement events that support home-school academic connection and community building.

- Elevating Family Voice: This fall we will form a [REDACTED] Advisory Group. The [REDACTED] Advisory Group, consisting of staff, parents and community members, will guide [REDACTED] Elementary in engaging a diversity of voice from among our community to co-create [REDACTED]'s vision and mission through community engagement. Collectively, this group will learn about [REDACTED]'s history, celebrate its strengths and opportunities, analyze survey and community feedback, and review and modify draft versions of [REDACTED] vision and mission.

#### APPENDIX A: Coordination and Integration of Funds

As a recipient of federal funds through Title I, Part A we are required to show how our school coordinates and integrates funding used at the school. The table below provides information on how various sources of funding are used and describes the purposes of each specific program.

Program	Amount Available	How the intents & purposes of the Program will be met:
Basic Education	\$4,449,057	To provide all students with instruction aligned to grade level, specific state standards including differentiation and enrichment services as needed. Basic education funds are combined to support the activities listed above. Examples include: classroom teachers, textbooks, supplemental materials, supplies, equipment, technology, staff development and substitutes.
Title I, Part A	\$344,771	To provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable and high quality well-rounded education and to close educational achievement gaps. These funds are used to provide a second full-time counselor and a classified staff member who supports restorative practices.
Learning Assistance Program (LAP)	\$226,800	To coordinate the use of Learning Assistance Program revenue as long as it can be shown services are provided only to students who have not met annual measurable objectives or are at-risk of not meeting state/local graduation requirements. Our LAP funds are used to provide a reading specialist who supports students reading below proficiency through direct interventions, as well as by providing coaching and support for the classroom teacher to differentiate instructional practices.
Total	\$5,020,628	

**APPENDIX E**

## PROFESIONAL DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

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### Tables

*Table 1: 10 Barriers & Solutions to Family School Collaboration*

Code	Number of Codes	Example of Coded language
<b>Barrier 1 Solution 1</b>	34	we have created a learning environment and community where students of different races, cultures and abilities benefit from being educated together.
<b>Barrier 2 Solution 2</b>	60	strengthen relationships with parents and families through deeper understanding of their perspectives and needs.
<b>Barrier 3 Solution 3</b>	4	Provide embedded coaching and professional learning, and serve as a Professional Learning Community (PLC) leads at our four Title elementary schools
<b>Barrier 4 Solution 4</b>	34	Our GSAs receive monthly training to ensure they are incorporating SEL strategies and restorative practices into their daily interactions with students.
<b>Barrier 5 Solution 5</b>	34	Our support system for our students is comprehensive and reflects our commitment to achievement and wellness.
<b>Barrier 6 Solution 6</b>	13	Embody a culture of shared leadership and collective accountability

<b>Barrier 7 Solution 7</b>	14	think analytically, logically, and creatively, and to integrate technology literacy and fluency as well as different experiences and knowledge to form reasoned judgments and solve problems.
<b>Barrier 8 Solution 8</b>	20	Implement a new process that involves more stakeholders to adopt culturally responsive materials that support the interests and instructional needs of students.
<b>Barrier 9 Solution 9</b>	8	Develop and implement principal training for cohorts of schools to further family engagement
<b>Barrier 10 Solution 10</b>	17	We are also reviewing our resource allocation processes to determine ways to direct resources towards programs and services that will most support our students who have traditionally been marginalized or underserved

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*Note:* This table shows the results of the language coded to align to the 10 barriers and 10 solutions that were identified in the literature. Codes were then used to analysis three District documents. The examples are text from the literature.

*Table 2: 9 Leadership Solutions*

Code	Number of Codes	Example of Coded language
Leadership Solution 1	11	Implement language access plan to ensure that information is available in multiple languages
Leadership Solution 2	28	The plan outlines our new vision, mission, and values, which were co-designed by our Board, staff, community
Leadership Solution 3	55	engage with community partners in a way that makes them feel valued and aligns their services to school and student needs
Leadership Solution 4	14	Conduct Parent Education Sessions to increase agency and participation
Leadership Solution 5	28	Engage community partners as a resource in working with families to improve two-way communication
Leadership Solution 6	13	All staff members are supported and encouraged to collaborate as team - both in grade levels and as vertical groups - to create culturally responsive instruction that is important and relevant to our students.
Leadership Solution 7	14	Expand strategies that affirm and inspire marginalized students, including structured mentorship programs.



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Leadership Solution 8	40	From an adaptive perspective, we will be working to change our culture around collecting and using data to drive our decision-making.
Leadership Solution 9	24	Develop and implement a communications plan to build understanding and support for our school district within our community.

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*Note:* This table shows the results of the leadership language that was coded from the literature. Codes were then used to analysis three District documents. Examples of the language coded for Autocratic and Transformative Language are presented in the table.