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Non-negotiable: A Case Study of Implementing Antiracist Education in Two Milwaukee Suburban K-12 School Districts

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NON-NEGOTIABLE: A CASE STUDY OF IMPLEMENTING ANTIRACIST EDUCATION
IN TWO MILWAUKEE SUBURBAN K-12 SCHOOL DISTRICTS

by

Jennifer Luken

A Thesis Submitted in
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ABSTRACT

NON-NEGOTIABLE: A CASE STUDY OF IMPLEMENTING ANTIRACIST EDUCATION IN TWO MILWAUKEE SUBURBAN K-12 SCHOOL DISTRICTS

by

Jennifer Luken

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2021
Under the Supervision of Professor Marie Sandy, PhD

As a racial reckoning and civil unrest permeated 2020 and 2021, many were left asking: *How did we get here?* By and large, the American public seemed underprepared to understand the context under which these events unfolded. The ability to engage in a critical analysis of race and society oftentimes requires post-secondary education – or the experience of it first-hand – and is mostly lacking in K-12 schools. There have been attempts to remedy this in recent years, including an equity-based model rooted in culturally responsive practices (WDPI, 2020). Little is known regarding the perception of school leaders on these initiatives and how they are implemented. Using general qualitative research methodology, this study explores perceptions from two district and two school-based personnel, along with an in-depth document analysis of two suburban districts in metropolitan Milwaukee, Wisconsin – one racially diverse and the other more racially homogenous. This study asks: How do school and district personnel perceive their role in practicing antiracism? Also, what do K-12 leaders perceive to be barriers/motivations for implementation? And lastly, what ways do these school communities share in common, as two “exogenous” districts of an urban metropolitan area, and how do they differ? This study found that terms such as equity, equity non-negotiables, diversity, inclusion and culturally relevant were used to describe their practices. Antiracism, although being practiced in various forms, is

not explicitly identified as a policy. The “charged,” political undertones of antiracism, along with other community barriers, has placed certain limits on each of the districts.

Keywords: antiracist education, social justice, white privilege, white supremacy, multicultural education, culturally relevant pedagogy, Equity non-negotiables

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	viii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	ix
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	x
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Problem Statement	1
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	13
Racism and Antiracism: A Conceptual Framework	14
Theoretical Frameworks: Multicultural Education, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, and Antiracist Education.....	26
Federal Reforms—"Accountability Cult" and Further Legislation	40
Implementation Strategies	43
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	49
Case Study Methodology	49
Sample Rationale and Site Selection	50
Document Analysis.....	53
Semi-Structured Interviews	54
Data Analysis	55
Validity and Reliability.....	57
Limitations	58
Antiracism: In Context.....	59
Positionality	59
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS.....	60
Standards and Policies from Federal/State: Wisconsin Every Student Succeeds Act (WI ESSA) and Wisconsin Department of Instruction (WDPI)	60
District Academics, Enrollment Data, and Overall Mission.....	65
Equity-Based Practices and Defining Equity Non-negotiables	71
Professional Development and Training Opportunities for Educators/Staff	90
Community Relationships and Resources Made Available to Families.....	93
Accountability Measures and Barriers to Implementation	97

(What May Not Be Called) “Antiracism:” What It Looks Like in Practice	104
Findings Summary	110
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION	115
REFERENCES.....	121
Appendix A: District Diversity 2018-2019 Report Card (WDPI)	134
Appendix B: District Homogenous 2018-2019 Report Card (WDPI)	135
Appendix C: ICS Equity Four Cornerstones.....	136
Appendix D: The Institute @ CESA #1 Honeycomb Model.....	137
Appendix E: Interview Coding Cycle #1 and #2	138
Appendix F: Coding Cycle #3.....	155
Appendix G: IRB Approval #21.233	166
Appendix H: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol	167

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. District Demographics and Enrollment Data.....	9
Table 2. Keywords Found Throughout the Study.....	10
Table 3. Participant Background	54
Table 4. Proficiency Levels Based on WI DPI Report Cards (2015-16 and 2018-19).....	69

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Embedded Single Case Design.	53
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AERA	American Education Research Association
CAGC	Closing the Achievement Gap Consortium
CRP	Culturally Relevant Pedagogy
CRT	Critical Race Theory
CRT	Culturally Responsive Teaching
CSP	Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy
ELA	English Language Arts
ELO	Extended Learning Opportunities
ENN	Equity Non-Negotiables
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
ESSA	Every Student Succeeds Act
ICS	Integrated Comprehensive Systems
IRTL	Identity Relevant Teaching/Learning
iSUMMIT	Innovative Summit
NAACP	National Association Advancement of Colored People
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
NIRN	National Implementation Research Network
SEA	State Education Authority
SEL	Social and Emotional Learning
SPLC	Southern Poverty Law Center
SRO	School Resource Officer
WCEP	Wisconsin Character Education Partnership
WDPI	Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The silence about the nation's social problems will never erase them. Rather than being silent, education must address issues of justice in schools and society (Wiggan and Watson-Vandiver, 2019, p. 24).

Problem Statement

The year 2020 highlighted the intersectionality of systemic racism, a global pandemic, and a highly polarized, extreme political climate. Although it seemed to be the “perfect storm” of sorts for a large-scale civil movement, the racial reckoning that unfolded did not just materialize overnight. The Black Lives Matter movement began long before the murder of George Floyd.¹ Black activism and antiracism² have been practiced as long as oppression and racism. Furthermore, politics and policies have always been dividing. However, there has arguably been a shift in rhetoric from Obama’s passage of the ESSA in 2015, to the Trump presidential political campaign the same year. Even so, Michelle Alexander (2020) reminds us that “‘Trumpism’ and ‘fake news’ are not new; they are old as the nation itself. The very same playbook has been used over and over in this country by those who seek to preserve racial hierarchy, or to exploit racial resentments and anxieties for political gain.”

Nevertheless, the 2016 presidential election ignited a spark inside most Americans and appears to have exacerbated trends toward greater polarization. On the campaign trail, Donald Trump often spoke of deporting millions of Latino immigrants, building a wall between Mexico and the United States, and banning Muslim immigrants (Costello, 2016). According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), there was a 25.9% increase in hate crimes from the last

¹ BLM took to the internet (#BlackLivesMatter), and streets in 2013 after the murder of Trayvon Martin (BLM, 2020).

² Antiracism and anti-racism are used interchangeably, depending on how it is used in the specific reference.

quarter of 2015 to the last quarter of 2016 (Barrouquere, 2017). In 2019, the FBI recorded the most hate crime *murders* since data collection began in 1991 – double the amount from 2018 alone (“FBI Reports”, 2020). More recently, Donald Trump was believed by some to incite violence during a speech denouncing the victory of President-elect, Joe Biden, ultimately leading to a violent mob breaching and terrorizing the Capitol Building (Dozier & Bergengruen, 2021). Fear and hate are evident.

Unfortunately for our country’s youth, classrooms are not hermetically sealed from the nation’s social problems. As stated by Bruner (1996), “Education does not only occur in classrooms, but around the dinner table when family members try to make joint sense of what happened that day, or when kids try to help each other make sense of the adult world” (p. xi). Education itself is reflective of the broader society (Bruner, 1996). During the campaign leading up to the 2016 presidential election, *Teaching Tolerance*³ surveyed classrooms around the nation; their findings were startling. They found the racial climate surrounding the campaign produced an “alarming level of fear and anxiety among children of color and inflamed racial tensions in the classroom. Many students worry about being deported” (Costello, 2016). Students felt “emboldened” to use racial slurs against their classmates, and teachers reported an increase in anger and acting out when practicing civil discourse (Costello, 2016). Perhaps more startling, 90 percent of incidents reported in the fall of 2018 were not addressed by school leadership – “administrators failed to denounce the bias or reaffirm school values” (Costello & Dillard, 2019).

After the violent murders of Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor in 2020, along with the public execution of George Floyd (all on the heels of a global pandemic and critical political

³ *Learning for Justice*, formerly known as *Teaching Tolerance*, is an organization that “seeks to uphold the mission of the Southern Poverty Law Center: to be a catalyst for racial justice in the South and beyond, working in partnership with communities to dismantle white supremacy, strengthen intersectional movements and advance the human rights of all people” (Learning for Justice, 2021).

campaign), some educators felt inspired to create teachable moments for their students. Unfortunately, not all school administrators, educators, and/or communities have been receptive to such “charged” conversations. Across the country and in Wisconsin, school districts, particularly majority-white districts, have received much backlash for attempts at incorporating difficult conversations about race – a choice that is a privilege. For example, in September 2020, a fourth-grade teacher in Burlington, a predominantly white district in Kenosha, Wisconsin, decided to discuss Black Lives Matter, social justice, and equity in her lesson plan. This district also had complaints from a parent stating that their daughter had been spit on, pushed down the stairs, and called the “N-word”, all without the district taking a stance on racism (Files, 2020). Although her students, particularly her students of color, were highly receptive and appreciative of the lesson on race, some parents (mostly white) were outraged (Johnson, 2020). Some considered this curriculum to be “indoctrination” and a form of teacher insubordination (Johnson, 2020). Initially, the school board chose not to defend the teacher, instead insisting she wouldn’t be terminated over a “one-time use of curricular materials” (Johnson, 2020). Perhaps trying to keep neutral in the situation, the school board seemingly demonstrated what *Teaching Tolerance* described; failing to denounce bias or reaffirm school values.

Although this particular district eventually came to terms with an “anti-racism policy” after enough public scrutiny, this is yet just one example among many. In 2013, a ‘white privilege’ lesson in Delavan-Darian high school was ill-received by parents and community members, claiming they were “teaching white guilt” and dividing students (‘White Privilege,’ 2013). Similarly, after a West Bend middle school provided a voluntary white privilege test to their students, one parent claimed, “middle school students don’t need to discover what they should protest or how they’re different” (Steffes, 2018). Another district in New Berlin had

board members claiming to “disagree with Black History Month” after students petitioned for white privilege and systemic racism to be addressed in their district (Reinwald, 2021). Some parents, community members, and even educators are concerned that revealing the realities of white privilege and systemic racism “vilify” white people, something students shouldn’t be presented with. Others believe that if students are old enough to experience racism, others are old enough to learn about it. With these challenges in mind, how are districts moving forward with an antiracist lens?

Looking at the broader context, Wisconsin ranks amongst the worst states for racial disparities, including education (Dresser, 2019). Between Black and white students, Wisconsin ranks worst in disparities with 8th-grade math scores, second-worst for out-of-school suspensions, and worst for Bachelor’s degree attainment (COWS, 2019). To add, Milwaukee is consistently ranked as the most segregated city (Denvir, 2011; Florida, 2014) and the worst city for Black Americans to live in (Miller, 2015; Mock, 2015) (Lloyd & Bonds, 2018). Even with these disparities in mind, few districts have implemented policies beyond equity and/or diversity and inclusion. Looking through the districts across Southeast Wisconsin with a quick google search of equity, inequality, and antiracism, the following populated: Diversity, equity, and inclusion, equity frameworks, equity visions, and equity plans. Only one district specified having an actual antiracism policy – Burlington School district.

In addition to the blatant racism previously described, students continue to be confronted with more hidden, less obvious forms of racism in their educational experience. Numerous scholars have discussed hidden, covert, or “new” racism within the context of public education. Covert racism has been described as “subtle manifestations of racism” coming from biased curriculum and “denial of racist incidents” (Kailin, 2002, p. 4). Looking at the *Teaching*

Tolerance survey, the lack of intervention from school leadership can certainly be linked to this new or covert racism. Murrell (2007) considers “new” racism to exist in which there is an “increasing, not a decreasing impact of race in school practices and policies” (p. 6).

Both covert and “new” racism are highly problematic in education. Appropriately dealing with race and racism in schools is still greatly difficult, in part because there is a “mistaken, but widespread, view that race no longer matters in the opportunities and fortunes of African Americans and other ethnic minorities,” otherwise known as being/acting colorblind (Murrell, 2007, p. 6). The act of being colorblind has been contested as an appropriate response to dealing with diverse racial groups. Not “seeing” race does not eliminate the inequities that come along with it. As Kendi (2019) has said, “The common idea of claiming ‘color blindness’ is akin to the notion of being ‘not racist’—as with the ‘not racist,’ the colorblind individual, by ostensibly failing to see race, fails to see racism and falls into racist passivity” (p. 10).

Another form of this “new racism” occurs whenever mainstream education focuses on the white perspective, “othering” those who do not share those experiences. Students aren’t necessarily being openly discriminated against; however, their experiences aren’t reflected inside the curriculum. Wiggan and Watson-Vandiver (2019) argue that students of color have often been educated through white, dominant curricula “omitting, undermining, or falsifying the contribution and experiences of minority groups” (p. 1075). Because classrooms are only becoming more diverse, this constitutes a problem. In 2019, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that schools are becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, with white students decreasing from 62 to 51 percent from 2000 to 2017 (NCES, 2019). Additionally, 79 percent of public-school teachers were reportedly white or non-Hispanic during the 2017-18 school year (NCES, 2020). Continuing to educate through a white, dominant lens will only

exacerbate gaps and disparities in education (Wiggan & Watson-Vandiver, 2019). The disparities, it is worth noting, typically refer to a “gap”⁴ in academic success between groups. Milner (2013) describes these gaps as occurring with students by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and language (p. 3).

Furthermore, history can often be considered “boring” and irrelevant for most students. Five-sixths of American students discontinue their history courses after high school, leaving them with whatever knowledge they retained at that time (Loewen, 2010). Perhaps more importantly, Loewen (2010) emphasizes “who wrote history, who did not, and for what purpose can make all the difference” (Loewen, 2010, p. 13). The importance of recognizing knowledge production, especially within the texts of our public schools, is critically important. Rather than perpetuating an ethnocentric lens around American history with the white American always coming out on top, Loewen (2010) suggests telling the whole story, with much more enthusiasm than simply reading from the text. “History is important—even crucial. Helping students understand what happened in the past empowers them to use history as a weapon to argue for better policies in the present” (Loewen, 2010, p. 17).

Similar to Loewen, Dixson et al. (2018) highlight an especially problematic reality with the curriculum. As they note: “Schools do not operate autonomously from the milieu of their local and regional politics” (Dixson et al., 2018, p. 236). In Texas, for example, the school board sought to rewrite the U.S. chattel slavery as a “work program” and that slaves were “voluntary workers” (Dixson et al., 2018, p. 236). This board was essentially trying to rewrite history. Dixson et al.’s (2018) assertions remind us how crucial and dangerous a curriculum can be to future generations.

⁴ Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) contests the use of the term achievement gap, instead referring to disparities as an “education debt.” More on this in Chapter 2.

There are many factors, both internal and external, overt and covert, that impact a student and their experience with education. Many education reforms have developed over the last few decades attempting to create a socially just, equitable classroom despite many local, national, and global influences. Currently, at the federal level, the U.S. Department of Education has a short list of materials focusing on antiracism. Two of the frequently referenced were creating “Inclusive Environments for Black Teachers” and “Confronting bias and building trust,” (U.S. Department of Education, 2021), neither of which were working websites, however.

In Wisconsin, a few examples include the WI ESSA (based on the federal ESSA) and the WI Equity plan.⁵ Additionally, schools and districts have partnered with outside organizations for resources to address racism and equity, such as Integrated Comprehensive Systems for Equity (ICS Equity). Outside of this, educational scholars have written extensively on methods, frames, and pedagogy aimed at eliminating racism in the classroom, such as implementing a multicultural education approach, focusing on culturally relevant pedagogy, as well as antiracist education.

Rationale for Reforms and Theories

To understand the progression and intersections of these reforms, this study reviews the history of racist educational policies and events, as well as theoretical frameworks of multicultural education, culturally relevant pedagogy, and social justice/antiracist education. For the purposes of this study, social justice and antiracist education will be used interchangeably. These frameworks have been foundational for major reforms and initiatives across K-12 education as seen in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).⁶ Furthermore, scholarly searches

⁵ More on the WI ESSA and Equity Plan in Chapter 3.

⁶ More on ESE, NCLB, and ESSA in Chapter 3.

for inequality, educational disparities, antiracism, and equity through the UW-M library system yielded the aforementioned frames most notably.

There is a robust amount of literature on the different education reforms and theories, however, what is lesser-known and lacking from current research is how school and district personnel perceive their role in *practicing* antiracism. To guide my study, I ask the following: How do school and district personnel perceive their role in practicing antiracism? Also, what do K-12 leaders perceive to be barriers/motivations for implementation? And lastly, what ways do these school communities share in common, as two “exogenous” districts of an urban metropolitan area, and how do they differ?

Qualitative Case Study into Suburban and Urban Emergent School Districts

As part of this bounded qualitative case study, I studied two separate school districts in the greater metropolitan region of a mid-sized upper midwestern city, Milwaukee, Wisconsin: District Diversity and District Homogenous. A case study involving only two districts was intentional to gain a closer, more personalized look at the practices and perceptions of administrators within these districts. Although each district is unique in many aspects (see Table 1), they also share many commonalities which led them to be joined as part of a single case study. As both exogenous suburban districts of urban Milwaukee, each district shares the same geographical and local context. Additionally, both districts take consult from the same equity-based firm, Integrated Comprehensive Systems for Equity (ICS). These consultants include researchers from a major institution in Milwaukee, furthering the cultural context of this study. These consultations led to their compilation of Equity Non-negotiables – an equity-based frame that has only recently become popular in some of Wisconsin’s public schools.

Furthermore, both school districts are considered to be “exceeding standards”⁷ by the Wisconsin Department of Instruction. Although it may seem that District Homogenous is a more “traditional” suburban district, each district experiences challenges discussing race, equity, and maintaining positive community relations. In this light, these districts were studied as part of a single case study, representing the “polycentric regional city” (Soja, 2011, p. 460). An important distinction with Milwaukee, however, is that “Milwaukee has the lowest rate of Black suburbanization in the country and is so deeply segregated” (A. Bonds, personal communication, June 15, 2021). There are many “political and economic rifts” separating Milwaukee from the surrounding suburbs which makes this area a unique case to explore (Loyd & Bonds, 2018).

Table 1.

*District Demographics and Enrollment Data**

	District Diversity	District Homogenous
Black	50%	3%
White	20%	70%
Asian	12%	16%
Hispanic or Latino/a	10%	6%
American Indian/Pac Islander	<1%	<1%
Total Enrollment	1,600	7,300
Total Population	11,000	40,000
Median Household Income (2015-2019)	\$63,000	\$108,000

⁷ Using a 100-point scale, Wisconsin provides schools with a report card based on the following priority areas: student achievement, district growth, closing gaps, on-track and postsecondary readiness. All scores above a 63 are considered to meet expectations, and about 73 to exceed expectations. Both of the districts studied are considered to be at least exceeding expectations based on their overall score (*Accountability Report Cards*, 2019).

Economically Disadvantaged Students (2018-19)	50%	8%
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*Source: Enrollment, 2021; Census, 2019 (*Numbers/percentages are approximated)*

The study includes document analysis of materials related to the development of policies, curricular artifacts and evaluation reports related to antiracism efforts, and in-depth interviews with one district-level administrator and one school-based leader from each of the two districts. In the case of both school districts, public documents were used as part of the analysis. Using the school district websites, this study analyzed school board meeting minutes, district mission statements and core values, equity plans and documents from equity working groups, resources for families, and specific program information (e.g. personalized learning, authentic student engagement, etc.) Additionally, Google searches were conducted to gain further insight into public events within each district. IRB approval through UW-M was obtained before conducting the interviews, as well as a separate site-specific IRB approval for each district (see Appendix G).

Table 2.

Keywords Found Throughout the Study

Keywords	
Antiracist Education	“Any theory and/or practice (whether political or personal) that seeks to challenge, reduce, or eliminate manifestations of racism in society” (López, 2008, p. 43). For the purposes of this case study, the following definition was developed to

	frame the findings: <i>any deliberate action that is taken to confront systems of racism or oppression.</i>
Social Justice Education	“Aims to help participants develop awareness, knowledge, and processes to examine issues of justice/injustice in their personal lives, communities, institutions, and the broader society... Aims to connect analysis to action; to help participants develop a sense of agency and commitment, as well as skills and tools, for working with other to interrupt and change oppressive patterns” (Bell, 2016). Social justice and antiracist education share a close sentiment and are used interchangeably throughout this study.
white Privilege	The “rights, advantages, and protections enjoyed by some at the expense of and beyond the rights, advantages, and protections available to others” (Kimmel & Ferber, 2016; Johnson, 2006) (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 81).
white Supremacy	A culmination of white privilege, coupled with a white power structure (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 143).
Multicultural Education	A “field of study designed to increase educational equity for all students that incorporates... content,

	<p>concepts, principles, theories, and paradigms from history, the social and behavioral sciences, and particularly from ethnic studies and women’s studies” (Banks & Banks, 2004; Banks, 2010, p. x).</p>
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy	<p>“The use of cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to, and effective for them. This pedagogy teaches <i>to and through</i> the strengths of these students” (Gay, 2000, p. 31) (Hollie, 2019, p. 35).</p>
Equity Non-Negotiables	<p>A clearly defined list that serves as a guidepost for educators to make ongoing decisions. They are made up of a common language that builds between a school systems’ disparities and aspirations to help create a “better reality for every student served” (Schroeder, 2021).</p>

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

To begin this literature review, I compiled a list of a few key terms to use in the UW-M library database to guide my search for scholarly articles. Through an earlier research paper conducted on education disparities, I came across antiracist education and multicultural education. These two terms guided my initial search. What I found was that culturally relevant pedagogy and social justice education also populated with frequency. On the UW-M library database, antiracist education populated over 12 thousand hits, culturally relevant pedagogy 50 thousand, multicultural education 321 thousand, and social justice education 1.4 million. However, social justice education is largely related to social work. Many articles on the subject of antiracism focused on higher education policies and/or studies, also on international policies. Specific sources on Milwaukee or Wisconsin, in general, were not easily found. However, once I broadened my search to just education in Milwaukee, over 300 thousand sources populated.

As I moved through the articles, I tried to be as deliberate as I could to obtain authors of color. I also dove deep into references from highly cited articles, books, and other sources to further my search and expand my literature review. This proved to be rather helpful with organizing my literature. Once I found several sources which were peer-reviewed and highly cited, I combed through their references to determine some of the prominent contributors to the subject. What I found was that the history of racism and white supremacy was widely documented and reflective of current practices. It was in this light that I chose to include a historical narrative before my frameworks.

Another finding through the literature review process was the wide-ranging definitions of racism altogether. Since antiracism was a focus, I believed a clear definition of each was warranted. Therefore, definitions and history precede the theoretical frameworks. Multicultural

education, culturally relevant pedagogy, and antiracist education are presented as separate frameworks. Although there is a clear overlap between the three, they each have a distinguishing difference which is discussed through the review. The three frameworks aren't necessarily organized as chronological; however, it could be argued that multicultural education preceded culturally relevant pedagogy and antiracist education based on the prominence of each in the literature over time.

Racism and Antiracism: A Conceptual Framework

No nation can enslave a race of people for hundreds of years, set them free bedraggled and penniless, pit them, without assistance in a hostile environment, against privileged victimizers, and then reasonably expect the gap between the heirs of the two groups to narrow. Lines, begin parallel and left alone, can never touch. (Robinson, 2000) (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 8).

“How Did We Get Here?”

We are not just a country full of racists and non-racists, it's not that simple. Racism has varying levels of complicity and activism, all of which have been molded from our history as a nation. Some of us are oblivious to the racism that encapsulates people of color outside the knowledge of slavery. Institutional racism, as within education, “often not only has no racist animus behind it but sometimes has no element of intent at all” (Loewen, 2010, p. 152).

Although the literature is expansive on systems of racism in this country, I believe it is important to identify how white privilege⁸ and white supremacy⁹ have influenced the educational system

⁸ Privilege refers to the “rights, advantages, and protections enjoyed by some at the expense of and beyond the rights, advantages, and protections available to others” (Kimmel & Ferber, 2016; Johnson, 2006) (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 81).

⁹ Culmination of white privilege coupled with a white power structure, equals white supremacy (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 143).

over the years. White people have had the distinct privilege over people of color for the last four hundred years within all facets of American culture, including education.

We often discuss or read about disparities in education between white students and students of color without explicitly identifying how education was structured to favor white families. White supremacy has often been attributed to hooded white men or other hate groups—or more recently, the folks storming the Capitol building in violent protest/terrorism. However, its pervasiveness is an “inherent feature of our economic system and culture,” which inevitably and purposefully embraces education (Kailin, 2002, p. 13). White supremacy, Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) elaborate, includes the “invisible and universalized white cultural practices and structural privileges” (p. 143). This supremacy and privilege are ingrained in our everyday lives and structures, even for those of us who consider ourselves to be antiracists. Even so, education has historically benefitted white people at the expense of Black families, and it hasn’t always been done with intentional racism in mind.

Racism itself, with such a difficult and complex history, has been defined in many ways. Derman-Sparks and Phillips (1997) describe it as “an institutionalized system of economic, political, social, and cultural relations that ensures that one racial group has and maintains power and privilege over all other in all aspects of life. Individual participation in racism occurs when the objective outcome of behavior reinforces these relations, *regardless of the subjective intent* [emphasis added]” (p. 2). In contrast, Loewen’s (2010) definition includes “treating people unfavorably because of their racial or cultural group membership” (p. 151). Derman-Sparks and Phillips’ (1997) definition pointedly holds institutions *and* individuals accountable. Also, it very closely resembles the definitions of white privilege and supremacy. This description is important because it recognizes that racism does not always happen in overt, intentional ways. It could be

easy to discount Loewen's definition of racism from your own life because of the subjectivity of being "unfavorable." This is a key distinction when considering antiracism.

Ibram Kendi (2019), a renowned antiracist scholar, concludes that "the opposite of racists isn't 'not racist'. It is 'antiracist'" (Kendi, 2016, p. 9). One either believes the problems are rooted in groups of people, as a racist, or located the roots of problems in power and policies, as an antiracist" (Kendi, 2016, p. 9). Although individuals can indeed be racist through their intended or inadvertent actions, antiracism emphasizes the power of policy and systems. Racism therefore can't be fixed through individual action alone.

Covert Racism and Hidden Curriculum

Although the last several years have instigated devastating challenges with educating our country's youth, many factors have impacted equity inside the classroom. Some factors are reminiscent of decades-old racist policy, others reflect newer, less obvious forms of racism. "After the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s... overt white supremacy has gone out of style, in education as elsewhere in society" (Loewen, 2010, p. 150). Kendi (2016) suggests that it is racist intentions, not racist policies, that have become more covert after the 1960s (p. 8). Suffice to say, it doesn't take too much reading in between the lines to decipher the racist messages that were projected from the White House from 2016-20, however.

In many ways, white privilege and supremacy are inherently embedded and reproduced in less obvious, covert forms of racism. This includes "all those institutional policies and practices whose habitual outcome is inequitable relationships between white and people of color," regardless of the racial intention (Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 1997, p. 11). In education, this includes IQ testing, tracking into certain programs/classes, a "white" centered curriculum, and ineffective bilingual education (Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 1997, p. 11). Also, "coded"

language is often used to describe students of color without explicitly naming them, such as students in the “*inner-city, at-risk, low achieving, language deficient and prone to violence*” (Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 1997, p. 20). Derman-Sparks and Phillips (1997) believe this coding has been connected to students of color so much that it has functioned as “explanations of educational problems that are in reality outcomes of racist practices” (Meier & Brown, 1994) (p. 20). Although their work is over 20 years old at this point, the implications of Derman-Spark and Phillips still ring true for many of today’s students.

Hidden Curriculum. An important aspect requiring extensive attention is the hidden or *latent curriculum*, as described by Banks (2020). Banks (2020) defines the latent curriculum as “the one that no teacher explicitly teaches but that all students learn” (p. 21). This latent, or hidden curriculum, is powerful because it teaches the students what is valued culturally, racially, and individually through the culture of the school itself (Banks, 2020).

Michelle Jay (2003) explored the hidden curriculum in the early 2000s as it related to Critical Race Theory. She described the hidden curriculum as the “implicit messages given daily to students about socially derived and socially legitimated conceptions of what constitutes valid knowledge, ‘proper’ behavior, acceptable levels of understanding, differential power, and social evaluation” (Jay, 2003, p. 6). Although quite robust, her definition bears a close resemblance to Banks’ (2020) more recent account. This hidden curriculum, according to Jay (2003), is how dominant power structures are maintained in schools. She argues that “hidden curriculum can serve as a hegemonic device for the purposes of securing, for the ruling class (and other dominant groups of society), a continued position of power and leadership” (Jay, 2003, p. 6).

Court Cases: Moving From Deliberate to Less Overt, “Hidden” Racist Policies

To gain a sense of this transition from deliberate, racist policy to the more concealed racist policies of today, we are going to take a historical look at key decisions and popular rhetoric made from pre-U.S. abolition to the present. Not only has racist policy severely impacted the availability and access to education for students of color, the actual educational experience once inside the classroom must be considered through a racist lens as well. Ibram Kendi's *Stamped from the beginning* and Gloria Browne-Marshall's *Race, law, and American society* each provide detailed accounts leading up to the present day. As some have learned of these cases throughout their schooling as triumphs, both Kendi and Browne-Marshall shed light on the realities behind the rulings.

Roberts v. Boston. After slavery was abolished in Massachusetts around 1781, several decades before the U.S. made the move, free Blacks wanted the same education as white children. They desired a public education funded by their tax dollars. Although they were eventually provided this opportunity with some restrictions, Black children were treated so badly, parents requested a separate tax-funded, public school for their kids. After a private Black school was created to fill in the void of public education, Boston legislation was passed requiring “racially separate schools, precluding Black children from attending any school other than one designated for Blacks” (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 20).

Over 50 years later, *Roberts v. Boston* became the “earliest reported education case brought by Blacks in America,” arguing that separate schools violated the rights of Black students (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 20). The response of the court (demonstrating the entrenched white supremacy still present nearly 70 years after Massachusetts’ abolition), was to argue that “this prejudice, if it exists, is not created by law, and probably cannot be changed by law” (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 20). Although white supremacy is mostly associated with

Southern retaliation against Blacks, it was still found in the more “progressive” North as Blacks desperately fought for another basic right, education.

After the U.S. Constitution officially abolished slavery in 1865 and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1866, formerly enslaved Africans were able to seek an education without “constant fear of reprisal from Whites” (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 22). The Freedmen’s Bureau was created in 1865 to oversee the reinstitution of those formerly enslaved, including their educational opportunities (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 22). From 1880 to 1910, illiteracy decreased from 70 to 33 percent among southern Blacks (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 22).

The short-lived success of the Bureau occurred despite severe pushback and hostility from President Andrew Johnson and others opposing public education for Blacks. A newspaper published a story, warning that “Education has but one tendency: to give higher hopes and aspirations”; “we want the negro to remain here, just about as he is—with mighty little change” (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 23). Asserting the desire for Blacks to “remain” below whites is a very overt demonstration of white supremacy. This belief, notwithstanding abolition, devastated the success and forward motion of the Black community. The Freedmen’s Bureau lost its funding and was all but disbanded in 1870, leaving Blacks once again susceptible to white rage without the proper representation from policymakers.

Because of the support for segregated public schools in the *Roberts v. Boston* ruling, other cases such as *King v. Gallagher* and *State ex rel. Garnes v. McCann* made similar rulings, stating “a Black child could not attend the school of her choice when a school designated for Blacks was made available” (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 24). These decisions gave the individual school boards discretion over racially segregating their districts, leading to a “wave of hundreds of segregation laws” (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 24).

Plessy v. Ferguson. The Separate Car Act forced Blacks to sit in separate, soot-filled rail cars from whites and led to the 1896 Supreme Court case, *Plessy v. Ferguson* (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 25). Although he argued this separate seating violated his Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendment rights and placed a “badge of inferiority” on Blacks, Plessy’s claims were denied (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 25). Using the previous decision favoring racial segregation in the *Roberts v. Boston* case, *Plessy v. Ferguson* officially instituted “separate by equal” which included schooling. Justice John Harlan went as far as to say:

The white race deems itself to be the dominant race in this country. As so it [is], in prestige, in achievement, in *education*, in wealth, and in power. So, I doubt not, it will continue to be for all time, if it remains true to its great heritage, and holds fast to the principles of constitutional liberty. But in view of the constitution, in the eye of the law, there is in this country no superior, dominant, ruling class of citizens (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 25).

It seems as though insisting the white race *is* dominant and with great heritage, while “officially” claiming it *is not*, does little to change any hearts and minds. This sentiment further emphasizes the blatant privilege whites felt deserving at this time.

Since discretion was mostly given to the states and individual districts, a Kentucky statute stated it was “unlawful to operate any college, school or institution where persons of the white or negro races are both received as pupils for instruction” (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 26). Those who violated this statute were subject to arrest and fines. In 1908, the Supreme Court upheld a conviction for the Berea College, a racially integrated college ran by white administrators (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 26). Whites were also being punished for “cross[ing] the color line” (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 26).

State of Missouri Ex Rel. Gaines v. Canada and Sipuel v. Oklahoma. The *Plessy* decision did prove to be troublesome for schools. If they were to uphold racially segregated schools, they must construct separate facilities for different races. Using this financial stress as a motivator, Lloyd Gaines, a Black student, challenged this ruling for his admission into the all-white University of Missouri-Columbia (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 28). He claimed that if “separate but equal” was to be upheld, he must either be admitted into the University of Missouri or have a Black law school provided. In 1938, Gaines was ultimately admitted into the all-white school under the direction that he would remain until a Black school was built (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 28).

Piggybacking on this decision, Ada Sipuel also requested to attend an all-white law school since there were no Black law schools in Oklahoma (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 28). Although she was only offered a roped-off area with separate teachers, and she and Gaines were both treated poorly once they attended the Universities, each of their cases established precedent leading to the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 28).

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court was handed a class-action suit on behalf of Black children across Delaware, Virginia, and South Carolina who were consigned to segregated schools (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 30). Brown was a Black, public school student who was forced to attend an all-Black school, miles from her home instead of the white school near her home (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 30). Having initially being denied based on precedent from the *Plessy* case, the NAACP stepped in to take the fight a step further. The NAACP and supportive psychologists reasserted the “badge of inferiority” placed on students attending all-Black schools, a fact once denied by the Supreme Court in 1896 (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 31).

In 1954, the Court decided that segregated schools, in fact, violated the Fourteenth Amendment rights of Black students and declared segregation “inherently unequal in public schools” (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 31). An important distinction to be made with this decision was the political motivations. Browne-Marshall (2013) noted a growing concern with the Cold War during that time and the desire to remain favorable in the light of the global context. The military had just been desegregated six years earlier and having the *Brown* case represent states in the Midwest allowed the Court “to overturn *Plessy* without directly implicating the South” (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 30). It could be argued this highly celebrated case was supported because it provided economic and political benefits to whites, not because of the moral indignities being done to Blacks. Kendi (2016) reminds us that Chief Justice Warren used assimilationists reasoning to pass *Brown v. Board* by insisting Black students were having disparities in education because they were not being exposed to white students.

Although *Brown v. Board* is a widely known and influential Supreme Court case, Browne-Marshall includes the long history and legacy of school cases in Kansas before 1954. For instance, *Williams v. Board of Education of the City of Parsons* in 1908 ruled a Black student’s education was unequal “based on travel distance as opposed to race,” since some students had to cross 21 train tracks to get to school (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 32). Once again, their race was not recognized as a factor for inequality in education. It took 46 more years for the Supreme Court to recognize race as a factor with the *Brown v. Board* case.

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka II – “With All Deliberate Speed.”

I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro’s great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen’s Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to “order” than to justice; who prefers a

negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically feels he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by the myth of time and who constantly advised the Negro to wait until a "more convenient season." (in Washington, 1986, p. 295)
(McManimon & Casey, 2020).

The *Brown v. Board I* is often highlighted as a critical, celebratory moment in the history of antiracism in this country. However, changing the law did little to change hearts and minds. In 1955, *Brown v. Board II* informed schools to desegregate "with all deliberate speed," providing schools with a substantial reprieve from implementing any real change in a timely manner (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 33). White people had the distinct privilege and federal protection to act on this ruling as they saw fit—all at the expense of the Black family.

Browne-Marshall (2013) believes this legal blow turned "desegregation efforts into an exercise in futility" and "sought a compromise on the backs of Black people" (p. 33). This decision also opened the door for states to disregard or refuse desegregation altogether. This "all deliberate speed" could be directly correlated with Dr. King's speech over 30 years later, asking a "Negro to wait for a more convenient season" (in Washington, 1986, p. 295) (McManimon & Casey, 2020). Furthermore, the courts used this as a more subtle way of protecting racist policy. On the surface, *Brown I* and *II* paved the way for more progressive, equal education in the eyes of the law. It could also be used to argue that Black equality had been achieved. However, the reality was that racist lawmakers, city officials, etc. could still operate business as usual. Southern state legislatures passed at least 42 laws in favor of segregation after *Brown II*, which

ultimately led to the infamous case around the “Little Rock Nine” (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 33).

“*Little Rock Nine.*” *Cooper v. Aaron* upheld the desegregation of public schools in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957 (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 33). Despite this, Central High School refused to acknowledge this ruling. The current Governor sent in National Guard to *prevent* Black students from enrolling into the white schools, a fact usually left out of this infamous case, and allowed angry white mobs to surround the school (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 34). The “Little Rock Nine” were nine Black students who boldly enrolled in the all-white school despite the turmoil. President Eisenhower eventually sent in military troops to restore order but stated the *Brown* decision “should not be allowed to create hardship or injustice [for whites]” (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 34). The hardship and injustice felt and imposed on the Black students and their families must have been lost in this line of reasoning.

Moving Forward: A Social Context

White Flight, White Privilege. As we moved into the 70s, nearly 20 years after *Brown I* and *II*, court battles for desegregation were still occurring across the U.S. Generation after generation of students continued to experience education without the care and attention they deserved, and rightly fought for. In an effort to remedy this highly divisive issue, many schools looked to further integration efforts, one example was/is bussing. Since most Black public schools built during segregation were demolished, Black students were being bussed to the white school districts further away from their home districts (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 36). This became a large burden on the Black students and their families since they had to wake up much earlier and arrive home much later than their fellow white classmates. Once again, white students and families held a distinct privilege over the families of color.

In response to integration efforts and other factors, white families began moving to the suburbs and enrolling in private schools, away from the public city schools. As a large populace and tax base moved away from the districts, urban schools were left underfunded and predominantly filled with students of color. Many other factors contributed to white flight and the restrictions placed on non-white families from moving to suburbs over the years, such as restrictive covenants, redlining, and blockbusting. With this in mind, Sadker and Zittleman (2009) argued that schools have actually been resegregating since the 1980s, nearly 30 years after *Brown I* (p. 74). Additionally, “white students are the least likely to attend multiracial schools, [sic] and are the most isolated group” (Sadker & Zittleman, 2009, p. 74).

Clearly, there are many schools educating students of color who continue to be successful and nurturing. Despite the years of overt racism and “interpretive” litigation to receive an education at all, some educators have found a way to focus on the strengths of their students and provide them with exceptional education—just as they would any other student. The lesson to be had is that our collective failure as a nation created an inequitable education for all students. The failure, the gap, the deficit, should not rest with the student of color. We should all be alarmed and armed with the knowledge of our history to understand how systemically, unequal circumstances persist in our present-day.

This next section focuses on the theoretical frameworks that seek to create equitable education post-*Brown v. Board*. As demonstrated with the historical setting of the court cases, even triumphs for racial inequality were just a steppingstone. Considering the overall context of racial inequalities that persist in Wisconsin and Milwaukee in particular, researchers, educators, and policymakers have a long way to go. The following frameworks have been studied extensively so

that classrooms can move past the legislation and onto a truly equitable education for students of color.

Theoretical Frameworks: Multicultural Education, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, and Antiracist Education

Multicultural Education

One of the earliest reform efforts encouraged by education researchers post-*Brown v. Board* was with the concept of multiethnic education, later termed multicultural education. Throughout the literature, you'd be hard-pressed not to find James Banks ascribed to multicultural education in some way. His work is cited by most scholars on the subject and has even been deemed the "father of multicultural education" (Scott, 2011). Multicultural education grew out of a need for more equitable, culturally relevant educational practices. Banks (2013), Cherng and Davis (2019), along with many others, attribute multicultural education to the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s as African Americans fought to end discrimination across many platforms, including education (p. 4).

Multiethnic studies were more of a curriculum reform that included diverse cultures and ethnicities but did little to improve academic achievement in diverse groups of students (Banks, 2013). To remedy this realization, school reformers such as Delpit (1992), Gay (1994), and Ladson-Billings (1995) identified the following variables they believed had a significant impact on student achievement: school policy/politics, school culture, and hidden curriculum, learning styles, language/dialects of the school, community participation, teaching styles and school staff attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs (Banks, 2013). These principles were not always believed to have an impact, however. In the 60s and 70s, some theorists believed that the school culture and practices had little impact on the overall success of students.

Cultural Deprivation and Deficit Paradigm vs. Cultural Difference Theory. Cultural deprivation theorists believed that low-income students and minoritized students experienced learning problems *because* of the cultures in which they were socialized (Bloom, Davis & Hess, 1965; Riessman, 1962) (Banks, 2013). Proponents of this theory argued that “characteristics such as poverty and disorganized families and communities cause children from low-income communities to experience cultural deprivation and irreversible cognitive deficits” (Banks, 2013, p. 75). In short, these students were deficient in the skills needed to succeed at school before they even arrived. Similar to Ladson-Billings, Milner (2013) further emphasized the problems and consequences of focusing on achievement gaps and deficits. Oftentimes, culturally diverse students are compared with white students without tangential reasoning for the differences between the groups (Milner, 2013, p. 4). Additionally, white students are considered the “norm” and displayed as more intelligent and/or superior academically (Milner, 2013, p. 4). Through using achievement gap research, students of color are represented as having a “deficit,” and the focus is placed on the individual, *not* the structures and practices put into place enabling this gap (Milner, 2013, p. 5).

To combat and disprove these claims, a new school of thought luckily began to outshine this theory. Cultural difference theorists rejected the idea that students of color and low-income students had cultural deficits (Banks, 2013). Instead, they believed these groups had strong, rich cultures that could enrich the lives of all students (Banks, 2013). These students were not failing because of their culture, rather, they were failing because their home cultures were not celebrated at school.

Achievement Gap. Ladson-Billings (2006), Milner (2013), and Kendi (2019) all discuss issues with using the term achievement gap altogether. Ladson-Billings (2006) sees the

achievement gap as akin to our national debt—deeming it the “education debt.” This debt has been created through historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral decisions and policies (Ladson-Billings, 2006). In her American Educational Research Association (AERA) presidential address, she reminded us of how the “nation endorsed ideas about the inferiority” with Black, Indigenous, and Latina/a students (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 6). Kendi (2019) believes “we degrade Black minds every time we speak of an ‘academic achievement gap’” (p. 101). He goes on to say that “the idea of an academic-achievement gap is just the latest method of reinforcing the oldest racist idea: Black intellectual inferiority” (Kendi, 2019, p. 101). Although it may seem like a simple argument in semantics, using indicators such as the achievement gap has far-reaching implications, as previously discussed. If we are to measure the success of all students utilizing this “gap,” how are educators ensuring they aren’t reinforcing Black inferiority?

Multiethnic to Multicultural. Multiethnic studies ultimately became multicultural after other marginalized groups organized to have their cultures, histories, and experiences represented as well. Some of the earliest definitions of multicultural education ranged from a mere implementation of specific ethnicities and cultures into the curriculum to a more humanistic concept around “diversity, human rights, social justice, and alternative life choices” (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997, p. xxiv). Multicultural education thus began to include gender, exceptionality, and social class (Gollnick & Chinn, 1983) (Banks, 2013).

As an editor of the *Multicultural Education Series*¹⁰, Banks defined multicultural education as “a field of study designed to increase educational equity for all students that

¹⁰ *Multicultural Education Series* was edited by James A. Banks. It provides educators, students, policy makers, etc. with a comprehensive set of relevant research, theory, and practice “related to the education of ethnic, racial, cultural, and language groups in the United States and the education of mainstream students about diversity” (Banks, 2010).

incorporates, for this purpose, content, concepts, principles, theories, and paradigms from history, the social and behavioral sciences, and particularly from ethnic studies and women's studies" (Banks & Banks, 2004; Banks, 2010, p. x). An important goal, Banks (2010) discusses, is to "improve race relations and to help all students acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to participate in cross-cultural interactions and in personal, social, and civil action that will help make our nation more democratic and just" (Banks, 2010).

In Banks and McGee-Banks' (2020) tenth edition of *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives*, they detail extensive material on effective use and implementation of multicultural education. They describe this practice as a "total school reform effort designed to increase educational equity for a range of cultural, ethnic, and income groups" (Banks & McGee-Banks, 2020, p. 8). Additionally, their text is "designed to help current and future educators acquire the concepts, paradigms, and explanations needed to become effective practitioners in culturally, racially, linguistically, and social-class diverse classrooms and schools" (Banks & McGee-Banks, 2020, p. xviii). This book is intended to provide educators with the tools they need to be *effective* with their diverse students.

Equity pedagogy. As one of the dimensions of multicultural education, McGee-Banks and Banks (1995) define equity pedagogy as "teaching strategies and classroom environments that help students from diverse, racial, ethnic, and cultural groups attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively within, and help create and perpetuate, a just, humane and democratic society" (p. 152). Equity pedagogy focuses much more critically on enabling students to become "effective agents for social change" (McGee-Banks & Banks, 1995, p. 152).

Taking a hard look at this line of thinking, it would not be considered sufficient to simply allow students to become effective within the “dominant canon without learning also to question its assumptions, paradigms, and hegemonic characteristics” (McGee-Banks & Banks, 1995, p. 152). Allowing diverse, minoritized students to be successful within the confines of the school isn’t enough. This idea of an equity pedagogy isn’t something that can be measured with test scores.

Multicultural Education: A Critique. Although the goals of multicultural education resembled a societal utopia of sorts, implementation was just not that simple. During the earliest days of implementation, there was an expedited response to the Civil Rights Movement and demand for representation inside classrooms. Courses and programs were initially developed “without the careful planning needed to make them educationally sound or to institutionalize them within the educational system” (Banks & McGee-Banks, 2020, p. 4). As deep-seated and ingrained as racism was/is in this country, policymakers and educators must have been inclined to make it right, as quickly as possible. “Single-group studies” focusing on special holidays, ethnic celebrations, and courses designed for one ethnic group dominated school reforms and were often only taken by the ethnic group represented (Grant & Sleeter, 2013) (Banks & McGee-Banks, 2020, p. 4). Cultures were represented in segments outside of the mainstream curriculum in many cases, leading to the “heroes/heroines and holidays” level of multicultural education.

At least initially, this approach enabled students from different ethnic backgrounds to see their culture represented in the curriculum and also allow white students to understand the interconnectedness between groups. However, creating a separate curriculum aside from the mainstream curriculum became problematic. This approach often excluded the “struggles, experiences, hopes, and dreams” of ethnic and racial groups, and instead emphasized the

holidays and a list of heroes to commemorate (Banks, 2013). This approach allowed educators and administrators to check off the box by providing ethnic curriculum, however, “the mainstream curriculum was not challenged or transformed and the students were not able to see the ways in which ethnic content was an integral part of the American saga” (Banks, 2013, p. 74).

Just like any institutional reform or practice, multiculturalism and education were subject to the global political climate of the time. The Cold War was in full swing and was highly influential on many aspects of American culture. Some adversaries of multiculturalism believed the practice would tear “apart the national fabric” and take time away from more important studies, such as reading and math (Sadker & Zittleman, 2009, p. 73). Some argued that teaching about ethnic differences, instead of celebrating common English and European beliefs, would aid in the dissolving of national power – as with Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia (Sadker & Zittleman, 2009, p. 73).

It is hard to conjecture whether educators simply missed the mark on the desired intention, or chose to focus on what they could easily control, such as celebrating different cultures through food, party, special curriculum, etc. Regardless of the reason, Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017), along with many others, felt as though the multicultural approach resulted in mostly demonstrations of “celebrating diversity” which does not acknowledge the “history and politics of difference” (p. 142). The key, critical component missing from implementing this approach was addressing structural inequalities and inequitable distributions of power (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Celebrating diversity in students is good but does little to change systems of oppression without further interrogating practices.

The problem with multicultural education, Banks would argue, was not with the theory and research itself. It was stated that “the widespread misconceptions about multicultural education have slowed its implementation and contributed to the contentious debate about its nature and purposes (D’Souza, 1991; Schlesinger, 1991) (McGee-Banks & Banks, 1995). On paper, in theory, it would seem that the practices *should* be effective. However, out of the five dimensions he emphasizes for effective implementation, only one dimension was being focused upon; content integration (p. 152). The other four dimensions include the knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, an equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture/social structure (McGee-Banks & Banks, 1995). Their work, along with others published in the *Series* focused on all five of these dimensions. It was with the intention that all of these dimensions should be considered to achieve the goals sought after with multicultural education.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)

Race is not an obstacle to culturally responsive teaching; ignorance is (Jordan & Armento, 2001) (Sadker & Zittleman, 2009)

Moving away from multicultural education, CRP focuses primarily on the *how* of educator effectiveness, not so much on the content. This pedagogy, as described by Ladson-Billings (2009), specifically refers to the *way we teach* through a “deliberate attempt to influence how and what knowledge and identities are produced,” asserting that it is both a political and a practical activity (Giroux & Simon) (p. 15). This is a key distinction from multicultural education in that the main focus is on the process of education itself—not just curriculum.

The literature on culturally relevant pedagogy, and other concepts/pedagogies with similar names, is quite extensive with over 40 years of research. Although most would likely attribute culturally relevancy in education to Gloria Ladson-Billings, Hollie (2019) reminds us that Ramirez

and Castaneda (1974) introduced culturally relevant teaching (CRT) nearly 20 years before (p. 34). In their book, *Cultural Democracy, Bi-cognitive Development, and Education*, they argued that schools used “assimilationist philosophies” to conform minority groups (Ramirez & Castaneda, 1974) (Hollie, 2019). While their work mostly focused on the lack of cultural sensitivity with Mexican American students, it still bears the same roots as more modern culturally relevant teaching. Even so, it could be argued that Ladson-Billings’ (1994) book, *The Dreamkeepers* put the term on the proverbial map.

In her early work, Ladson-Billings (1994) defined CRT as “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural and historical referents to convey knowledge, to impart skills, and to change attitudes” (p. 13) (Hollie, 2019, p. 34). Although she does not discount the historical aspects of racism, she cautions using the past to determine the future, especially for African American students (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 35). She asks, “How can teachers who see African American students as mere descendants of slaves be expected to inspire them to educational, economic, and social levels that may even exceed their own?” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 36). Once again, her focus remained on teacher effectiveness.

Primarily focusing on teacher education efforts, Ladson-Billings (2014) identified three domains of CRP: academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness (p. 75). Cultural competence refers to students’ ability to “appreciate and celebrate” their culture, as well as other cultures (Ladson- Billings, 2014, p. 75). Sociopolitical consciousness includes extending learning outside the classroom, effectively analyzing and solving real-world problems (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 75). In this third domain, “students must develop critical consciousness and actively challenge social injustice” (Sadker & Zittleman, 2009, p. 78). In relation to Banks’ (2013) multicultural approach, Ladson-Billings’ cultural competence domain would effectively check that

box. Additionally, the sociopolitical consciousness also closely resembles equity pedagogy as described by McGee-Banks and Banks (1995).

Shortly after Ladson-Billings' first edition of *The Dreamkeepers*, Lisa Delpit authored *Other People's Children: Culture Conflict in the Classroom*. Also focusing on teacher education and effectiveness, Delpit (1995) stated the following:

We all interpret behaviors, information, and situations through our own cultural lenses; these lenses operate involuntarily, below the level of conscious awareness, making it seem that our own view is simply "the way it is." Learning to interpret across cultures demands reflecting on our own experiences, analyzing our own culture, examining and comparing varying perspectives. We must consciously and voluntarily make our cultural lenses apparent. Engaging in the hard work of seeing the world as others see it must be a fundamental goal for any move to reform the education of teachers and their assessment. (p. 151) (Hollie, 2019, p. 34).

Recognizing and examining your own cultural biases is a key component in culturally relevant teaching.

Another fundamental contributor to the subject is Geneva Gay. Building on the works of Ladson-Billings, Delpit, and others, Gay's (2000) *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice* introduced the concept of pedagogy with CRT. "Remixing" CRT into culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), Gay (2000) defined CRP as:

The use of cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to, and effective for them. This pedagogy teaches *to and through* the strengths of these students (p. 31) (Hollie, 2019, p. 35).

The work of Gay was especially important because her work included “results-based data” (Hollie, 2019, p. 35). Up until that point, the work on CRT had been mostly theoretical with little data supporting its claims.

Fast forward twenty years or so, Christopher Emdin (2016) wrote about the “urban educator,” while examining youth culture and its role in CRT (Hollie, 2019). As Hollie (2018) put it, youth culture is “probably the most dominant ‘culture’ in the classroom and yet is the least addressed or understood (Hollie, 2019). Emdin’s (2016) work is especially important considering the diversity of students in classrooms, coupled with an abundance of white educators. He asks and attempts to answer, “What new lenses or frameworks can we use to bring white folks who teach in the hood to consider that urban education is more complex than saving students and being a hero?” (Emdin, 2016) (Hollie, 2019, p. 36).

Continuing to build on those before, Paris and Alim (2018) introduced a new term altogether, culturally *sustaining* pedagogy (CSP). CSP “goes beyond just acceptance or tolerance of students’ cultures to move instead toward explicitly supporting aspects of their languages, literacies, and cultural traditions,” with culture including popular, youth, and local culture (Hollie, 2019). Paris and Alim (2018) also had a list of “to-do’s” for educators, something that wasn’t necessarily present in other CRT contexts. “Agency, internalized oppression, and community” were added to the conversation, which gave their work a broader appeal (Hollie, 2019).

CRP: Critiques. Within Hollies’ (2019) analysis of culturally relevant education, he found that the term “culturally relevant” itself had been “shrouded in a myriad of buzzwords like *equity*, *cultural sensitivity*, and *inclusivity* (p. 32). Identifying a harsh critique of current CRP practices, Ladson-Billings (2014) stated the following:

What state departments, school districts, and individual teachers are now calling ‘culturally relevant pedagogy’ is often a distortion and corruption of the central ideas I attempted to promulgate. The idea that adding some books about people of color, having a classroom Kwanzaa celebration, or posting ‘diverse’ images make one ‘culturally relevant’ seems to be what the pedagogy has been reduced to (p. 82).

Multicultural education and culturally relevant pedagogy, regardless of intentions and careful considerations, may have been muffled to mostly resemble the same thing – celebrating “heroes/heroines and holidays.” Allen et al. (2017) also believe the original foundation of CRP is been watered down to “steps and checklists” (Parsons & Wall, 2011) (p. 3). In defense of Ladson-Billings and others who have worked extensively on CRP, Allen et al. (2017) reemphasize that CRP was never intended to be “done; rather, it is a state of being” (Ladson-Billings, 2011) (p. 4). In her attempt to remix this pedagogy and better reflect the fluid nature of culture and scholarship, Ladson-Billings (2014) built on Paris’s idea of culturally *sustaining* pedagogy, wherein marginalized students become the subject, “not mere objects” of the teaching process (Paris, 2012) (p. 76). Regardless of this reframing, Allen et al. (2017) argue that CRP can itself, be reframed to support social justice work in teacher preparation programs (p. 4).

Social Justice and Antiracist Education

Whereas CRP is focused primarily on teacher education and reducing gaps in student outcomes, social justice and antiracist education take on a broader stance. Often used interchangeably with social justice education, some believe antiracist education emerged from the “dissatisfaction” with multicultural education sometime in the 1980s (Niemonen, 2007). Although multicultural education has no shortage of critiques, Mansfield and Kehoe (1994) would argue that antiracism has many similarities. Both “support teaching of heritage languages, and promote student teamwork and dialogue (Hernandez, 1989, Troyna, 1992). Both emphasize

culturally different ways of perceiving and learning, and advocate the removal of bias, tracking, and assessment barriers from curriculum” (Fleras & Elliott, 1992, Tator & Henry, 1991) (Mansfield & Kehoe, 1994, p. 419). James Banks (1986) and Bullivant (1986) would also argue that multicultural education embraces the issues considered within antiracist education (Troyna, 1987). Although both have evolved over the last several decades, it could be argued these similarities persist.

Despite the similarities, antiracist education has often been considered much more politicized than either multicultural education or CRP. Troyna and Williams (1986) contended that antiracist education required “involvement by educational institutions in political issues (p. 107), and Thomas (1984) believed antiracist education to be synonymous with political education (p. 24) (Mansfield & Kehoe, 1994, p. 420). While multicultural education is believed to focus on “individual conversion”, antiracist education “prioritises [sic] collective action” which leads to challenging existing power structures (Troyna, 1987, p. 312). Considering this politicization, antiracist education aims to “confront” racism and examine its historical roots, with a focus on unequal power and capitalism (McGregor, 1993; Tator & Henry, 1991) (Mansfield & Kehoe, 1994, p. 420). “Unless students understand the nature and characteristics of discriminatory barriers and thus acquire political agency, anti-racist educators believe the prevailing inequitable distribution of resources will remain intact” (Fleras & Elliott, 1992) (Mansfield & Kehoe, 1994, p. 420).

Moving ahead into the new millennium, Julie Kailin (2002) echoed the impact of the socioeconomic context on the effectiveness of antiracist education efforts. She believed that “while it is important for education to be aware of the need to develop multicultural values and skills, one must also critically analyze the role of class and capitalism and the relations of

domination in the social construction of difference among race, class, and gender” (Kailin, 2002, p. 47). Once again, a serious critique of capitalism is advocated. Niemonen (2007) considered antiracist education “a set of pedagogical, curricular, and organizational strategies that hope to promote racial equality by identifying, then eliminating, white privilege” (p. 160). In a broader sense, López (2008) describes antiracist education as “any theory and/or practice (whether political or personal) that seeks to challenge, reduce, or eliminate manifestations of racism in society” (p. 43).

Espinoza et al. (2003) are much more forward with their expectations of social justice and antiracism. They do not stop by insisting we raise white people’s consciousness. Espinoza et al. (2003) very pointedly assert that “social ills cannot be combated simply by pressing the popgun of liberal, middle-class love against the bosom of oppressive social structures” (p. 36). They continue further in their discussion on decolonizing pedagogy.

Decolonizing Pedagogy. What they deem as “social justice reconsidered,” Espinoza et al. (2003) describe decolonizing pedagogy as both the “means and the ends of schooling” (p 21). It is informed by a “theoretical heteroglossia” that “unmask[s] the logics, workings, and effects of internal colonial domination, oppression, and exploitation in our contemporary contexts” (Espinoza et al., 2003, p. 21). They believe without this form of pedagogy, students of color will continue to be “assaulted by multiple forms of violence,” all of which have been sanctioned and normalized in our society (Espinoza et al., 2003, p. 11).

Referencing the works of Marx and Engels, they believe that although history *is made* by men and women, “their being in the world cannot be detached from and unaffected by the time and space they have already occupied” (Espinoza et al., 2003, p. 17). Even so, their social condition doesn’t necessarily determine the histories of their future (Espinoza et al., 2003). Just

as Kailin described the domination of social constructions, Espinoza et al. (2003) further emphasize the colonization of education as a manifestation of power and domination. This power and domination often determine what it is we learn, what knowledge is “worth it” – they assert that the “pedagogical is inherently political” (Espinoza et al., 2003, p. 20).

Confronting and disrupting *systemic* racism in antiracism is key. Throughout the literature, there isn’t a set of rules, domains, or step-by-step guidance on how to achieve antiracism. As conceptualized, it is encompassed throughout all aspects of education. According to Bell (2016), social justice education “aims to help participants develop awareness, knowledge, and processes to examine issues of justice/injustice in their personal lives, communities, institutions, and the broader society... help develop a sense of agency and commitment” (p. 4). Instead of simply learning about multiculturalism in the curriculum, this approach attempts to “interrupt and change oppressive patterns and behaviors in themselves and in the institutions and communities in which they are a part” (Bell, 2016, p. 4). Lee Ann Bell (2016) makes an important distinction of using “oppression” versus discrimination, bias, or bigotry to describe social inequalities. Her focus on oppression gives added emphasis to the *systemic* issues that are rooted “institutionally and in everyday life” (Bell, 2016, p. 5).

Identifying, challenging, reducing, and eliminating. More recently, Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) see antiracist education as a *deliberate* approach that recognizes that racism is embedded in everyday life (p. 142). More specifically, they believe the process should “raise the consciousness of white people about what racism is and how it works” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 142). It is within these latter definitions that the role of white people is explicitly challenged. This is a key element to practicing antiracism. What these scholars are saying is that we are not just to celebrate how we are different. To actually challenge the systems of oppression

(Bell, 2016), thus resulting in a fundamentally more just society – we must be truthful to the origins of the system.

Antiracist Education: Critiques. While having a “politicized character” in education, many critics believed antiracist education represented indoctrination or propaganda (Troyna & Carrington, 1990) (Mansfield & Kehoe, 1994, p. 420). This was the exact critique heard from the parents of the Kenosha district who attempted to discuss Black Lives Matter in 2020. Oftentimes, parents and/or educators believe education should be apolitical, and antiracist education leans much too far left (Mansfield & Kehoe, 1994). Additionally, many believe antiracist education “reduces racism to something primarily, if not exclusively, perpetuated by whites “(Gordon, 1989, F. Palmer, 1986) (Mansfield & Kehoe, 1994, p. 422).

Federal Reforms—“Accountability Cult” and Further Legislation

What if we realized the best way to ensure an effective educational system is not by standardizing our curricula and tests but by standardizing the opportunities available to all students? (Kendi, 2019, p. 103).

Recognizing the disparities in student outcomes across the U.S. despite the *Brown v. Board* ruling, the federal government has continued to intervene in various ways. Because of the Tenth Amendment, the federal role in education is limited, leaving the state and local levels to largely decide educational policy (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). However, the federal government does provide laws and guidelines for the states to follow. In 1970, President Nixon endorsed a policy which stated that Washington “wants to be sure that every dollar invested in an educational program will produce a payoff that can be measured and that can be proved” (Bell, 1972) (Ambrosio, 2013, p. 43). Some believe the real purpose wasn’t meant to “respond to the educational demands of low-income families, or provide students with a basic education, but to

‘prevent analysis of the influence of social and economic factors on school success by forcing educators to concentrate on measuring and testing learning in a social vacuum’” (Martin et al., 1976) (Ambrosia, 2013, p. 44).

Some branded this shift a “cult of efficiency,” influenced by Frederick Taylor’s (1911), *The Principles of Scientific Management*, which later transformed into “a new accountability cult” (Callahan, 1962; Nash & Agne, 1972) (Ambrosia, 2013, p. 320). Au (2011) argued the purpose of the accountability system overall was to “deflect attention away from the real underlying problems that plague public education: ‘rising poverty and racial segregation in our schools, increasing unemployment, lack of health care, and the steady defunding of the public sector’” (Ambrosia, 2013, p. 38). Although this was a time still fresh from civil rights litigation, the tone at the top was seemingly uninspired.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA)

ESEA, signed on the back of the Civil Rights Act, was signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965, attesting that “full educational opportunity” should be “our first national goal” (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Although President Johnson’s motivations have been scrutinized, this was still an important moment for social justice and civil rights. The goal was for students to receive equal access to quality education through Title I¹¹ funding for professional development, instructional materials, and additional resources (Paul, 2016).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

To place heavier weight on accountability within school systems in addition to encouraging academic improvement, President George W. Bush passed No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002, as an expansion of ESEA. This law promoted “standardized testing,

¹¹ Title I funding provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) with high numbers/percentages of low-income students. Funding supports extra instructions, special preschool, and extra school programs. (<https://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html>)

accountability, competition, school choice, and privatization” (Hursh, 2007). In exchange for a significant increase in school funding, states were required to meet several precise benchmarks (Black, 2017). These benchmarks were to be disaggregated based on subgroups within the schools, such as race, gender, disability, ethnicity, language, and socioeconomic status. Each of these groups was therefore required to meet the same benchmarks under the heightened testing and accountability requirements (Black, 2017). If schools receiving Title I funds did not meet these requirements, the consequences escalated by year. After two years of missing the progress requirement, schools were given a label of “in need of improvement.” Additionally, students were then given the right to transfer out of the district. After year four, schools were to replace staff or change the curriculum, and five years resulted in school closure (Black, 2017).

President Bush insisted America needed to remain competitive in the global market, which meant improving our academic achievement through “objective assessments” (Hursh, 2007). However, NCLB succumbed to a plethora of critiques as it “became increasingly unworkable for schools and educators” due to its “prescriptive requirements” which applied to all students, regardless of ability (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Mandating one hundred percent proficiency was unrealistic and failed to account for any reasonable failure, including structural inequalities (Black, 2017).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

The most recent law affecting schools at the federal level is the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), enacted by President Obama in December of 2015. This was a reauthorization of the ESEA and a direct response to the crisis unfolding from NCLB’s nearly impossible progress standards (Black, 2017). Overall, ESSA aims to improve student outcomes across the board. One highlight of ESSA includes “advancing equity by upholding critical protections for America’s

disadvantaged and high-needs students” (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Additionally, the law aims to “close achievement gaps, increase equity, improve the quality of instruction, and increase outcomes for all students” (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

One key aspect of the ESSA also includes Title I funds, as passed down from the ESEA. Title I is still designed to provide financial assistance to schools with a high percentage of low-income families for students to meet the state academic standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). These funds support additional instruction in reading/mathematics, preschool, after-school, and summer programs and have seemingly much greater flexibility than with NCLB. For example, the funds do not necessarily have to be spent serving only low-income students (Black, 2017). More discretion is given to the states with fewer restrictions, making it “easier for schools to use their Title I funds for ‘school-wide programs’” (Black, 2017). Although the ESSA is lauded for educational equity and flexibility for school districts, Black (2017) would argue that it shares the same flaws as NCLB. He contests that current regulations impede equality efforts, (as advertised in both NCLB and the current ESSA), and “drastically narrows the ways in which equality principles apply. The result is a regulatory regime that promotes, at best, random equality that really cannot be properly deemed equality at all” (Black, 2017, p. 1346).

Implementation Strategies

Looking at the national context, there is relatively little published on implementing antiracism education in K-12 schools. Many of the search results from Google Scholar (roughly 17 thousand hits from 2000-2021) and the UW-M library database (roughly 140 hits from 2000-2021), revealed studies of antiracism focused on social work, medicine, or are from international studies (i.e. Britain, Canada, and Australia). Many of the results from the U.S. are strategies used

in higher education – not K-12. Search terms included: how do schools implement antiracism, antiracism in schools, racism and pedagogy, antiracist policy, antiracist pedagogy, and antiracist education.

There are, however, a few examples of how antiracism has/is being implemented in the U.S. In one case study conducted by Wiggan and Watson-Vandiver (2019) on a high-achieving urban school, critical antiracism was highlighted and used throughout the curriculum and instruction. To note, this district has a total of only 100 students, all of whom are Black. For their methodology, Wiggan and Watson-Vandiver (2019) investigated the perceptions of students (15), teachers (4), and 1 administrator during the 2014-2015 school year through semi-structured interviews. In addition, they conducted classroom observations and solicited written responses from the participants. Based on their perception, the antiracism framework seen inside this school was “more or less a synthesis of critical race theory and antiracism education” (Wiggan & Watson-Vandiver, 2019, p. 1076). The teachers critically analyzed the history and contemporary social issues and incorporated both into their reading, mathematics, language arts, social studies, science, and elective courses (Wiggan & Watson-Vandiver, 2019, p. 1076). The greatest finding from this study was how “self-knowledge” was implemented into their curriculum, specifically with corrective history, response to news media, and inspiration from Ferguson, Missouri (Wiggan & Watson-Vandiver, 2019, p. 1076).

Regarding corrective history, students were provided information about their “blackness” outside of just enslavement and the Civil Rights Movement. One student even commented: “The stuff that my school tells us, you will never see in the history books” (Wiggan & Watson-Vandiver, 2019, p. 1076). Even further, the “self-knowledge” applied to providing students with positive reflections of themselves, despite the negative portrayals of Black people on television

and in the news (Wiggan & Watson-Vandiver, 2019, p. 1076). Another strategy used in this study was to be open and honest about instances of police brutality, such as the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. The literature, foreign language, mathematics, and even science teachers discussed these events, “demonstrating their awareness regarding the importance of addressing these social issues in a school” (Wiggan & Watson-Vandiver, 2019, p. 1076). This study focused less on the “why” behind having an antiracist approach, and almost solely on how the strategies were implemented.

Another example of antiracist implementation strategies occurred circa 2006 within one southwestern high school with a large population of immigrant Latino/a students. As part of a larger qualitative case study including 5 months of participant observation in 5 ninth-grade classrooms, Nancy Lopez (2008) studied the antiracist actions of one bilingual schoolteacher. Lopez (2008) noted that Ms. Rivera, the teacher studied, was a strong activist against anti-immigration legislation and legal action, which was especially relevant in their town situated on the U.S./Mexico border. The political and local climate of immigration, as well as having a majority Hispanic student population, seemed to be the catalyst for Ms. Rivera to take a strong stance in favor of an antiracist pedagogy. Some examples to demonstrate this pedagogy include having significant representation of political leaders, activists, and various other artifacts which represented her students. Additionally, Ms. Rivera encouraged and even joined her students in a walk-out during the National Day of Action for immigrant rights (Lopez, 2008). Ms. Rivera also “articulated and empowering discourse” and critiqued the media and U.S. policy for hypocrisy and misrepresentation of the Latino/a community (Lopez, 2008). In this example, antiracism was implemented due to a pressing need to preserve Latino/a communities in a highly contested corner of the country.

Another example includes a strategy identified by James Loewen during his experience as an educator. Throughout his work, James Loewen has aimed to change the perspective of history from which it is often told and uncover the “hidden facts” about our nation’s past (Loewen, 2010). One example is with the “Nadir of Race Relations,” described in his book on *Teaching What Really Happened*. As a period rarely addressed in history class, the “Nadir of Race Relations” refers to the timeframe from 1890 until about 1940 in which race relations for Native Americans, African Americans, Chinese Americans, and Mexican Americans became *worse* (p. 189). In Loewen’s (2010) summation, this is a key timeframe to encourage students to interrogate since the race of the author discussing this history, and the period it was written impacts how it is told. As previously mentioned, “who wrote history, who did not, and for what purpose can make all the difference” (Loewen, 2010, p. 13).

This “Nadir” impacts the *way* in which history is told as determined by those who tell it – often by those in power. As an educator encouraging students to look past this “bad” history, Loewen (2010) asks his students the following: “When was it created? Who created it? Why? Who was/is the intended audience? Did the audience include powerful people/institutions? Who is left out? Are there problematic words/symbols? How was it received? What does it leave out about the “heroes”? Is this accurate? (p. 76-77). Throughout this method, students are encouraged to identify, and challenge systems of racism embedded in their studies. In this way, educators stimulate critical analysis of history.

In the last study I noted with implementation strategies, Hristić (2019) conducted a qualitative case study on six K-12 principals in six different schools about their perceptions and practices of mindfulness and antiracism. Each participant had completed specific equity training and self-identified as being committed to racial equity (Hristić, 2019). All schools within this

district had been engaged with racial equity work for at least ten years, and their leaders had been asked to center issues of race in their practices (Hristić, 2019). Throughout this study, Hristić (2019) found these leaders “worked to close the resource gap... mitigate the negative impact of gentrification on the students and families they served, and they challenged certain district practices that result in increased segregation of students in SpEd in their own building” (p. 135).

Specific strategies reflective of antiracism in Milwaukee were challenging to find. Even with such racial disparities and large gaps in student outcomes across the board, antiracism education policies were not found in my search of Milwaukee metropolitan districts. However, Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) reflected on their struggles for implementing multicultural, anti-racist education back in 2000 (Lawrence, 2000). Although parents, administrators, teachers, and the local community had advocated for a more multicultural, anti-racist philosophy in the 1990s, the political climate, changes in school district leadership, budget, and standardized testing hindered the progressive movement (Lawrence, 2000).

Despite the lack of literature available referencing Milwaukee, there are various resources devoted to aiding in implementing antiracism in schools. For example, the Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC) reached out to all public-school superintendents in October 2020, inviting them to partner with the WEAC to make sure “every Wisconsin child is learning in an anti-racist school with anti-racist educators” (WEAC, 2020). Additionally, PBS Wisconsin Education published an article titled: “Anti-Racist Education” concerning a 2-day racial equity habit-building challenge (Penick-Parks, 2021).

Gap in Literature

Looking at the above examples, only the case study with Ms. Rivera and her Latino/a students answered the question of “why” behind implementing antiracism. The other examples

were based on perceptions and specific strategies. Noting this gap in the literature with specific implementation strategies, particularly in Milwaukee metropolitan, this qualitative case study aims to shed light on antiracist practices in at least two districts. Although my study largely focused on perceptions as well, semi-structured interviews were conducted to understand more of the “why” behind antiracism in these two suburban districts.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study asks: How do school and district personnel perceive their role in practicing antiracism? Also, what do K-12 leaders perceive to be barriers/motivations for implementation? And lastly, what ways do these school communities share in common, as two “exogenous” districts of an urban metropolitan area, and how do they differ? Guided by these questions, Critical Race Theory (CRT) was used as a theoretical frame for my research. As stated by Tichavakunda (2019), “CRT is at its best when its lens is directed at identifying racism and the racialized nature of different aspects of education” (p. 652). To elaborate, in hopes of a “more equitable society and transformative change, CRT in the field of education continues to evolve methodologically and conceptually to study the changing nature of race and racism in education” (Howard & Navarro, 2016) (Tichavakunda, 2019, p. 653). A key aspect of this frame includes the evolving and transformative nature of CRT in education. This study inevitably demonstrated this evolution in real-time as the districts grappled with the realities of a dynamic local, national, and global context.

Case Study Methodology

To gain a better understanding of equity and antiracist practices inside K-12 schools, I conducted a basic qualitative case study using document analysis and semi-structured interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), focusing on the years 2015 through 2021. As stated by Baxter and Jack (2008); “Qualitative case study is a research methodology that helps in the exploration of a phenomenon within some particular context through various data sources, and it undertakes the exploration through a variety of lenses in order to reveal multiple facets of the phenomenon.” Since the topic at hand was very layered, nuanced, and interpretive, this study allowed the participants to provide their perspectives along with the document analysis so that the data could

be as humane and transcendent as possible (Stake, 2005). Researchers conducting a basic qualitative case study, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), “would be interested in (1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 24). This was particularly evident as this study leaned on the perceptions of the participants to gather data outside of the document analysis.

Sample Rationale and Site Selection

Overall, this study’s focus on metropolitan Milwaukee was intentional based on the documented realities of racial disparities. Based on a 2019 study, “Wisconsin has the regrettable distinction of ranking among the worst states in the nation for racial inequality” including poverty, unemployment, educational attainment, and incarceration (Dresser, 2019). Furthermore, “Milwaukee is one of the most racially and economically segregated cities in the US, and one of the most innovative, in terms of the adaptation of school choice policies,” including the Chapter 220 program¹² (Bonds et al., 2015). Although this study doesn’t specifically analyze these school choice policies, Milwaukee continues to have a difficult relationship with these policies along with local politics. For example, former Congressman Sensenbrenner attributed white flight to ‘high crime, high taxes, and bad schools’ (Lewis, Silverstone, Sambamurthy, & Lapinski, 2016) (Loyd & Bonds, 2018). According to Loyd and Bonds (2018), “this account of history obscures both historical white flight and white resistance to civil rights demands, and ongoing political assaults that marshal the same tropes to rationalize the dismantling of public education and services” (p. 912). Considering these implications of Milwaukee and surrounding suburbs, interrogating antiracist educational policies seems especially paramount.

¹² The Chapter 220 program was created by the Wisconsin Legislature in 1975 as a voluntary school integration program. The goal, overall, is to “promote cultural and racial integration in education on a voluntary basis” (E. McDowell, personal communication, June 5, 2011) (Bonds et al., 2015).

Site Selection. This case study focuses on two exogenous suburban districts on the periphery of Milwaukee. The site selection for this study includes two metropolitan Milwaukee suburban school districts; one racially diverse, District Diversity, and one more racially homogenous, District Homogenous, (see Table 1). For context, metropolitan Milwaukee has a population of 1,575,169 based on July 2019 Census data (US Census, 2019). Of this population, over 1.1 million identify as white, over 250,000 Black, over 147,000 as Hispanic or Latino (of any race), nearly 7,000 American Indian and Alaska native, over 60,000 as Asian, and over 600 as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (US Census, 2019). Based on the data from Table 1., I considered District Diversity to be diverse and District Homogenous to be *more* homogenous. Additionally, full integration is considered to be reached once a racial minority makes up at least 30 percent of a school system’s population (Thomas-Lynn, 2007) (Bonds et al., 2015, p. 12). Although District Homogenous has roughly 30 percent students of color and *not* homogenous by standard definition, this does include less than 3 percent of students identifying as Black. I chose to use the label “more homogenous” to contrast the districts in this way.

Although each district has many differences, one key similarity is their implementation context for their equity-based work. With this, Domitrovitch et al. (2008) would argue that strategies are often interconnected in K-12 school systems. Even further, a two-case study design is stronger than a single case study (Yin, 2017). Both District Diversity and Homogenous have commonalities, lending them to be joined as part of this case study. Each district shares similar proximity to Milwaukee and its urban context. Although some would debate whether each is suburban, urban, or urban emergent (Milner & Lomotey, 2014), Soja (2011) reminds us how similar these distinctions are. “As the density gradient tilts further upward, peripheral urbanization is bringing with it increasingly economic and cultural heterogeneity, growing

immigrant populations, and practically everything traditionally associated with central cities, erasing what was once a fairly easy to identify boundary between the urban and suburban worlds” (Soja, 2011, p. 461). About this “morphology” (Soja, 2011), these districts each share challenges based on this heterogeneity, among other things, as seen within the findings of Chapter 4. It is important to note however, Milwaukee is a unique case in this aspect. There are many political, economic, and especially funding disparities present between Milwaukee and the surrounding suburbs (A.Bonds, personal communication, June 15, 2021) that add another layer of complexity to this study.

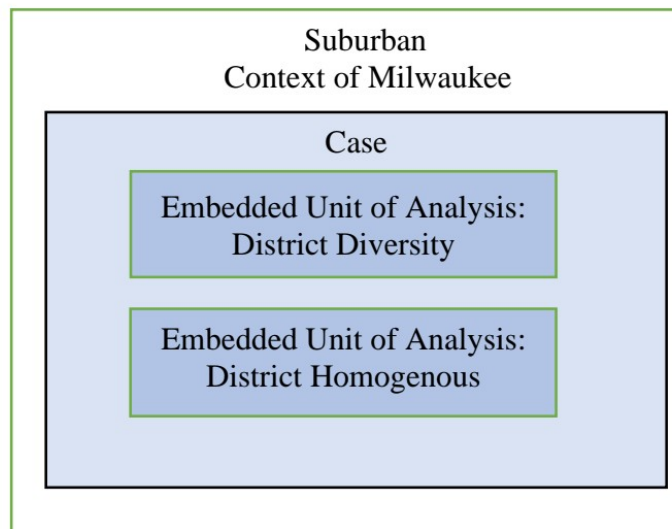
Even further with similarities, each district falls under the same state and local policies which guide their equity work, in addition to sharing the same implementation context for equity. District Diversity and Homogenous each drew on the same equity-based consultation firm, Integrated Comprehensive Systems for Equity (ICS). Furthermore, each district delineated Equity Non-negotiables on their district websites, which were derived from consultations completed through ICS.

This case study is embedded, as the data analysis was limited to each case, and the data was not pooled between each of the schools (Yin, 2017). In this light, these districts were presented as two examples of a single study. Research indicated that efforts regarding similar program implementation in K-12 systems are often interconnected (Domitrovitch et al., 2008), so an embedded case study seemed to allow the discovery of important features of how the implementation of antiracist policy developed in both districts. Data was collected and analyzed in separate reports, which then allowed for cross-case observations and finally, a cross-case report. See Figure 1.

Additionally, these sites were selected due to the personal ties I have with each. I have a close relationship with an administrator in District Diversity and have followed the districts' progress and diversity agenda over the last three years. This relationship became my initial contact in recruiting participants for this study. Additionally, my children will be attending District Homogenous once they become school-age and I thus have a personal interest in what kind of education they will be receiving with regards to social justice and antiracism. I gained access to this district through a direct email to a district stakeholder. This contact provided further guidance on their specific IRB approval and became my point of contact for further research inquiries.

Figure 1.

Embedded Single Case Design (Yin, 2018)



Document Analysis

In the case of both school districts, public documents were used as part of the analysis. Using the school district websites, this study analyzed school board meeting minutes, district

mission statements and core values, equity plans and documents from equity working groups, resources for families, and specific program information (e.g. personalized learning, authentic student engagement, etc.) Additionally, Google searches were conducted to gain further insight into public events within each district.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four school and district-based stakeholders. I interviewed one school-based and one district-based personnel from each district. IRB approval through UW-M was obtained before conducting the interviews, as well as a separate site-specific IRB approval for each district (see Appendix G).

Interview Participant Sample Selection. For the interview participants, the individuals were chosen due to their overall positionality in the decision-making process. Using the public district directory, emails were sent to members with the job titles referencing teaching and learning, principal, assistant principal, social and emotional learning, and equity using a recruitment template approved through the IRB. After only receiving one response from school-based personnel in District Diversity, Ms. Smith (the school-based personnel) recommended I reach out to a district librarian for input. This direct recommendation provided data for my fourth and final interview. All of the interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom. A secondary phone transcription application was used in addition to the Zoom recording. Prior to the interviews, I conducted a pilot interview with Ms. Smith. After this interaction, I determined I needed a semi-structured versus a structured format to let the participants expand their responses in an open-ended fashion. Although semi-structured, a protocol form (approved by the IRB, see Appendix H), was used during the interview process.

Each of these members interviewed is deeply tied to practices and policies inside their district and provides personalized views. To gain perspective from both policymakers and implementers (i.e. “boots on the ground”), this study sought participants from both school and district-level. Although their viewpoints are individual and not necessarily representative of all members within their school communities, they each can institute change. There were no exclusionary factors for these individuals, although I attempted to obtain as diverse of a participant base as possible (see Table 3 for more information on participants).

Table 3.

Participant Background

Participant Demographics and Job Descriptions			
District Diversity		District Homogenous	
Ms. Smith	Ms. Rogers	Ms. Williams	Ms. Scott
As a school-based administrator, Ms. Smith is a white female with 4 years in the district and 9 years in education overall. She oversees multiple departments and staff members and works closely with ICS staff.	As a district staff, Ms. Rogers is a white female with 18 years in the district. She oversees the K-12 library staff and IT department.	Characterized as a school-based staff, Ms. Williams is a white female with 8 years of experience in the district, 20 years in her role. She works with the learning communities to design lesson plans.	As a district-staff member, Ms. Scott is a white female with one year in her current role and 14 years in the district. She works in the area of student services and specializes in diverse, inclusive practices.

Data Analysis

Document Analysis. As noted in Chapter 1, the beginning stages of my data analysis yielded literally thousands of results. To discipline me “not to pursue everything,” I narrowed my study through my search of the literature (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). After conducting initial searches through the UW-M library database on antiracism, I recognized that multicultural education and culturally relevant pedagogy also surfaced with frequency. To organize my

literature, I created separate digital folders for each of these frameworks. As I uncovered additional literature on each, they were inserted into these folders for further review. To widen my scope of the study, I also searched using terms such as equity, racism and education, diversity and inclusion, white privilege and supremacy in education, culturally relevant pedagogy, multicultural education, and social justice education. Once I moved onto the document analysis, I began with standards and policies on racism, equity, diversity, and inclusion in federal and state resources. Once I recognized the standards in which districts were to operate, I analyzed overall mission statements, core values, and easily accessible equity plans (within a few mouse clicks on the district websites). After this initial analysis, meeting minutes and board policies/documents were viewed.

Semi-Structured Interviews. After I had completed a significant amount of document analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted using the process outlined above. After I transcribed each interview, I went through and highlighted keywords/phrases and quotes that stood out to me about equity, racism, diversity, culturally relevant pedagogy, and antiracism as my first cycle of coding. I then went back through the highlights as my second coding cycle and compiled a list of codes and themes (see Appendix E for interview coding document). What I found was that some codes were present in all of the interviews, such as equity and equity non-negotiables. Using Microsoft Excel, I assigned each code a specific number and attached them to quotes from within each transcript. I inserted each quote into the document and assigned it a tentative theme. From there, I went back through the themes and color-coded each to determine which were unique to each interview. The themes that were shared between more than one participant were not color-coded. What I found was that after this second coding exercise (See Appendix E), each interview had very few unique codes separate from the rest. After an initial

list of about 30 themes, I combined similar themes and eliminated those without significant substance as part of a third cycle. After this third cycle of coding and combining themes, I was left with seven themes of which are included in my findings as headings. As part of this cycle, I also compiled a list of exemplary quotes from each participant (See Appendix F).

Validity and Reliability

The criteria for maintaining validity and reliability in qualitative research have been widely contested and defined over the years, without a consensus on “appropriate criteria” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). However, looking at Lichtman’s (2013) “personal criteria,” good qualitative research includes “being explicit about the researcher’s role and this or her relationship to those studied, making a case that the topic of the study is important, being clear about how the study was done, and making a convincing presentation of the findings” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

It is still important to realize that with qualitative research, there is always some level of interpretation from the researcher. Even so, Merriam and Tisdell (2015) provide a list of 8 strategies for promoting validity and reliability, including triangulation, member checks/respondent validation, adequate engagement in data collection, researcher’s position, peer review, audit trail, rich, thick descriptions, and maximum variations (p. 259). In order to increase the overall credibility and internal validity of this study, triangulation was used as a strategy – using multiple methods and sources of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Document analysis was used in conjunction with the interviews to cross-check what was read in the public documents versus how the participants viewed their practices. Both the school-based personnel and district-based personnel were interviewed so that I could gain as much insight as possible from both perspectives. I provided my reflexivity as the researcher and have had my data peer-reviewed

along the way. Additionally, three cycles of coding interviews were conducted to ensure the major themes were reflective of the data gathered. Lastly, an audit trail can be found in the appendices reflecting the reliability of the data.

Limitations

Although this study maintains validity and reliability with the data gathered, there are still areas of limitation. Since this study is based on qualitative data, it is not generalizable like traditional quantitative data. However, Thomas (2011) would argue “that to seek generalizable knowledge, in whatever form—everyday or special—is to miss the point about what may be offered by certain kinds of inquiry, which is exemplary knowledge” (p. 33). Additionally, only two districts were studied. Although they share commonalities from existing within the same region and having a similar race, equity, and community-related issues, each of these districts still has a dramatically different study body. Since only one racially diverse and more homogenous district was studied, these findings are not/should not be applied to all districts.

To further emphasize the antiracist practices inside school districts, I believe a greater number of interviews, including with teachers and students, would paint a much clearer picture. Additionally, participant-based research would also be incredibly valuable within this study. Talking about the practice can only reveal so much. Experiencing the lessons first-hand could reveal the subtle, perhaps even “hidden” aspects discussed in Chapter 1. Furthermore, I operated initially using a mostly deductive lens. Focusing on a mostly white and also diverse student base, I began my research with certain assumptions in mind. What was gathered, however, was not as clearly identified as such. I moved from these broad-based assumptions as my research progressed.

Antiracism: In Context

As demonstrated throughout the literature, antiracism can take on different meanings to different people. Moving forward through my findings and discussion, the following definition was developed and used as a guide: *any deliberate action taken to confront systems of racism or oppression*. Due to the limitations of my methodology, I chose to further broaden the definition. Although this may seem like a diluted version of the current literature on the subject, I believe further specifications would limit my research results drastically.

Positionality

As my research is centered on race, it is important to identify my positionality. I am a white female in my 30s. My former career was serving in the armed forces with little interaction with students of any kind (my higher education up to that point was almost exclusively distance learning). Not only did I grow up in a mostly white suburb in Ohio, but I have also been away from high school and youth-related experiences for almost 15 years. My positionality undoubtedly impacts my research in some way. Not only am I far removed from the struggles of being a student during these incredibly difficult times, but I also am not an educator. While it may be easy for me to pass judgment on current methods and pedagogy, I have no experience dealing with students. Additionally, I reside in the mostly white suburb of District Homogenous. I do not currently have any children or family in this district however, this will be the assigned district my children will attend once they become school-aged. As I spoke with administrators and studied district documents, it was important to recognize this positionality.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

As school districts are struggling to find their stride in addressing equity and racism, the federal and state governments provide relatively little guidance on the subject. However, quantitative data such as graduation rates, academic achievement, and measurable “gaps” in student success are riddled throughout government policy. Standards reflective of antiracism, social justice, or multiculturalism are mostly non-existent. On the other hand, community involvement, culturally relevant teaching, specific equity plans, social and emotional learning, and character education were referenced in relation to equity. Considering this, it is no surprise that most districts share these frameworks versus a distinct antiracist policy, for example. To demonstrate the standards/policies aimed at equity and race relations districts are faced with, the Wisconsin ESSA and Wisconsin DPI were first considered. As part of my case study, the WI ESSA and WDPI were not explicitly referenced from any of the interview participants. However, each was listed to some frequency in their board documents and policies.

Standards and Policies from Federal/State: Wisconsin Every Student Succeeds Act (WI ESSA) and Wisconsin Department of Instruction (WDPI)

Guided by the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the State Educational Agency (SEA) outlines a plan in the WI ESSA to improve education for all students. Specifically, in the areas of graduation rates, academic achievement, and proficiency of English learners, including “cutting the achievement gap in half” within six years (WI Consolidated Plan, 2017).¹³ To meet this ambitious goal, valuable “teacher/student relationships, cultural

¹³ Other programs listed include Improving Basic Programs, Education of Migratory Children, Prevention and Intervention Programs for Children and Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent, or At-Risk, Supporting Effective Instruction, English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement, Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Rural and Low-Income School Program, and Education for Homeless

competence, family and community engagement, and effective, standards-based instruction” must be included in each district’s plan (WI Consolidated State Plan, 2017).

Community Involvement

One way the State Educational Agency (SEA) offers to “equitably meet the needs of underserved students” is through community involvement (WI Consolidated Plan, 2017). The WI ESSA states: “Schools will need to intentionally and explicitly include representatives from all members of the community to ensure that improvement plans will meet local needs and provide educational equity...explicitly focused on improving school climate and culture” (WI Consolidated State Plan, 2017). Community-based organizations, neighborhood representatives, Tribal government representatives, and other local organizations are encouraged to be involved with school intervention programs (WI Consolidated State Plan, 2017).

Culturally Responsive Practices

The SEA also notes the importance of culturally responsive practices. To reduce racial “achievement gaps,” one strategy listed was to have at least 50 percent of teachers and decision-makers attend at least one culturally responsive or equity training by the year 2020 (WI Consolidated State Plan, 2017). Yearly, these programs are to be evaluated for effectiveness—although the evaluation method isn’t specifically identified. The SEA recognizes that school improvement plans often fail, not because of poor plans or interventions, but because the plans were never implemented as they were designed to. This shares a close sentiment with other educational reforms. As previously discussed, proponents of multicultural education and culturally relevant practices both agree that each approach only works if implemented as it is/was designed. With this in mind, emphasis is placed on scientific research from the National

Implementation Research Network (NIRN)¹⁴ to ensure the improvement plans are implemented with fidelity (WI Consolidated State Plan, 2017).

WDPI Equity Plan

WDPI provides guidance and resources for achieving equity and diversity in the classroom. Their objective is to “illuminate the connections in the education process and to show how equity and diversity can actually make the system work better for all” (WDPI, 2020). This includes a resources and planning guide, “Educating All Our Children,” and “Follow the Purple Brick Road to Equity and Social Justice” (WDPI, 2020) (Bitters, 2011). Other resources focusing on current events and various publications about race are also included. Additionally, the WDPI has materials on including antiracism in school libraries – the only mention of antiracism I could find.

The WI ESSA makes numerous mentions of Wisconsin’s equity plan, which is further described on the WDPI site. This plan is specifically designed to comply with Title I, Part A of the ESEA to “ensure that students from low-income families and students of color are not taught at higher rates than other children by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers” (*Inequitable Distribution of Teachers*, 2021). It is worth noting that schools in both District Diversity and Homogenous receive Title I funding at the federal level. For the 2019-20 school year, District Diversity used its funds for Schoolwide Programs, improving systems, practices, and programs to assist all children (*Title I, Part A*, 2020). District Homogenous, on the other hand, used its funds for Targeted Assistance, supporting subgroups of identified students (*Title I, Part A*, 2020).

¹⁴ NIRN is a network of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. They use “the science and practice of implementation to solve real world problems.” They work to “translate evidence into practice to improve equitable outcomes for children, families, and communities” (<https://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/>)

In the WI ESSA, schools were further identified as having inexperienced, ineffective, and out-of-field teacher disproportionality, which “contribute the most to statewide inequality” (WI Consolidated State Plan, 2017). 42 percent of District Diversity’s teachers were considered to be ineffective or inexperienced based on the economic disadvantage and/or presence of students of color, whereas District Homogenous had 26 percent.

Culturally Responsive Education

Leaning on the works of Ladson-Billings and others, the WDPI outlines a culturally responsive model for educators and administrators to use, asserting that “diversity is our greatest education asset” (Culturally Responsive Education, 2020). Included in this model is “accepting institutional responsibility” and using “practices and curriculum that respect students’ culture” (WI RtI Center, 2017). Institutional responsibility recognizes that historically, policies and practices have benefitted some students while at the expense of others (WI RtI Center, 2017). To respect students’ culture, “walls, halls, and curricular materials” must represent each of the students so that they can see themselves represented (WI RtI Center, 2017). The WDPI’s vision of culturally responsive teaching, at least by these descriptions, represents a skeleton of multicultural education. They encourage educators and administrators to embrace diversity by lining the walls and halls with diverse faces and respecting others’ cultures. Once again, this seems to lack the critical approach in which Banks, Ladson-Billings, and others advocated so strongly.

Character Education and Social and Emotional Learning

The WDPI also provides information and resources on Character Education and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL); both of which aim to help students succeed in school and life through managing their feelings, relationships, and social environments. The Wisconsin

Character Education Partnership (WCEP) promotes “intentional, proactive efforts” for teachers to instill values such as “integrity, honesty, fairness, responsibility, and respect for themselves and for others” (WCEP, 2020). Similarly, SEL is considered the process in which students and adults apply their knowledge, attitudes, and skills to manage their emotions and establish/maintain positive relationships (SEL, 2020). The Wisconsin State Superintendent’s Equity Stakeholder Council (Council) believes that equity can be achieved through effective SEL strategies: student experience, district and school engagement, coherence and alignment, and community partnerships (SEL, 2020). SEL assessments, curriculum tools, and conference/training opportunities are all outlined within the WDPI’s resources.

Summary

Districts looking for state guidance on antiracist education need to look elsewhere. Although Wisconsin’s Equity plan, character education, and SEL all have facets that could be seen as antiracist, the resources provided by the state largely omit racism as a factor, and therefore antiracism as a topic. Even within the context of discussing CRP, the state doesn’t emphasize *who* is benefitting from historical practices and policies. CRP, in general, seems to be used as more of a cultural diversity frame or multicultural model rather than an attempt to challenge social injustice (Sadker & Zittleman, 2009) or develop a critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In their description of CRP, WDPI even encourages educators to line the halls and walls with diverse faces because diversity is their greatest asset (Culturally Responsive Education, 2020). It would at least appear, for further guidance or a more interrogative approach beyond those discussed, schools need to look for private resources or subject matter experts.

District Academics, Enrollment Data, and Overall Mission

To elaborate, District Diversity and Homogenous are public school districts with varying levels of diversity in the student body. Using data obtained from the WI ESSA and WDPI resources, each district was interrogated to understand how their practices and policies are reflective of antiracism, even when not explicitly stated as such. As noted in Chapter 1 and the NCES data, student populations are only becoming more diverse. Obtaining specific enrollment data over five years provides insight into the trends of student populations within these school systems. Specific achievement information was also gathered so that transparency of academics could be annotated, and state expectations identified. Additionally, I believe it is important to recognize how districts are graded and held accountable at the state level. District demographics were mentioned by at least one participant in District Homogenous, however, the enrollment and academic information were gathered through publicly available documents through the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

What was found through this look at quantitative data was that each district, although exceeding WI standards, has clear disparities in student outcomes. It takes additional interrogation of the data to recognize how each subgroup is performing on its own. Recognizing this, it is important to understand how districts with disparities, despite “exceeding,” are supporting their students with a culturally responsive, antiracist lens.

Enrollment Data

Looking at district enrollment data (Table 1), enrollment demographics have changed from 2015-16 to 2019-20 for both districts. For District Diversity, the number of Black, Hispanic, and Asian students increased, and white students decreased, with relatively unchanging total enrollment. For District Homogenous, the percentage of both white and Black students

decreased, with an increase in Hispanic and Asian students, again with a relatively unchanged enrollment overall. To note, District Diversity also has significantly fewer students, roughly six thousand less in total (Enrollment, 2021). By looking at enrollment alone, District Diversity has a vastly more diverse student base than District Homogenous. However, looking at just this short window from 2015 to 2020, the diversity of both districts seems to be following national trends – becoming progressively more diversified.

“Exceeding Expectations”

Although both District Diversity and Homogenous receive Title I funds, along with some level of teacher disproportionality, they each have at least “exceeded expectations” by Wisconsin state standards. The measured standards for district report cards are based on a 100-point scale to include student achievement, district growth, closing gaps, and on-track and postsecondary readiness. For the 2018-19 school year (the latest reported year)¹⁵, District Diversity scored 74.2 out of 100, which exceeds expectations (see Appendix A), whereas District Homogenous (see Appendix B) scored 88.9, significantly exceeding expectations (*Accountability Report Cards*, 2019). Student achievement is one area that demonstrates a sharp contrast between districts.

From Closing Gaps to Target Group Outcomes

The Closing Gaps priority area typically focused on students from “traditionally marginalized populations,” however, issues became evident over the last few years with measuring in this way (Target Group Outcomes, 2021). Ladson-Billings (2006), Milner (2013), and Kendi (2019) would agree that this focus places too much emphasis on the student and not enough on the systems creating the gap. For example, small schools could see large fluctuations year-to-year based on student populations, not necessarily performance (Target Group

¹⁵ Due to the public health crisis in 2020 (COVID-19 pandemic), district report cards were not issued for the school year 2019-2020 (<https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2019/related/acts/185/55>)

Outcomes, 2021). Additionally, the WDPI believes that “identifying the lowest-performing group reinforces the idea that every school has work to do to close gaps,” not just schools with historically marginalized populations such as students of color, students with disabilities, low-income, or English learners (Target Group Outcomes, 2021). To counter this need, along with others, The WDPI shifted its focus in early 2021 from “Closing Gaps” (more demographics-based) to “Target Group Outcomes” (performance-based) measurements (Target Group Outcomes, 2021). The target group includes roughly 25 percent of students who are in the most need of support and is determined by performance, rather than demographic association (Target Group Outcomes, 2021). This shift in focus should be taken into account when considering the following reporting data.

Proficiency

While students of color include more than just one racial subgroup, achievement data for Black and white students were used to gauge differences in student outcomes¹⁶ between student populations. In District Homogenous, for example, a majority of their students of color would identify as Asian, and these students are typically outperforming their white counterparts (M. Scott, personal communication, March 24, 2021). To further emphasize the consideration that should be given to students of color versus a specific subgroup, Ms. Scott (district personnel, Homogenous) stated:

A majority of our students that represent people of color are students who would identify as Asian. And that population is historically from India or from China. And most of the families are here as international families. And so, you know, they come with very high

¹⁶ In an attempt to not perpetuate the idea of “Black inferiority” as described by Kendi and Ladson-Billings, I purposely chose to refrain from using the term achievement gap to reflect on differences in student outcomes between student subgroups.

expectations, very high level of value of education and rigor. So, when we look at our data and pull it apart, it's really interesting because if you look at our demographics and you look at our performance data. If you're a student in this district who identifies as Asian, you're typically going to be outperforming your white counterparts. Now if you're part of that population that identifies as Black, the 3%, you are much more likely to be identified as a student of disability, you are much more likely to have disciplinary consequences that are not in concert with your white counterparts. And you're definitely not achieving at a higher rate than students' peers who identify as white (M. Scott, personal communication, March 24, 2021).

Black students have the largest difference in proficiency levels compared to white students in both districts, therefore I chose to compare these two populations directly. Student achievement as recorded in state report cards includes English Language Arts and Mathematics. Measuring data from school years 2015-16 to 2018-19 (see Table 4), District Diversity's Black student population became less proficient in English Language Arts (ELA) and slightly more proficient in Mathematics (*Accountability Report Cards*, 2019). However, the number of Black students considered below proficiency increased for both subjects. For the reported white students, both ELA and Mathematics proficiency decreased from one reporting period to the next.

For District Homogenous, the number of Black students proficient in both ELA and Mathematics increased, and the number considered below basic proficiency decreased from reporting years (*Accountability*, 2019). White students, on the other hand, decreased in proficiency for both subjects and increased in those considered below basic proficiency (*Accountability Report Cards*, 2019). By averaging the level of proficiency for both subjects for

the years 2018-19, District Diversity’s proficiency for white students is 16.4% more than that of Black students, and District Homogenous is 17.8% more (*Accountability Report Cards, 2019*).

Table 4.

Proficiency Levels Based on WI DPI Report Cards (2015-16 and 2018-19)

District Diversity (2015-16)	Black	White	2018-19	Black (+/-)	White (+/-)	Diff
% Prof ELA	23.5	43.1	% Prof ELA	20.7 (-2.8)	36.9 (-6.2)	
% BLO Prof ELA	34.3	14.4	% BLO Prof ELA	38.9 (+4.6)	17.2 (+2.8)	
% Prof MATH	20.8	39.6	% Prof MATH	21.3 (+.5)	37.9 (-1.7)	
% BLO Prof MATH	43	17.8	% BLO Prof MATH	46.5 (+3.5)	18.2 (+.4)	
			Average Proficiency	21	37.4	16.4
District Homogenous (2015-16)	Black	White	2018-19	Black (+/-)	White (+/-)	Diff
% Prof ELA	19.5	47	% Prof ELA	26.5 (+7)	45.9 (-1.1)	
% BLO Prof ELA	43.4	8.3	% BLO Prof ELA	30.3 (-13.1)	10.6 (+2.3)	
% Prof MATH	23	47	% Prof MATH	26.5 (+2.5)	42.6 (-4.4)	
% BLO Prof MATH	42.5	8	% BLO Prof MATH	36.4 (-6.1)	9.5 (+1.5)	
			Average Proficiency	26.5	44.25	17.8

Source: Accountability, 2019 (<https://apps2.dpi.wi.gov/reportcards/home>)

This data is clearly one-dimensional. By looking at these numbers alone, it is impossible to understand what factors drove the proficiency level for each student population. What can be inferred, however, is that there are clear differences in outcomes between both Black and white students in each school district, despite exceeding expectations at the state level. The Wisconsin goal to cut the “achievement gap” in half over six years is no small feat. However, District Diversity managed to cut their “gap”¹⁷ by 2.8 percent from the 2015-16 school year to 2018-19, and District Homogenous by 8 percent (*Accountability Report Cards, 2019*). There is still a lot of work to do.

¹⁷ The term “gap” was used in this case to reflect the goal of the WI ESSA.

Mission Statement and Core Values

A well-defined mission statement and set of values can provide insight into priorities and practices within a school district. Their mission or vision is the first impression for those seeking information from a district. Since both districts still have significant differences in students' outcomes, it is critical to understand their overall mission, vision, and core values.

For District Diversity, they have distinguished both a vision and a mission. Their vision states: “[District Diversity] aspires to be a world-class educational community that honors diversity, promotes high expectations for life-long learning and leadership, preparing all students to reach their fullest potential” (*Our Vision, Our Mission*, 2021). Their mission reads similarly as: “Together with our families and communities, we will inspire students to be passionate learners, creative thinkers, and innovative leaders who enrich our world” (*Our Vision, Our Mission*, 2021). For District Homogenous, their mission and vision are to “educate and inspire every student to think, to learn and to succeed” and ensure that “Every student [is] ready for Life, College, and Career” (*Strategy and Accountability*, 2021). Their core values include “Celebrating each person’s engagement and contributions to our community” and “Fostering teamwork and inclusive environments that embrace ideas and people with attention to diversity and equity” (*Strategy and Accountability*, 2021).

Each of these districts notes diversity and equity as a core value or as part of their mission statement. Specifically, with District Homogenous, this includes celebrating each person as they contribute to society. Although these statements are just a glimpse into the district, they preface their ENN.

Summary

Looking at enrollment data, it is clear that both districts are becoming even more diversified. In fact, District Homogenous has nearly 30 percent students of color, therefore, they

could even be considered “integrated” with the number of racial minorities in their schools (Thomas-Lynn, 2007) (Bonds et al., 2015). However, Ms. Scott (district personnel, Homogenous) reminds us how looking at white students and then “all others” can be very misleading and therefore overshadow other subgroups receiving greater disparities in outcomes. Even further, Black students in each district are performing below their white counterparts. If you were to look at WDPI enrollment data alone, this data is masked by the fact that they are still exceeding expectations by state standards. It takes additional interrogation of each subgroup of student populations to recognize that not *all* students are exceeding.

Perhaps the WDPI’s move from quantifying achievement gaps to target groups will be more representative of actual performance inside schools. Taking these outcomes into account, it became increasingly important to understand how these two districts’ policies and practices support students more equitably. As Ladson-Billings (2006), Milner (2013), and others would argue, quantifying the “achievement gap” between students does little to help students without taking into account the tangential reasoning for the differences between groups.

Equity-Based Practices and Defining Equity Non-Negotiables

Districts all over the country have been coming up with ways to demonstrate their stance on equity and race-related issues since the widespread demonstrations in 2020, or perhaps after localized incidents. Furthermore, some districts have had these issues on the forefront for many years now. Based on the state report cards, both District Diversity and Homogenous clearly have strengths and weaknesses. Although there are measurable, quantifiable factors being reported to the state, District Diversity and Homogenous have also developed a set of “Equity non-negotiables” (ENN) to improve the educational experience of their students and staff. ENN are not something explicitly identified in federal or state resources, therefore each of these districts

adapted these ideals without an official mandate. Information about the ENN for both districts was available publicly from their district websites. In addition to this data, each of the participants provided in-depth knowledge on the compilation. To note, ENN appears to be increasing in popularity amongst Wisconsin school districts and are each unique to the district defining them.

Although it seemed that each district responded to the racialized climate of 2020 with their ENN, it became evident after speaking with the participants that each began their equity and inclusion work years before. Both districts have been working with outside consultants and presenters, not explicitly relying on state resources or guidance. In addition to their ENN which clearly discusses race, racism, and inequality, each district also takes on aspects from a “personalized learning” approach, as well as social and emotional learning and authentic student engagement to encourage all learners to be successful. Although these approaches do not overtly discuss the implications of systemic racial barriers or biases, they reflect the district objectives of equity.

District Diversity: ENN, ICS, and Other Means for Equity

As a highly racially diverse district, Ms. Rogers (district personnel, Diversity) believes they are a “microcosm of the United States. What issues we face in terms of student achievement or racial equity or educational gaps” is representative of the U.S. as a whole (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021). Bruner (1996) would also agree that schools are reflective of the broader society. Roughly five years ago, District Diversity began participating in Integrated Comprehensive Systems for Equity (ICS Equity) training (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021). ICS presents the following four frameworks/quadrants for achieving equity: 1. Focus on Equity, 2. Align Staff and Students, 3. Transform Teachers and

Learning, and 4. Leveraging Policy and Funding (See Appendix C) (ICS Equity, 2021). At stage 1, the focus is on historical marginalization and shifting from “deficit vs. assets thinking” and developing Equity Non-negotiables (ICS Equity, 2021). The ICS model, as advertised on their organizational site and the districts, delineates the different approaches between deficit-based models and equity non-negotiables (Frattura & Capper, 2019). For example, the deficit-based model tracks and marginalizes students of color, whereas focusing on equity adheres to the belief that the system is responsible for preventing student failure (Frattura & Capper, 2019). This delineation between deficit and asset-based teaching resembles the cultural difference theory as discussed by Ladson-Billings (2006) and Milner (2013). For more information about the district training on the ICS framework, see “Professional Development and Training Opportunities for Educators/Staff.”

The purpose of District Diversity’s ENN are to “positively impact every aspect of the learning trajectory in our school system – which includes academics, course performance, and discipline aligned with educational goals” (*Executive Summary*, 2019). With at least some level of intervention, a member of ICS Equity¹⁸ assisted the district in their ENN compilation.

Mirroring the words of the ICS for Equity, District Diversity exclaimed the following:

Research indicates, in spite of decades of educational reform and federal mandates, inequities among students not only persist but are growing. To eliminate these inequities, leaders must understand how their current piecemeal approaches are not only ineffective, [sic] but are exacerbating these inequities. Further, most equity work addresses only one aspect of inequity, such as culturally relevant pedagogy or developing culturally relevant staff. Instead educational leaders must learn how to transform the entire educational

¹⁸ Integrated Comprehensive Systems for Equity (ICS Equity) is an institute focusing on equity, aligning staff and students, transforming teaching and learning, and leveraging policy and funding (icsequity.org).

system via Integrated Comprehensive Systems for Equity, the only equity focused work that takes a systems approach to eliminating inequities (*Executive Summary*, 2019).

This transformation, as called upon by ICS, accentuates changing the systems that produce inequities. Changing the system is a clear factor involved with antiracist work. Although ICS's focus is on all forms of equity, including students with disabilities, District Diversity specifically centers on race with the ENN. Within a few mouse clicks, District Diversity's ENN are clearly outlined in their "Equity Plan and Resources." Recognizing a "fierce sense of urgency to stop racism," they finalized the following in June 2019:

- Teach our school community that racism is never acceptable
- Create opportunities to engage students in diverse learning situations that will help them understand the value of different perspectives and better understand different cultures
- Develop and enact school board equity policies that explicitly state non-negotiables for conduct and much-needed values of character in our schools
- Engage our parents in learning to understand what diversity and closing achievement gaps are all about
- Learn from other diverse school communities on how they collectively engage in discussions about race, marginalization, and inequities (*Our Equity Plan*, 2021).

In addition to outlining their ENN, their Equity Plan begins with a segment titled: "Enough is Enough," referring to two distinct moments driving their call to action (*Our Equity Plan*, 2021). The first included a racist incident with a student-athlete (before 2020). The "N" word was used toward one of their students, and they responded with a harassment and discrimination policy approved by the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association to "teach privileged individuals" the power of words (*Our Equity Plan*, 2021). Even further, they explain

how white privilege allows students to “navigate a society where they never have to prove their worth; where they are never second-guessed; where they do not have to work twice as hard to be considered just as good and where good is never good enough” (*Our Equity Plan*, 2021). The second was “May 2020. Black Lives Matter.” These incidents drove their decision to devise the ENN and state their position to the community.

District Diversity’s Equity Plan goes much further than addressing the inherent issues with both incidents. The message specifically calls on the community to “recognize the systemic racism that has historically occurred in our country” and “interrupt systems of oppression” and “advance the cause of human dignity and social justice” (*Our Equity Plan*, 2021). As a district, they aim to accomplish this is through “focusing on the whole child, growth mindset, rigorous learning expectations, and developing nurturing relationships” (*Our Equity Plan*, 2021). Recognizing this as easier said than done, they plan on holding themselves accountable to this message. This accountability, as noted in later sections, is not clearly identified.

The District has considered its equity plan a chance to rebuild its system and develop a more personalized educational system (*Our Equity Plan*, 2021). To note, the district officials did not steer away from the charged language in this equity plan. White privilege, social justice, racism, marginalization, systems of oppression, and systemic racism were all used throughout.

Ms. Smith emphasized how she envisions their ENN:

I mean as an educator, my vision, my mission is to not just educate people at the academics, but when they leave school, that they’re just kind people and they’ve experienced a lot. We’re trying to limit the microaggressions, the bias, the stereotypes, the racist comments. I’m a big believer in knowledge and experience is our power. The more we know, the more we experience. I think those biases, stereotypes, prejudices, will

be knocked down. I think it's that lack of knowledge that makes us know the way that we are, we are a person because of our experiences (M. Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021).

District Homogenous: ICS and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

District Homogenous' ENN are still in the working stages with their Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Workgroup. This specific working group began in August 2020 and is also advised by a member of ICS. However, Ms. Williams and Ms. Scott noted that equity and inclusion consultations began with an ICS consultant around the year 2000. (M. Williams & M. Scott, personal communication, March 24, 2021). A core belief of the ICS work is to "make a concerted effort as a system to interrupt systematic ways of doing things that perpetuate barriers for all students to access opportunities (M. Scott, personal communication, March 24, 2021).

You know all that work really starts with examining your own beliefs, examining your own bias, and really having people dive in. I think when you think about kind of a racial reckoning that's happening across the country. In response to... George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis, I think a lot of people are stepping back and saying, "What do I think about this, what maybe am I doing that I'm not even aware of, where did that come from, what are my own personal stories and histories with diversity and race and ethnicity?" (M. Scott, personal communication, April 13, 2021).

Over the last 20 years under the ICS consultation, District Homogenous has brought focus to the "history of marginalization for non-dominant groups in the areas of disability, race, gender...just all the 'isms'" (M. Scott, personal communication, March 24, 2021). Although District Homogenous has been working with an outside consultant for at least 20 years, there have been two recent incidents in which equity and race have taken center stage. The first

included students and alumni speaking out during a public board meeting in June of 2020.

Another, a community resident using defamatory language toward a board member in early August 2020.

Regarding the first incident, several former students spoke about their discontentment with how race was discussed and celebrated inside their predominantly white school district. Most felt ill-prepared to enter the real world with the knowledge and skills they had obtained during their enrollment. A group of alumni presented a petition signed by 1,408 people and called out the district for its “lack of response to the current injustices impacting our community, as well as the district’s curricular practices that neglect issues of racial justice” (Johnson, 2020). In their letter addressed to the board, they argued that although their district is predominantly white, it “does not excuse an omission of these topics from our curriculum” (Johnson, 2020). The petition called for the following actions:

- To include social justice and racial equity as one of the district’s core values.
- To release a detailed plan for recruiting, hiring, and retaining educators of color, as well as establish a leadership position dedicated to equity and social change.
- To review the existing social studies curriculum to ensure that it contains accurate historical and contextual teaching on social and racial injustice and recognition of privilege.
- To plan and implement professional development for all staff and faculty on implicit bias, racial equity and inclusive curriculums.
- To assist the equity team to ensure that it is racially diverse and that it collaborates with students to complete the aforementioned steps (Johnson, 2020).

This list of proposed actions shares a sentiment to a petition authored by Diversify Our Narrative, an organization of students “fighting for racial justice through our education systems” (Diversify Our Narrative, 2021). In a form provided on their organizational site encouraging students, teachers, educators, and parents to address their school board, they explicitly call for antiracism in the classroom. With a large focus on curricular texts, the following is a few of the actions proposed by their petition:

- A minimum of at least one book in every English/Literature and Composition class be by a person of color AND about a person/people of color’s experience(s)
- Teachers much have the autonomy to choose books from the recommended list provided OR if the chosen text accurately portrays the cultural and racial diversity of our society
- At least one of the mandated books be the Black experience, due to the anti-Blackness that has existed since the inception of our nation (Diversify Our Narrative, 2021).

Each of these petitions is relatively concise and actionable, although it is unclear whether Diversify Our Narrative had any influence on the petition for District Homogenous. It is interesting and notable that other petitions, specifically for public schools in Wisconsin, are available for interested parties to use. Looking at District Homogenous, they have included equity as one of their core values. It was not gathered whether or not this occurred before, after, or as a result of the petition.

A few days before the aforementioned board meeting, the district Superintendent sent a letter to students, family, and staff discussing the death of George Floyd. The Superintendent attributed the unrest that followed to “how far our country, including the community in which we live, have to go to address racism, equity, and opportunity” (*A Letter from Superintendent*, 2020). The letter continues by addressing “Black and African-American students, families and

staff members,” stating: “You are essential members of our school community, and our District pledges to listen to you, learn from your experiences, and work with you to create our preferred future” (*A Letter From Superintendent*, 2020).

After the second incident in August, the school board President and Vice President once again addressed the district community. During a board meeting focused on the re-opening plan during the COVID-19 pandemic, a community member objected to the requirement for face coverings and explicitly called out a Muslim Board member (Pilarski, 2020). The community member addressed the Muslim board member stating: “Christian children shouldn’t be forced to wear face coverings anymore then children who are Islamic or Muslim should be forced to, as you put it, be subjected to the American Style of the sexualization of children and have to wear less clothing that you are comfortable with your children wearing” (Anderson, 2020) (Pilarski, 2020). A few board members warned the woman to “avoid defamatory statements” and also end her comments (Pilarski, 2020).

In addition to this response, the Vice President and President of the school board sent a letter to the community regarding the incident. In this, they detailed: “Our community values civil discourse and understands that disagreements are inevitable. However, the behavior displayed at Tuesday’s meeting was far beyond the boundaries of acceptable conduct” (Wheeler & Lambert, 2020). Additionally, the board affirmed the values of their district around diversity. They stated: “Diversity encompasses race, religion, cultures, and differences in opinion,” and reassured families that their district is a “safe and welcoming district, [sic] and hate towards anyone will not be tolerated” (Wheeler & Lambert, 2020).

After collaboration with ICS, parents, community members, school board, teachers, and administrators, District Homogenous published a draft set of ENN in December of 2020 (M.

Scott, personal communication, March 24, 2021). They had “families of students of color, students with disabilities, students who are not gender conforming” involved in the process to really open up the conversation about what it means to value diversity, equity, and inclusion (M. Scott, personal communication, March 24, 2021). Although the ENN appeared shortly after these incidents and may have given the impression of a response, they had been in the works since at least 2019 (M. Scott, personal communication, March 24, 2021). Ms. Scott (district personnel, Homogenous) believed that by 2019, they were “at a point where [we] wanted to make equity non-negotiables part of our strategic plan” (M. Scott, personal communication, March 24, 2021). Within their message, they felt few districts have devised core principles or non-negotiables and believe this to be an important aspect for successful graduates (*Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Workgroup*, 2021). Their working ENN stated the following:

- The District will attain true excellence only when all students are achieving universally high goals. The District is committed to the success of every student in our schools and it is our belief that all students deserve to be academically challenged in a safe and supportive learning environment in which they feel a sense of belonging. This environment must be free of bullying, harassment, and discrimination.
- Historical and continuing structural inequities create disparate outcomes for marginalized student populations. We recognize that as individuals, despite the very best intentions, our actions can contribute to disparate outcomes for our students. As a District committed to equity, we seek to disrupt societal and historical inequities and eliminate disparities based on student and family characteristics such as, but not limited to, race, color, national origin, citizenship status, ancestry, religion, sex (including sexual orientation and gender identity), economic status, disability status, and age, so that all students thrive.

- Educational equity is based on the principles of fairness and justice in allocating resources, opportunity, treatment and creating success for each student. Achieving equity means students' identities will not predetermine or predict school success. We believe that expanding opportunities for students who have been historically marginalized will enrich the overall development of all students.
- Equity benefits the District as a whole. All students must participate in appropriately rigorous, challenging and diverse educational experiences designed to achieve post-secondary success. Expanding opportunities and increasing support for students will ultimately increase the overall educational experience, general well-being, and academic achievement of all District students.
- Equity does not mean equal. Achieving educational equity will mean that schools and students may receive different resources based on specific needs. Nevertheless, the District will provide every student with equitable access to high-quality curriculum, support, facilities and other educational opportunities (*SDE ENN Draft, 2020*).

The Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion workgroup provide a breakdown of each ENN for further evaluation during this working stage. Through this process, the group lists a model ENN, their intent, and feedback on each. The model ENN includes the following: eliminating inequities begins with ourselves, the system is responsible for failure, students are proportionally represented in the core of teaching and learning, instruction is based on Identity Relevant Teaching and Learning (IRTL) and created for the first time the concept/skill is taught, diversity of the workforce, and a few others (*SDE ENN Draft, 2020*).

Although their ENN are descriptive on their own, the feedback obtained during their workgroup shed some additional light on their intent and priorities. To elaborate; for their

teaching community to eliminate inequities, the workgroup identifies the impact of implicit bias and aims to challenge them along the way. They agree that their district is “responsible for creating a system where success for ALL students is accessible through a representative and inclusive curriculum that decenters whiteness and prioritizes marginalized communities” (*SDE ENN Draft, 2020*). In regards to students being proportionally represented, District Homogenous recognizes that students must also be represented by teachers, staff, and administrators and commit to “creating a comprehensive plan to hire more staff that identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color” (*SDE ENN Draft, 2020*). Their curricula will also be adjusted to represent an anti-racist history “including culturally relevant pedagogy” (*SDE ENN Draft, 2020*).

District Homogenous has clearly been deliberate with their ENN. Their ENN have been in the working stages for over a year as they continue to fine-tune their message. Looking at their working notes, a substantial amount of discussion has gone into each and every line. They specifically speak of seeking to decenter whiteness in their curriculum and even represent antiracist history. However, after speaking with Ms. Williams (school-based personnel, Homogenous), her perspective is that the district comes from a view of diversity and inclusion, not antiracism: “I’m not sure that I can say that, specifically in [District Homogenous] we push out and say we want to be anti-racist or we want to focus in on anti-racism, we come at it from a perspective of diversity, equity and inclusion” (M. Williams, personal communication, March 11, 2021). Similarly, Ms. Scott mentioned that they don’t seek a particular antiracist or ableism policy; they come from a perspective of culturally relevant pedagogy (M. Scott, personal communication, March 11, 2021). It seems as if the critical conversations represented in their working notes and even their ENN are not nearly as explicit within the perspective of these participants.

Personalized Learning and Authentic Student Engagement: A Means for Equity?

Outside of ENN, District Diversity and Homogenous have taken other steps aimed at improving all students' education and breaking down barriers. One approach that has resonated throughout both includes personalized learning. This approach was not explicitly highlighted during the interview process, however, District Homogenous and Diversity have a specific section on their district site and/or board documents designated to their personalized learning approach. This method "recognizes unique learning differences and preferences in students... focusing on communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity" (*Personalized Learning*, 2021).

Both districts have utilized outside organizations in their personalized learning plans. District Diversity references resources from *KnowledgeWorks*¹⁹ to examine ways to incorporate personalized learning with their students. In a school board document titled: "Recommendations for Advancing Personalized Learning Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)," *KnowledgeWorks* outlines opportunities, recommendations, and guiding questions for districts to use to leverage the ESSA and advance personalized learning (*KnowledgeWorks*, 2016). For example, under Extended Learning Opportunities (ELO), *KnowledgeWorks* encourages districts to ask the following:

- What strategies will the district implement to ensure at-risk populations do not face barriers to participation in ELOs, including transportation, scheduling, and access to technology?

¹⁹ *KnowledgeWorks* is an organization that works with schools, state, and federal policymakers to "grow a system-wide approach to sustain student-centered practices" (<https://knowledgeworks.org/mission-vision/>)

- How will the district monitor ELOs to ensure they are customized to the needs of all learners?
- What partnerships can the district establish with local stakeholders to create high-quality ELOs focused on the development of well-rounded students, such as those that build social and emotional competencies or improve nutrition and health? (*KnowledgeWorks*, 2016).

District Homogenous similarly elicits outside expertise from the Cooperative Educational Service Agency #1²⁰ (CESA #1). As part of a “Honeycomb” model (see Appendix D), the Institute @ CESA #1 centers on learner profiles, customized learning paths, and proficiency-based progress (The Institute, 2014). In connection with the Honeycomb model, the CESA delineates legacy versus personalized learning methods.

Legacy vs. Personalized Learning. District Homogenous specifically identifies the differences in legacy vs. personalized learning. In legacy learning, all students are set on the same path from kindergarten through high school. With a personalized learning experience, each student follows a “unique path on their individual interests, strengths and learning styles” (The Institute, 2012). Legacy learning typically has little engagement with the community as a whole and few connections to the real world. Also, content is “typically presented within a narrow, pre-defined cultural context” (The Institute, 2012). On the other hand, a personalized experience encourages the students, school, and community to connect content with real-life experiences and are encouraged to “view content through culturally appropriate lenses” (The Institute, 2012). Additionally, meaningful community partnerships and expertise are leveraged (The Institute,

²⁰ Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESAs) serve as a link between school districts and states. Southeastern WI is part of the CESA #1. They offer services to “help education providers meet the diverse needs of their students” (<https://www.cesa1.k12.wi.us/about/>).

2012). For support and resources, legacy practices are usually inequitable or not available for all students, whereas personalized practices support students and with equitable resources “available on-demand, where and when they are needed most” (The Institute, 2012). The emphasis on community is also found within the WDPI’s Consolidated Plan (WI ESSA) and the intentions behind SEL.

Authentic Student Engagement. In addition to personalized learning, District Homogenous leans on the methods and teachings involved with authentic student engagement and was also made available on their district site. Neither participant mentioned this with regards to equity-oriented work. However, the following factors are described as contributing to, and present in an authentically engaged learning environment:

- Purposeful learning: “Students describe not just *what* they are learning, but how it addresses key competencies” and how they can use it outside of class.
- Learner efficacy: The class environment is designed so that students connect “good choices, effective strategies, persistence, and good use of resources” to their success.
- Ownership for learning: Students see their learning as valuable to them, and their work is for themselves, rather than for the adults demanding complicity.
- Flexible pace: Students learn at their own pace, with a focus on “quality learning, not the calendar.”
- Learner voice infused: Although students’ preferences may not always be implemented, their perspectives and opinions are respected and encouraged.
- Learner choice presented: When practical, learners will have options to the ways in which they will engage in the learning process.

- Learners serve as resources for learning: Learners are encouraged to “bring new ideas and insights to their learning” and are seen as key resources – not just “receptacles for knowledge to be filled.”
- Space for learning flexibility: Instead of standard rows of desks or assigned seating, learners are encouraged to find a space/location they learn best without being a distraction to others.
- Commitment focus: Rather than focusing on compliance for completion of work, authentically engaged classrooms “focus on stimulating and nurturing commitment to learning as the key driver for learning engagement and growth.”
- Collaboration: Learners are encouraged to work alone, in pairs, or small groups depending on the learning task at hand.
- Technology supported: “High levels of authentic student engagement is not driven by technology.” Rather, technology is used thoughtfully and strategically to support learning.
- Growing learning independence: “Learners are given driving choices and crucial voice in and responsibility for their learning” (Monogue, n.d.).

As seen with both districts, personalized learning discusses cultural appropriateness, community partnerships, using equitable resources, and social and emotional competencies. Although neither district specially called out their personalized learning approaches, it seems as though much of what they established as equity and/or antiracist practices were really tied into their idea of personalized learning. Authentic student engagement similarly focuses on giving students a voice and a choice with their educational experiences. The focus, however, is mostly

on individual learning in both approaches, not confronting, challenging, or eliminating any systems that have created inequalities in the first place.

Social and Emotional Learning

As described by the WDPI and WCEP, the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) practices have made their way into schools around the country. Since the WI Council claims equity can be achieved through implementing an SEL approach, these practices were also looked at. As previously stated, SEL is “the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (*SEL*, 2016). According to a few of the WI SEL competencies, students from grade eleven through adult should be able to “support the rights of all individuals to reflect their family, culture, and community in society... evaluate the ways in which public opinion can be used to influence and shape public policy”, and “generate positive choices and pro-actively advocate for themselves and others” (*Social and Emotional Learning Competencies*, 2018). Since the WI Equity Council connects both SEL and equity, each districts’ SEL practices were identified. These competencies bear a close resemblance to what Ladson-Billings (1994) described at CRT – just with a different name.

As with many equity practices, social and emotional learning doesn’t have a “one size fits all” image associated with it. SEL was mentioned in interviews with each school district and also discussed briefing on their district websites. However, both District Diversity and Homogenous use SEL as a means to nurture their students in some way and have staff designated to enforcing its role. With a large percentage of students open enrolling in District Diversity from the city of Milwaukee, they use SEL as an emotional transition tool for their students (M. Smith, personal

communication, March 11, 2021). On a similar token, District Diversity encourages student-led clubs/groups, including one highlighting sexual orientation (M. Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021). These clubs encourage students to get “more involved in things they’re interested in or how they identify and make them feel part of our culture,” as well as encourage them to be proactive and advocates (M. Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021). Similarly, District Homogenous encourages group membership/formation with their students with the support of a staff member (M. Williams, personal communication, March 24, 2021). Looking at educator objectives across all grade levels, social-emotional learning and well-being appear with frequency. As part of their collaboration with *KnowledgeWorks*, social and emotional competencies were also provided a focus.

Similarly, with personalized learning and authentic student engagement, SEL seems to be used as a tool to create an equitable environment in the classroom. Participants from each district referenced SEL when prompted about their equity work. Based on the WI Council’s descriptions and objectives of SEL, along with the perceptions of the participants, SEL would seem to serve as a means for student resiliency. While resiliency is undoubtedly a valuable tool for all, some would say this is not the answer to achieving antiracism. For example, Zandashé L’orelia Brown posted the following on Instagram: “I dream of never being called resilient again in my life. I’m exhausted by strength. I want support. I want softness. I want ease. I want to be amongst kin. Not patted on the back from how well I take a hit. Or for how many” (Brown, 2021). Although this study revealed more than just an SEL framework, I believe it is still important to recognize that resiliency and emotional stability are still placing the burden on those experiencing the stressors, not the systems responsible.

Summary

Throughout this study, equity non-negotiables became a large focus within both the document analysis and interview process. While searching for antiracist efforts, policies, or specific practices, equity non-negotiables became the easiest to determine as oriented around systems of racism. It is the one thing each district has that is actually codified, albeit mostly unmeasurable. During the interview process, questions about equity non-negotiables were presented by me early in the conversation and as I referenced antiracist work. Had I focused on the ENN without referencing antiracism, it is hard to say whether the two would have been linked by any of the participants. However, both districts' ENN were clear that racism is unacceptable, and the larger educational system is often responsible for structural inequalities. The participants, on the other hand, were less forward with this assertion. The language used in the working notes with District Homogenous was very explicit and reflected an antiracist lens, however, neither of the participants interviewed perceived their equity work as antiracist. As noted, language matters. Especially in the mostly white, conservative district of District Homogenous.

District Diversity's ENN are specifically housed under their "Equity Plan" and is relatively succinct. Sometime in May 2021, however, their ENN actually transitioned to an "Equity for Excellence" plan that expanded on their bulleted points. This shows that their plan is still in an evolutionary phase and is likely to change many times. District Homogenous too remains fluid with their ENN. Their bulleted points are quite descriptive and elaborate, along with their working notes. Despite the rich narrative, neither participants' perception of their ENN were particularly focused on systems of racism or structural inequalities.

It is worth noting that neither district refers to their plans as antiracist or as an antiracist policy. Instead, Equity Plan and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion are used to house their ENN.

This verbiage is considered a barrier and is discussed further under “Barriers and Motivations.” Furthermore, equity, personalized learning, authentic student engagement, and social and emotional learning were each found through the document analysis and interviews while referencing equity and/or antiracism. Antiracism, at least in some regards, became synonymous with equity. To improve student outcomes and really nourish all students that come through their doors, each district takes on those practices identified above. This unsurprisingly reflects the WDPI’s direction and resources, in addition to ICS’s cornerstones (see Appendix C). ICS highlights equity non-negotiables, inequities, and marginalization. Much of this verbiage resonated with the participants. What can be said is that each district has taken on a distinctive stance with race and racism in their ENN, however, other practices often became highlighted in the process.

Professional Development and Training Opportunities for Educators/Staff

Educators, along with many other professions, require periodic professional development throughout their careers. Both District Diversity and Homogenous incorporate professional training with their staff focusing on bias training, inclusive practices, and equity regularly. Both districts participate in ICS-led training in addition to consulting for their ENN. This training, above all, promotes conversation between members of the education community. To note, professional development was widely discussed throughout my case study. It was mentioned in both my document analysis as well as my interviews with participants. However, District Homogenous had documents on their website with information about specific professional development opportunities that were also used in these findings.

District Diversity

District Diversity has incorporated equity-based training into their professional development days. Their Superintendent, along with four other educators, developed an organization called Closing the Achievement Gap Consortium (CAGC) in 2012. This organization aims to ensure “social justice rings throughout every classroom and hallway” within the 39 public and private schools involved (*Executive Summary*, 2019). In addition to participation in this community organization, District Diversity has partaken in various ICS-led professional development opportunities since at least 2016. Each of these events includes the involvement of building-level administrators, board members, teachers, custodians, and administrative assistants (*Executive Summary*, 2019).

For District Diversity, they began this training with a crew of teachers and two district administrators initially (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021). During the first year of their training, they came up with a draft set of non-negotiables based on the “history of inherent bias and racism” (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021). As the next few years went on, most administrators, teachers, and staff partook in the training as well. After about two and half years of training, the district invited two members of ICS Equity to present for all district staff, including custodial staff (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021). Their ENN eventually moved from a draft to practice in 2019.

Since the 2020-2021 school year, District Diversity has also instituted bias training for all staff members, occurring once per month (M. Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021). This training focuses on biases and microaggressions and lasts for approximately two to two and a half hours, led by a professor in the University of Wisconsin school system (M. Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021). Outside of this training, the district hosts annual professional development days with special speakers, focusing on various equity and inclusive

practices. A well-known speaker and author on culturally responsive practices have presented at their district on more than one occasion (*Teaching and Learning Committee Meeting, 2018*).

District Homogenous

District Homogenous has also hosted several “inclusive practice” and equity-based trainings as part of its professional development efforts. Since 2016, they have hosted an annual iSummit (Innovation Summit), focusing on inclusive practices, special education, and mental health (*iSummit, 2021*).

The purpose of that [iSummit] is to have outside professionals come in and really talk about how to get motivated behind inclusive practices, how do we listen to stories from other people who may have felt a lack of belonging within a school system for some areas that they felt marginalized by, be it LGBTQ, be it gender, be it race (M. Williams, personal communication, March 11, 2021).

For their 2019 iSummit, one speaker provoked the following messages: “If we want inclusion, we have to restructure!” “Segregation likely affects hearts and minds in ways that are unlikely to be undone,” “Separate but equal is illegal,” and “people are valuable because they are different” (Causton, 2019). Another speaker pointed out the differences between inclusion and equity: “Inclusion: Who is here? Equity: Who is missing?” (Moore, 2019). The speaker also exclaimed: “If a flower doesn’t bloom, we fix the environment instead of blaming the flower” (Moore, 2019). Without having the actual transcript or attending first-hand, it is unclear how much discussion was had about “fixing the environment.” Although their 2020 iSummit was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were no speakers identified publicly for either year that were persons of color. They did, however, have speakers with disabilities representing special education inclusivity.

Summary

Both districts seem to participate in a robust amount of training with regards to anti-bias, inclusivity, and equity. Antiracist training was once again, not explicitly identified as a talking point. Additionally, District Diversity and Homogenous use ICS Equity to facilitate at least a portion of their equity-based training. Recognizing outside consultants were used largely for both districts' equity training and their ENN was a key finding. Based on assumptions alone, it may seem that District Diversity would be completing this type of training mostly in-house due to the overall diversity of their student body. The assumption being that they educate a large number of students of color and therefore "should" be subject matter experts. However, both districts have a large portion of white identifying teachers – not representative of their overall student body, particularly District Diversity. This fact cannot be overlooked as it relates to the overall perception of antiracism and how they train their professionals.

Community Relationships and Resources Made Available to Families

As discussed within the objectives of the WI ESSA and WDPI, community involvement is paramount to creating an equitable culture inside schools. Going off of Bruner's (1996) assertion that schools are an extension of the broader society, the relationship between the district and local community becomes mostly symbiotic. Both District Diversity and Homogenous have various ways of maintaining an open relationship with their communities, from public school board meetings to resources for families and community members. Both districts had the local community involved with their ENN writing process and open communication avenues established to discuss the racialized events of 2020. However, not all relationships have been strictly positive and will be discussed further in "Barriers and Motivations."

District Diversity

Based on conversations with members from District Diversity, the local community and school community seem to have a relatively close-knit relationship. The district superintendent attends town hall meetings with the Mayor which allows the community and district to share feedback, concerns, etc. (M. Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021). Ms. Smith (school-based personnel, Diversity) believes having this type of forum really allowed people to understand and have an influence in their push toward a more equitable approach in education. Additionally, their new superintendent created a forum called “Live at Five” which is a monthly forum “allowing people to get together and just to talk and share” (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021). The focus tends to be within the first quadrant of the ICS framework, uncovering and discussing historical bias, racism, and inequities and really allow “the white teachers to learn from [the] colleagues of color” (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021). This forum is in addition to their bi-monthly board meetings which the local community and families can attend via Zoom.

Additionally, many of the staff from District Diversity walked in protest in support of the Black Lives Matter movement in the summer of 2020 (M. Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021). The superintendent along with multiple staff stood side by side of students and family members in solidarity. On a similar token, the district has opened up its relationship with the local police even further. As some districts have pulled their School Resource Officer (SRO) from the roster, District Diversity chose instead to use this resource as a community asset (M. Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021). Their SRO wears civilian attire and maintains close relationships with the students and the district staff. “There’s been a lot of great conversations that I’m glad we didn’t just get rid of them, but now we’re working together and

moving forward in a better direction” (M. Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021). An entire thesis could be written about SRO’s and school/police relationships, however, further interrogation of this remains outside the scope of this study.

Although the U. S Department of Education and the WDPI provide resources for educators to use in their classrooms, District Diversity extends its Equity Plan to families and community members. In June 2020, a letter was sent to the families of students discussing the civil unrest and “tragic and racially charged recent events” (*Family Letter*, 2020). In the letter, they offer assistance from staff members and a “Q&A for Children on Protests/Riots.” The following were other resources provided: Black Lives Matter Movement (What is the movement?), Ten Tips for Teaching and Talking to Kids About Race, Your Kids Aren’t Too Young to Talk About Race, Understanding Race and Privilege, The Traumatic Impact of Racism and Discrimination on Young People and How to Talk About It, and Approaching Racism with Compassion & Humility (*Resources*, 2020). Although these resources were made available to the community and families, it is unclear whether this information was explicitly presented inside the schools. Looking at the titles alone, it seems as though these materials would be valuable tools for educators to use with their students.

District Homogenous

In District Homogenous, community members and families are also invited to attend public school board meetings occurring around once per month. These meetings are live-streamed and archived for future viewing. In relation to their ENN, District Homogenous invited parents and community members, in addition to educators and board members, to have an open discussion about their diversity, equity, and inclusion plans in 2019 (M. Scott, personal communication, March 24, 2021). They intentionally wanted to include the community in their

plans moving forward with a more equity-oriented lens. Specifically, the district has reached out to the Black student unions and families of students who are Black “to really... understand what is happening in their lives that are barriers and are preventing them from having a level of success” (M. Scott, personal communication, March 24, 2021).

For their inclusion iSummit seminar, the district invites and collaborates with other districts on the content provided. In this way, the community is expanded and sharing its knowledge, resources, and lessons learned on the subject. As with District Diversity, District Homogenous maintains an SRO officer in their high schools to maintain community relations. The district also provided their community with a few resources on their public site to help families talk about race and racism, including Resilience: Uplifting Youth Through Healthy Communication About Race, How to Talk with Kids About Racism and Racial Violence, and How to Talk to Kids About Race and Racism (Hansen, 2020). As mentioned with District Diversity, it was also unclear whether these materials were being used inside the classroom with the students or what other mediums this information was presented in. For instance, was this sent out in a newsletter, discussed during parent/teacher conferences, etc.?

Summary

District Diversity and Homogenous each have open communication with their local communities. Public board meetings, as with most public-school districts, allows local community members to remain informed and have a direct impact on the education goals and policies of the district. Through speaking with District Diversity, their involvement expanded beyond board meetings. Members from their district, including the Superintendent, participated in the Black Lives Matter protest/march in 2020. Additionally, their SRO is closely tied and present in their school and was noted as being reflective of positive community collaboration (M.

Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021). Although District Homogenous maintains an SRO in their high schools, it is unclear how this is viewed by the students or local community through my research. Similarly, my findings did not reveal any specific involvement from the district in supporting any BLM movement or protests in general, however, that is not to say it did not occur. At least based on the perceptions of those interviewed, District Diversity seems to have greater positive collaboration and support from their local community.

Accountability Measures and Barriers to Implementation

As guided by one of my research questions, I aimed to understand how equity and/or antiracist practices are actually being measured and/or accounted for. Both District Diversity and Homogenous have extended their professional development and staff training to include equity, inclusion, and diversity training—not explicitly identified as antiracism, however. What was less clear through the document analysis was how this training or practices are being measured. The following findings were almost exclusively obtained through conversations with district and school-based personnel. Overall, tangible accountability measures for each district’s equity and/or antiracist practices and policies were difficult to gather. Since schools are largely driven by quantifiable data, such as achievement and test scores, they must find other ways to measure the impact of their training.

District Diversity: Accountability Measures

Through speaking with an administrator in District Diversity, Ms. Smith candidly admits to lacking a “good accountability system” at this time (M. Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021). However, they do use the results from their SEL student surveys as well as achievement data to gauge any problem areas. In addition to these surveys, they complete a “full investigation” with any student or parent complaint (M. Smith, personal communication, March

11, 2021). For example, a teacher may use a microaggression or otherwise harmful language toward a student. If this occurs, a full investigation will be launched into the incident so that the issue can be tackled head-on and can become a teachable moment for their staff (M. Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021). When it comes to achievement data, Ms. Smith (school-based personnel, Diversity) mentions the “achievement gap” that exists within various subgroups of students (M. Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021). From her perspective, this data can be used in a way to determine if “teachers are connecting to all of our kids,” not just a data point for reporting purposes (M. Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021). Furthermore, the school principals/vice-principals do periodic “walk-throughs” with their teachers during classroom sessions. As one element of observation, the teachers’ “equitable practices/removing barriers” are annotated (M. Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021).

Since 2020 was largely shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic, Ms. Smith (school-based personnel, Diversity) noted the unique impacts it continues to have on their students and teachers. As District Diversity has experienced intermittent virtual learning, parents can be present “inside” the classroom for the first time. This has allowed the parents to be more engaged and hold the teachers accountable in ways that were never possible before (M. Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021). Whether it be a particular lesson plan, curriculum, teaching aid, or teaching style in general, parents can engage with the learning process. (M. Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021). This can be as extreme as recognizing blatant or subtle forms of racism occurring, or as simple as questioning the literature/text choice of a teacher.

District Homogenous: Accountability Measures

District Homogenous also has measurement and accountability tools for its equity practices. As part of their work with the ICS team, they have periodic interviews with the consultants who supply the district with direct feedback on what is or isn't happening equity-related (M. Williams, personal communication, March 24, 2021). As part of this feedback, self-reflection becomes a measurement tool. Their ENN workgroup uses this feedback, among other things, to "make sure that [they're] using equity and equality... accurately and knowing that what is fair isn't always equal" (M. Williams, personal communication, March 24, 2021). Other forms of feedback come from their alumni groups and educators in general. Considering their inputs, they work to make sure their curriculum is "reflective of a broader perspective," not just the Anglo-Saxton, European history (M. Scott, personal communication, March 24, 2021).

Leadership from the district also holds listening sessions for students to discuss whatever issues they believe needs attention (M. Williams, personal communication, March 24, 2021). As a unique element of their supervisory ladder, consisting of a more streamlined approach, these issues can be tackled "fairly quickly," and leadership can put adequate supports in place (M. Williams, personal communication, March 24, 2021). All parties are then held accountable for this process to make sure the issue at hand is appropriately dealt with.

More specifically, District Homogenous started a survey in 2020 that asks specific questions about equity and belonging (M. Scott, personal communication, March 24, 2021). This survey is distributed to their sixth through twelfth-grade students and kindergarten through twelfth-grade educators. It asks questions about their comfortability with talking about race; if they feel they can discuss these issues with their teachers and do they feel like they belong (M. Scott, personal communication, March 24, 2021). Along with this survey, Ms. Scott (district personnel, Homogenous) explained how their discrimination and harassment policies and data

are submitted to the Office of Civil Rights every five years, in addition to submitting discipline and complaint data to the DPI (M. Scott, personal communication, March 24, 2021).

Although both districts have a defined set of ENN, it is clear that measuring and holding educators accountable is very difficult. Neither district has been able to put its ENN into practice in an easily identifiable way. Surveys, like most qualitative data, seem to be the go-to or most sensible means for measuring if their equity plans are being implemented effectively.

Unfortunately, this study was not able to uncover these survey results. As the social climate continues to evolve and the effects of 2020 and 2021 materialize, perhaps the survey data will demonstrate a more accurate picture.

District Diversity: Barriers to Implementation

District Diversity has identified a few barriers to implementing their ENN and other antiracist practices inside their district. One barrier includes staff in general. Anytime staff turnover occurs, equity/bias retraining needs to occur for the new teachers (M. Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021). The time and resources it can take to complete the initial training, in addition to training new hires, can be a challenge (M. Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021). Also, equity means different things to different people, and teachers are not immune from this. Ms. Smith (district personnel, Homogenous) recognizes that equity does not just refer to “black and white;” it’s different religions, identities, etc. (M. Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021). Some teachers (especially extended-career teachers) may believe their practices are equitable already but may not be by others’ standards – especially in the districts (M. Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021). Ms. Smith elaborates:

When we try to take two steps forward, it’s constantly a step back. You know we’re still moving in the right direction but to get everybody on board at the proper place to

implement those ethical practices, it's tough. We still have individuals that don't have that growth mindset towards this work, and it is a more fixed mindset, especially some of our teachers that think they know everything and that's with any profession, they're just very stuck in their train of thought. They think they know what's best. It's kind of hard to get different perspectives and for them to see, you know, bigger picture (M. Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021).

Another aspect of staff that creates a barrier is representation. With “woefully... maybe less than 10 percent” teaching staff as persons of color and around 80 percent students of color, Ms. Rogers believes they drastically lack representation of their student body (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021). Working with the library and digital resources, Ms. Rogers (district personnel, Diversity) recognizes a distinct barrier to this representation. “Here's the trap... as a white woman trying to think like I know what's best in regards to social justice because the publishing industry tells me... these are diverse titles and this is what's best for you... and then there's a white lady trying to sell it to them... they're like, that is crazy” (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021).

The social climate was also noted as a barrier to their equity practices. The murder of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, Ms. Rogers mentions, “really accelerated people's understanding as to what inequities do exist” (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021). “As a district, I think people were really thrown off-kilter... it was just a smack in the face and people were like, ‘I don't know what to do,’ and we have kids that just in a state of trauma. As white adults, we had no means to cope. We have these principles, like sure, this is what we do. But we don't really do this” (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021). Overall, the social unrest in Milwaukee and across the country became a “tipping point” as they were left

trying to meet the needs of kids facing trauma in their daily lives (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021).

One barrier specific to creating an equitable education, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic/virtual learning environment, resonated with both the school-based and district-based staff at District Diversity: technology. Not all students have access to broadband access at home or even have devices to do schoolwork on. With 80 percent of students of color and over 60 percent of students on free or reduced lunch, glaring inequities unraveled during the pandemic and virtual learning (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021). Therefore, implementing equitable and/or antiracist practices was more challenging, albeit more crucial than ever in 2020.

District Homogenous: Barriers to Implementation

District Homogenous has identified unique barriers to their practices that weren't necessarily identified within District Diversity. Ms. Scott admits that the "political rhetoric that has been permeating communities over the last four years continues to be a challenge," especially since most in the community self-prescribe themselves as Republican or conservative (M. Scott, personal communication, March 24, 2021). Since the school board is made up of elected officials, most believe they should be non-partisan.

As noted in the literature through Espinoza et al. (2003) and Mansfield and Kehoe (1984), antiracism is innately political. When the district talks about equity or antiracist curriculum, the current rhetoric is that "they are currently educating racists because we need an antiracist curriculum. Language is just a lightning rod. A current draft of equity non-negotiables talks about decentering the dominant culture, and that is very offensive to some people, even before they have a true understanding of what we need in our current contemporary situation"

(M. Scott, personal communication, March 24, 2021). Furthermore, the school board elections of 2021 have highlighted the political barrier quite starkly. For example, one candidate has claimed that tax dollars are funding “leftist indoctrination” and promises to return American values to our classrooms” (Republican Party of Waukesha County, n.d.). As opposed to what kids *should* learn in public schools, the candidate believes students *are* learning: “all people white are racist, so equality has never existed; success depends on systemic racism, privilege and group-think; and social justice, diversity and inclusion are foundational skills all students need” (Republican Party of Waukesha County, n.d.). Instead, they affirm students should learn “all people have equal opportunity; success depends on individual effort and responsibility, and all people are created equal” (Republican Party of Waukesha County, n.d.). Even without having a specific “antiracist” agenda or policy, some believe the diversity, equity, and inclusion to be charged topics on their own.

Summary

Within both districts, it was very difficult to quantify or identify ways in which their equity and/or antiracist practices are measured. Both use survey data of some sort to gauge how students and teachers feel about the training they receive and how they feel once they are at school. Additionally, both districts mentioned their ICS Equity team auditing their equity practices. Further information about these audits was not determined through my research. However, District Homogenous noted that within their early days of working with ICS, they recommended setting non-negotiables which they ultimately brought to fruition.

Additionally, District Diversity mentioned using their “achievement gap” between students as a form of measuring the success of their equity training (M. Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021). From the perspective of at least of one the participants, this

gap not only demonstrates a learning deficiency, but also a deficiency in teacher/student relations. This finding was interesting since up until this point in my research, “achievement gaps” were used as a measurement for academic achievement alone – not necessarily a measurement of relationships. In this light, perhaps some quantifiable data *can* be used to determine whether students are receiving an equitable education.

As districts both falling within the same geographical region, they each inevitably shared barriers to implementing equity and/or antiracist policies. Although District Diversity has a large student population who identify as Black or students of color, their educational staff is still largely white. Even with their educators who are persons of color, discussing equity and antiracism becomes a point of contention. Some believe their work is already equitable, others simply don’t have a “growth mindset” (M. Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021). District Homogenous also has a majority white teaching base in addition to a majority white, highly conservative, local constituency. Although they are focused highly on diversity, equity, and inclusion – not explicitly antiracism, a large number of community members feel that is still “leftist indoctrination” (Republican Party of Waukesha County, n.d.) among other things.

It seems as though community relations and professional development in public schools, as discussed earlier, have a large impact on policies and the type of *words* used within school districts. Although each district believes that their equity work checks off some of the (proverbial) antiracist boxes, they can only take it so far. The local community, educators, or both can disagree with the direction of the district and hinder forward progress.

(What May Not Be Called) “Antiracism:” What It Looks Like in Practice

With challenges and barriers imposed by the “charged” language of antiracism in mind, I developed a definition as an agglomeration of the literature: *any deliberate action taken to*

confront systems of racism or oppression. To be clear, this was not developed to bend the findings in any particular way or another. Instead, I recognized the complexity of the concept and chose to create a definition that encompassed aspects of the literature while still maintaining the ability to answer my research question with validity. Moving forward with this definition, there were certain aspects of each district’s policies and/or practices that I believe were reflective of antiracism – although not explicitly identified as such.

District Diversity

Although District Diversity doesn’t have a designated policy defined as antiracist, Ms. Smith (school-based personnel) associates their ENN and anti-bias training with an antiracist agenda. She believes “equity should be a basis of all of our teaching” (M. Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021). Even further, Ms. Smith stated: “I think a big part of this antiracist, equity work is being vulnerable and accepting where you are in this journey. And if you can’t accept where you are in this journey, and truly reflect on who are you, it’s not going to go anywhere (M. Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021). At least informally, she believes every decision they make is made with their ENN in mind, and “at no point should a teacher be doing something that’s not related to an equity non-negotiable” (M. Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021). One practice that represents this is through their teacher walk-throughs. As mentioned within their accountability measures, the walk-throughs help ensure equity practices are being implemented appropriately and within the vision of the district.

Since COVID-19, District Diversity has taken on a different approach to grading. Understanding the barriers to technology and inequities that persist, they developed a “COVID grading” system (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021). Designed as a “best practices” grading system, it attempts to answer; “How do we grade kids when they don’t have

access to technology? When some kids are working because their parents have lost their jobs, or some are caring for children? How do we afford students the benefit of the doubt and an opportunity?” (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021). With this new grading scale, there are no zeros. Ms. Rogers believes zero is unattainable because you can’t recover, so the lowest is now 50 percent (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021). Also, a pass/fail/incomplete scale is used to give students multiple opportunities to pass. “This is an equitable grading process given everything that is taking place and happening” (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021).

Representation with their staff is another way District Diversity is actively confronting potentially oppressive actions. As noted previously, the district has roughly 80 percent of students of color and around 10 percent of teachers of color. Recognizing the lack of representation with the majority of their student body, the district is making additional strides to hire minorities. For example, their new Superintendent is a woman of color, along with their Director of Teaching and Learning, Director of Pupil Services, Elementary and High School Principals, and their Athletic Director (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021). They are currently going through a “massive changeover in administration” and have several candidates of color who are “phenomenal candidates... who could offer us different assets and move us forward in this process. It’s exciting, it’s hard work, but it’s exciting” (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021).

Aside from general staff representation, a woman of color was provided an internship and eventually hired on as a district librarian, Dorothy. This representation in the library has proven to be highly positive according to Ms. Rogers. “Finding that right individual who has the passion and the talent, as well as the experience and the relatability is absolutely

priceless... representation matters” (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021). Ms. Rogers, as a white woman, described a scenario where she tries to “sell” a book series about Egyptian mythology to her Black students. She would make “cultural assumptions [that they] understand Egypt [is a] part of Africa and therefore [that main character] would be Black. Whereas then Dorothy just goes up and goes, it’s an awesome book, lots of magic, lots of adventure, Black kid, and the kids’ like, I’ll take it” (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021). Ms. Rogers also refers to Dorothy as a value-added asset because she brings a new, valuable perspective. For instance, they each came up with a “social justice list” to present to a Language Arts class, and they each came up with a separate list. Having this other perspective really highlights the value of having another opinion (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021).

Similarly, the district recognized issues with its history books and social studies programming since the COVID-19 pandemic and social unrest of 2020. To adjust their curriculum, they brought in an additional member to their Social Studies department, a woman of color with a background in African American historic studies (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021). As part of a new lesson, she instructed on the occurrence of redlining and it was “absolutely phenomenal” (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021). This was a lesson they “never would have done, never would have thought of” (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021).

For Ms. Rogers, “The diversification and the representation and experiences of the staff members that are adding these little layers, that will help... one of the key turnarounds... is that representation, and that is truly going to be the crux of education. And for [District Diversity], our success is really going to be dependent on that because that’s how we’re going to be able to

connect with the new families that we have coming into the district” (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021). Similarly, the District’s “Live at Five” forum opens up the line of communication and allows the “white teachers to learn from [their] colleagues of color” (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021).

Although representation may be a step in the right direction, it is once again important to note where the burden lies – with people of color. Bringing in Black and Brown teachers to represent the study body sounds like a great way to create community and cultural relations within the study body. However, changing the demographics is only touching on the surface. Additionally, it leaves the “problems” associated with educating students with an antiracist lens on those Black and Brown teachers, not on the remaining white staff. They are there to “check” the white staff and educate them on the ways of being and teaching Black. This, once again, takes responsibility away from the white systems that have perpetuated racism in the first place. Even further, the white staff that have been replaced are likely to be teaching somewhere else, perhaps without gaining the crucial, critical lens that teaching students in today’s climate requires. Furthermore, the assumption with hiring more persons of color is that they may share the same values or perceptions. As noted with Ms. Smith, even some of their educators of color do not necessarily agree with the steps they are taking toward creating equitable classrooms.

District Homogenous

From the working ENN to the notes from the workgroup, District Homogenous has agreed to take a powerful stance in their district. Similar to District A, District Homogenous used terms such as structural inequities, disparate outcomes, disrupting societal inequities, eliminating disparities, and inside their workgroup notes—antiracism. Their notes also mentioned decentering whiteness. In order to get past the barriers to implementing an antiracist or equity

agenda, Ms. Scott (district personnel, Homogenous) believes they can't just approach "person by person by person." (M. Scott, personal communication, March 24, 2021). Instead, they need to think about it "systemically... at policy level" (M. Scott, personal communication, March 24, 2021).

Racism and oppression, Ms. Scott believes, is "the collection of 1,000 tiny paper cuts of things that happen over time, that starts to reinforce at a really young age 'I'm different,' and that different might mean less valued, or begins to perpetuate that sense of 'othering'" (M. Scott, personal communication, March 24, 2021). The focus goes back to "culturally relevant pedagogy" and evidence-based practices, not necessarily a separate antiracist or ableism policy (M. Scott, personal communication, March 24, 2021). In order to solve the systemic challenges around race, educators need to "engage in conversations around sensitive topics in a way that they feel supported and empowered... talking about race... it's a muscle, you have to build it" (M. Scott, personal communication, March 24, 2021). Making mention of the murder of George Floyd and the "racial reckoning that's happening across the country," Ms. Scott believes antiracist or culturally relevant work, "starts with examining your own belief system and examining your own biases... really having people dive in" (M. Scott, personal communication, March 24, 2021).

Summary

Founded on the document analysis and perspective of those four individuals interviewed, antiracism was not a term used to identify any policy within the districts. However, based on the "simplified" definition I devised, there were practices in each of the districts that were reminiscent of antiracism. Most notably, District Diversity took on a new grading system during COVID-19 so that students without accessibility, technology, or those with personal issues

would not be negatively impacted in the long term. Additionally, instead of simply punishing the student who used the “N-word,” they adopted an anti-discrimination policy that was implemented by the sporting association they fall under. Another step they are taking as a district is to deliberately hire persons of color so that they have a greater representation of their student body. Simply changing the demographics of the teaching staff should not be considered antiracist, however, their decision to deliberately make the change and provide representation is a step that was deemed important for this study.

Although District Homogenous did not provide any specific examples or instances that would be considered antiracist, Ms. Scott (district personnel) was very adamant in having uncomfortable conversations, discussing systemic racism, and empowering teachers and students to discuss these issues. To note, culturally relevant pedagogy was referenced as a way to achieve antiracism. This was an interesting find since the literature often had overlap between all of the frameworks studied. From the perspective of those interviewed, there is no shortage of issues needing to be resolved in their schools. Their equity work and equity non-negotiables specifically give them a baseline and tangible reference to moving forward with an equity-oriented lens. Coming right out with an antiracist policy to boast on their district sites, and most likely receiving even more backlash did not seem to be on the agenda.

Findings Summary

Throughout this study, I attempted to answer: How do school and district personnel perceive their role in practicing antiracism? Also, what do K-12 leaders perceive to be barriers/motivations for implementation? And lastly, what ways do these school communities share in common, as two “exogenous” districts of an urban metropolitan area, and how do they differ? Each of these questions proved to be quite challenging to answer. Going into this study,

certain assumptions were made about District Diversity and Homogenous at first glance. Although both self-described as suburban, I expected to find a large number of differences in the way that each district approached equity and antiracist work. For example, District Diversity has a larger number of students of color and a widely diverse local demographic, therefore I anticipated fewer barriers than were noted during the study. Additionally, I assumed District Homogenous's "significantly exceeds" grade from the state, in conjunction with being lauded as one of the best schools in the county, would reveal they had little disparities between students. This was also not the case.

Looking at the actual data gathered, both the document analysis and semi-structured interviews offered valuable insight for this study. School board meeting minutes and the equity non-negotiables were key findings in the document analysis. Board documents are mostly transparent as they mirrored the decision-making process. As with all meeting minutes, there is still some subjectivity depending on who is writing them. Also, the public video streams of meetings can be edited to remove any content the boards deem inappropriate. Even so, the minutes from both districts became key in understanding the rationale and overall process of their equity-oriented work. I was able to read, step-by-step, the working notes of their equity plans and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion workgroup. These documents became key to understanding the rationale and intention behind devising their ENN and other equity plans.

What could not be gathered through these documents was the perception of district leadership. Since each district had public equity plans and ENN explicitly identifying racism as a non-negotiable, it could be easy to assume that the district as a whole must be on board. What was found, however, was that some staff members and community members alike are *not* so receptive to such discussions specifically about race. Additionally, none of the participants

alluded to an antiracist policy on their future agenda. Antiracism, as perceived by the participants, was more framed around equity, and their ENN was their big step in that direction. Since equity involves more than just race (i.e. disability, gender, religion, etc.), working from an equity-oriented space gives the districts a broader base to work with. The participants were able to provide this perspective in a way that further emphasized how these districts share more commonalities than differences.

Barriers to implementation were most easily identified in this study through speaking with the participants. District Diversity believes that staff turnover, attitudes, and representation of the student body are huge barriers for them. Additionally, outside influences such as COVID-19, accessibility, and access to resources, and budgets impact their efforts dramatically. With District Homogenous, their biggest barrier is their local community. As a public school, they serve the community in which they are located, and a vocal base of people do not believe topics centering around white privilege and racial inequalities belong inside the school.

Overall, this finding resonates widely with Soja's (2015) assertion about the new regionalism and peripheral urbanization. "Traditional suburbia is slowly disappearing as the once relatively homogenous suburbs are feeling the effects of mass regional urbanization" (Soja, 2015). In this light, differentiating between suburban and urban is less meaningful, instead, more comparative research is necessary (Soja, 2015). What can be said is that this region of the Milwaukee metropolitan area exudes commonalities and including both District Diversity and Homogenous in a single study within this region helps to fill this gap that exists with comparative research.

As mentioned, antiracism is not anticipated to become an identified policy anytime soon with each district, based on what I gathered from my study. However, each district does seem to

be making slow, but sustainable efforts. Throughout this study, District Diversity had a relatively large influx of educators and staff join them that are persons of color, including a new Superintendent. They recognize the importance of representation and the potentially harmful implications of maintaining a vastly white perspective in a predominantly Black district. As noted by Ms. Rogers (district personnel, Diversity), they have made “leaps and bounds” over the last 18 years to adjust their library resources to be more culturally relevant (M. Rogers, personal communication, April 13, 2021).

Over the last few years, they have even taken on more professional development to help all staff understand what implicit bias truly means and the negative impacts it can have on student success. More recently, they adopted a new grading scale to meet the needs of their students during COVID-19 and the challenges of virtual learning. The conversations seem to be becoming more frequent about racial inequalities, not less, as they push toward the future. District Homogenous went from working with ICS initially focusing on special education, to devising ENN with explicit verbiage around racism and structural inequalities. Additionally, they have leadership open and willing to discuss these tough issues. Further, their ENN are still in a working stage for over a year at this point. They have been incredibly intentional about their ENN and it does not seem like they are using these to simply “check off a box.” However, District Homogenous’ language use inside their ENN and working notes are much more reflective of antiracism than the perceptions of the participants. Their ENN are incredibly robust and explicit of antiracist policies and intentions. Both participants from Homogenous reflected mostly on their diversity, equity, and inclusion policies and did not mirror the language inside their ENN.

Ultimately, each of these districts shares many of the same struggles. Historically, all conversations about race have been contentious. What I gathered about antiracism as a framework is that it is not easy for anyone to confront or even place their finger on – even those districts that are familiar with educating Black children. I went into the study assuming that all schools would strive for some kind of antiracist policy, however, public districts clearly have many outside influences and barriers that make using equity, culturally relevant teaching, and non-negotiables *easier* to digest.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

This thesis addressed the following questions: How do school and district personnel perceive their role in practicing antiracism? Also, what do K-12 leaders perceive to be barriers/motivations for implementation? And lastly, what ways do these school communities share in common, as two “exogenous” districts of an urban metropolitan area, and how do they differ? Attempting to answer these questions proved to be challenging as there were many limitations. The greatest limitation was the number of participants interviewed. Gaining a larger participant base would have added great value and provided even more perspective from each district. Additionally, this study only focused on school and district-based personnel, with no student perspective. The perception of an educator or administrator can be vastly different from that of a student sitting in the classroom.

Even further, this study was limited to only two school districts. Although these districts represent the same regional climate, they still have a vastly different student body and only represent the single district under which they fall. Moreover, the nature of this subject is incredibly fluid, especially considering the national context. During this study, there was a radical change from one presidency to another, multiple instances of state violence against Blacks, and a pandemic that changed the way schools operated from the ground up. The perspectives I gained and even the documents I analyzed were a point in time. These perspectives could surely have changed as the nation and local context continues to evolve.

Despite these limitations, I maintain there is still value in the scope of this study. Although it cannot be considered generalizable due to replicability, Firestone (1993) would argue that these methods “should not be avoided because of the fear that their claims for broad relevance are especially weak” (p. 22). Similarly, Yin (2013) points out that case studies are

appropriate for answering “how” and “why” whenever the researcher has relatively little control over the phenomenon. Qualitative research also serves to understand what processes, beliefs, and perceptions occur in a situation, and applying things such as “thick” description can help fill the gap of generalizability (Firestone, 1993).

Although not having the ability to be generalizable, this study serves as pilot data that can be used in future research. Comparing two districts from the same geographical region provides a glimpse into the regional climate and state-imposed regulations. Future studies would benefit from studying a greater number of districts in the Milwaukee metropolitan region, especially since there are relatively few studies conducted outside of Milwaukee proper. In this same respect, future studies would benefit from studying more than one district that is similar to District Diversity and Homogenous to determine how they compare with another. This study overall is limited since the districts studied are only representative of themselves and conclusions cannot/should not necessarily be drawn about other districts.

What became clear during the research phase of the literature review was that most aspects of multicultural education, culturally relevant pedagogy, and antiracist education take on different forms and meanings, depending on the implementer. Although multicultural education still holds a place in the research and education community, the practices were not explicitly linked to any government or local level policy. As the literature suggested, multicultural education took some serious heat as it tended to instigate a “heroes/oins and holidays” mindset. It is unclear the reasons why this approach is absent in the aforementioned study, perhaps due to the stigmatized verbiage overall. District Diversity did, however, mention their demonstrations during Black History and International Women’s History month as a means to celebrate the diversity of their students.

On the other hand, culturally relevant pedagogy was used throughout the WDPI and both Districts' equity plans. As Ladson-Billings (1994) noted in her early definition of CRT, one aspect of cultural relevancy includes empowering students politically. This political empowerment, at least with District Homogenous, was a clear barrier for their community. Within Hollies' (2019) analysis of culturally relevant education, he found that the term "culturally relevant" itself had been "shrouded in a myriad of buzzwords like *equity*, *cultural sensitivity*, and *inclusivity* (p. 32).

Culturally relevant pedagogy or practices were used to describe everything from diversity, equity, and inclusion, and even some aspects of antiracism with the participants. The challenge with determining that actual implementation of CRP is that I did not study teachers specifically. Without looking at the actual *practices* of the teachers, it is difficult and perhaps incorrect to make that assumption.

Furthermore, antiracism and/or antiracist education were also not used with frequency throughout the findings. The political nature of antiracism overall, as described by Mansfield and Kehoe (1994), Kendi (2019), Espinoza et al. (2003), and others seemed to have a distinct impact on implementation in this study – most clearly with District Homogenous. Even further, Kendi's (2019) assertion that the opposite of racist is antiracist, and vice versa, is a clear point of contention for school districts. As seen within the political context of District Homogenous, describing a diverse, equitable, inclusive environment—not even explicitly an antiracist agenda—has placed a large portion of the community on a defensive stance. For example, a large population of their community believes that implementing antiracist practices insinuates the district is currently educating racists or boils down to indoctrination of some sort. As a public school, some believe politics do not belong.

Word choice clearly matters. Another example of this is found within the districts' bias and anti-discrimination training in general. Looking back on the work of Bell (2016), she was clear to identify the importance of using oppression versus bias or discrimination in social justice education. Using the term oppression draws the relation between structural inequalities and systemic racism, not just individual actions. Both District Diversity and Homogenous referred to their training specifically as anti-bias and anti-discrimination. This isn't to say that either district only focuses on individual action versus systems of oppression. However, it is another example of how words can be seen as "charged," perhaps even politically, and thus difficult for districts to explicitly categorize their training as such.

In relation to barriers, each district had very distinct barriers based on the data gathered from my participants. For District Diversity, their biggest barrier was staff and representation of the study body. Even as a highly diverse district, their teaching staff is majority white. As noted in Chapter 1, this overrepresentation of white teachers with an increasingly diverse study body tends to become problematic. Educating through a white-dominated lens can exacerbate differences in student outcomes, as noted by Wiggan and Watson-Vandiver (2019). However, during the study period, the district was undergoing a massive staff turnover, according to Ms. Rogers, including adding a woman of color in place of their previous white superintendent.

For District Homogenous, the local community "self-prescribes" themselves as conservative and Republican (M. Scott, personal communication, March 24, 2021). This isn't an issue in and of itself, but the political rhetoric during and after the Donald Trump presidency has made discussing race, specifically systemic racism, a huge challenge for the district (M. Scott, personal communication, March 24, 2021). Students and alumni have publicly called on the

district to adopt a more antiracist curriculum and policy, however, a large portion of the local community doesn't believe it belongs in the school.

What can be said about this study is that antiracism is not an “easy” framework to adopt by name. Just as we have seen through historical educational policies and legislation, the burden continues to rest with the students and families of color, specifically Black students. If simply saying your school district is coming from a place of antiracist intentions invokes an outcry from a community, this only shows how little discomfort white families are willing to feel.

It seems clear in some ways why antiracist education efforts are not being advertised across all school bulletins. Culturally relevant, multicultural, and equity sound much less political and polarizing than antiracism. Antiracism implicates society as a whole for embracing whiteness and truly seeks to challenge our deepest biases. Coming back to CRT as a framework, Zamunido (2011) contends that the “master narrative” of our dominant culture is not objective and that schools are one of the major means for disseminating the master narratives (p. 5). If this is the case, the master narrative can be changed to reflect a broader, more inclusive, antiracist lens. However, educators (in this case) seem to be adjusting this narrative to suit their constituents. Storytelling in a way that makes the white community members “comfortable,” at the expense of critical education, continues to perpetuate the white, dominant society (Zamunido, 2011). Deliberately implementing change and addressing these biases is difficult to imagine, especially for school leaders. They are continuously grappling with federal and state standards, community and parent criticisms, student and teacher issues, and now a global pandemic. Perhaps non-negotiables are negotiable, after all?

This study hopefully filled a small part of the gap in understanding how antiracism is perceived by school and district personnel. More specifically as seen with this study, how it is

being practiced under a different, more ubiquitous name. If there is one link between all of the aforementioned school reforms, policies, practices, and theorizations, it's that education does not happen in a vacuum. Our individual and collective histories and experiences indubitably impact our education. Reframing, renaming, and assigning new vocabulary has been attempted in hopes of making an effective, equitable education reform. If the goal is to *change* the current realities of disparities in education and truly advocate for social justice, our ideals must change. It would be fruitless and has proven to be so, to take any of these reforms at face value. Improving education for all students cannot be accomplished through using a designated checklist or curriculum. It must evolve and be fluid, along with the world. As stated by Ms. Smith, "don't let your first thought be your last thought" (M. Smith, personal communication, March 11, 2021).

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APPENDIX A

District Diversity 2018-2019 Report Card (WI DPI)

Overall Score



74.2

☆☆☆☆☆

Exceeds Expectations

Overall Accountability Ratings	Score
Significantly Exceeds Expectations	83-100 ★★★★★
Exceeds Expectations	73-82.9 ★★★★★
Meets Expectations	63-72.9 ★★★☆☆
Meets Few Expectations	53-62.9 ★★☆☆☆
Fails to Meet Expectations	0-52.9 ★☆☆☆☆

District Information	
Grades	K4-12
Enrollment	1,521
Within District Mobility	0.1%
Between District Mobility	3.9%
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.7%
Asian	12.6%
Black or African American	49.6%
Hispanic/Latino	8.2%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.0%
White	21.1%
Two or More Races	7.9%
<i>Student Groups</i>	
Students with Disabilities	14.4%
Economically Disadvantaged	49.5%
English Learners	6.4%

Priority Areas	District Max Score	State Max Score
Student Achievement	55.1/100	62.3/100
English Language Arts (ELA) Achievement	28.7/50	31.6/50
Mathematics Achievement	26.4/50	30.7/50
District Growth	67.9/100	66.0/100
English Language Arts (ELA) Growth	34.9/50	33.0/50
Mathematics Growth	33.0/50	33.0/50
Closing Gaps	81.4/100	68.8/100
English Language Arts (ELA) Achievement Gaps	17.9/25	18.1/25
Mathematics Achievement Gaps	17.4/25	18.0/25
Graduation Rate Gaps	46.1/50	32.7/50
On-Track and Postsecondary Readiness	87.6/100	84.8/100
Graduation Rate	38.4/40	36.3/40
Attendance Rate	37.3/40	36.6/40
3rd Grade English Language Arts (ELA) Achievement	6.8/10	6.2/10
8th Grade Mathematics Achievement	5.1/10	5.7/10

Priority Area Weights	Percentage Weight
Student Achievement	15.3%
District Growth	34.7%
Closing Gaps	25.0%
On-Track and Postsecondary Readiness	25.0%

Note: For details about how weights are determined, see weighting calculator: https://oea-dpi.shinyapps.io/overall_weighting_calculator/

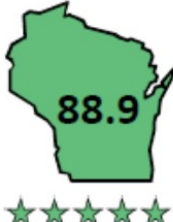
Student Engagement Indicators	Total Deductions: 0
Absenteeism Rate (goal <13%)	Goal met: no deduction
Dropout Rate (goal <6%)	Goal met: no deduction

Test Participation Information				
Includes Forward Exam (grades 3-8), ACT Aspire (9 and 10), ACT (11), and Dynamic Learning Maps (3-11)				
Group	ELA 1- Year	ELA 3- Year	Math 1- Year	Math 3- Year
All-Students Rate	98.3%	98.2%	98.3%	98.1%
Lowest Subgroup Rate: SwD	90.7%	92.2%	90.7%	92.0%

Source: Accountability Report Cards, 2019

APPENDIX B

District Homogenous 2018-2019 Report Card (WI DPI)

<p style="text-align: center;">Overall Score</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p style="font-size: 24pt; font-weight: bold; color: green;">88.9</p> <p style="font-size: 18pt; color: green;">★★★★★</p> <p style="color: green; font-weight: bold;">Significantly Exceeds Expectations</p> </div> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; font-size: 10pt;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left;">Overall Accountability Ratings</th> <th style="text-align: left;">Score</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr style="background-color: #d4edda;"> <td>Significantly Exceeds Expectations</td> <td>83-100 ★★★★★</td> </tr> <tr style="background-color: #fff3cd;"> <td>Exceeds Expectations</td> <td>73-82.9 ★★★★☆</td> </tr> <tr style="background-color: #fff3cd;"> <td>Meets Expectations</td> <td>63-72.9 ★★★☆☆</td> </tr> <tr style="background-color: #fff3cd;"> <td>Meets Few Expectations</td> <td>53-62.9 ★★☆☆☆</td> </tr> <tr style="background-color: #ffe0b2;"> <td>Fails to Meet Expectations</td> <td>0-52.9 ★☆☆☆☆</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; 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Source: Accountability Report Cards, 2019

APPENDIX C

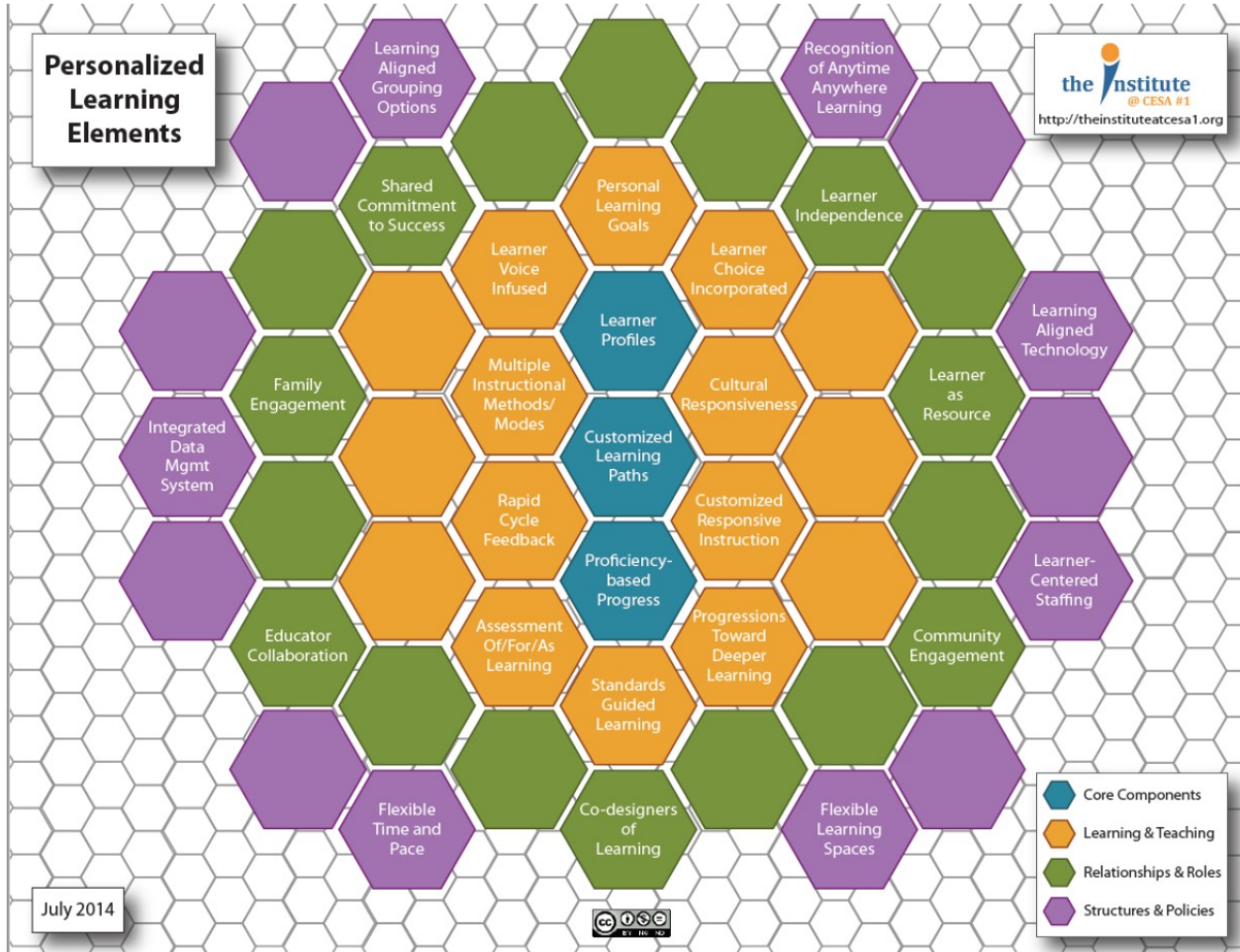
ICS Equity Four Cornerstones



Source: *ICSEquity.org*

APPENDIX D

The Institute @ CESA #1 Honeycomb Model



Source: The Institute, 2014

APPENDIX E

Interview Coding Cycle #2

The following were common themes throughout all of the interviews: Equity, equity non-negotiables, ICS, curriculum, diversity, town hall/community, and difficult/courageous conversations. Unique themes were highlighted throughout each interview.

District Diversity: Ms. Smith / School-Based Personnel	
Coder JML: Code #	Quotes
1	Equity should be a basis for all of our teaching
1, 4	In order to bring more of our equity work into our school is we created interdisciplinary PLC since equity is cross cat
1, 2	Informally, every decision that we make is made with those equity non negotiables. Okay, so everything about barriers with technology helping families, you know, allowing kids to get their needs met before they can learn, that was decisions we could make because we had those non negotiables in place. So, it did help us with our decision making, but, ideally we want to make that infused into all of everything that we do at the school level. So, our first interdisciplinary equity meeting or equity lesson was actually going over those equity non negotiables, because that's something that we want all of our teachers to be aware of, to know. In the future. I would like all of our presentations to relate back to an equity non-negotiable. At no point should a teacher be doing something that's not related to an equity non-negotiable.
5	You know we're still moving in the right direction but to get everybody on board at the proper place to implement those ethical practices, it's tough. We still have individuals that don't have that growth mindset towards this work, and it is more fixed mindset, especially some of our teachers that think they know everything and that's with any profession, they're just very stuck in their train of thought. They think they know what's best. It's kind of hard to get different perspectives and for them to see, you know, bigger picture. That's also a barrier that we get. And I'm going to say resources, sometimes we have these great ideas and we just don't have the funding to implement them.

7,8,9	I mean as an educator, my vision, my mission is to not just educate people at the academics, but when they leave school, that they're just kind people and they've experienced a lot, and they don't have those, you know, we're trying to limit the microaggressions , the bias, the stereotypes , the racist comments.
10, 12	I think curriculum should represent a lot of backgrounds. You know I think right now we talk about English classes. Like all the work is by "old white people" they say. You know, it's like diversify the curriculum and include all aspects or history
8, 9	I'm a big believer in knowledge and experience is our power. The more we know, the more we experience I think those biases stereotypes prejudices , will be knocked down. I think it's that lack of knowledge that makes us you know the way that we are, we are a person because of our experiences.
7,8, 33	Bias trainings and helping us understand our microaggressions , where we're at and what we can do to help us move forward, and how it affects us and the students learning
11	I would say right now we don't have a good accountability system.
11, 6, 20	But as far as that accountability. Unfortunately, the thing I guess we could say is we do look at student achievement data, and different types of SEL emotional, social, emotional , surveys that we give out to our kids. So I think that is a good baseline to see how our students are perceiving, our teachers, and also as how our teachers are teaching all of our students, you know, when we talk about the achievement gap with various subgroups of students is, you know, are our teachers connecting to all of our kids, you know, how do they feel in that classroom? so I think we do use that data as a part of accountability
6, 12	We try to have a diverse staff with our student body. We started off with social emotional learning program, which I think is imperative for like the transition we have a lot of open enrollment kids.
12, 16	We're trying to get kids more involved into things that they're interested in or how they identify and make them feel part of our culture. I think what's nice about our school district is that since it's always been very diverse, to make people feel comfortable, it's kind of always been there and I think we're a step above because we are so diverse, it's, it's been helpful.

13, 16	We have a very restorative approach to issues which I think also makes our culture, different than most. We prefer to talk through issues instead of just giving out consequences
14	I will say a big part of that by supporting these students is we have town hall meetings that students are allowed to go to
12, 16	Black History Month is one month but we celebrate that. We also celebrate International Women's month you know some people say, you know, diversity is accepting of all, and I think that's something that we're trying to get to at [District Diversity] is celebrating all of the diversity
21	We're not afraid to stand up for our kids. And although it may be a difficult conversation. These are conversations our district is willing to have. And I think that says a lot that we are, we're supportive of our students.
22	We have a social studies class that you know if we did not touch on this topic, you are allowed to research it on your own and present something that's close to you. So, some students decided to do the BLM Movement. We try to give our kids that opportunity. At our school district, it. We've had student protests, as long as they're peaceful.
15	We want to promote appropriate social justice , with our students.
16, 5	[Challenges] culture in general, just where our society is. Our staff and our students is not immune to that, there's a lot of people that have pushback. There's a lot of stuff on the Internet, whether it be true or not, they can find whatever viewpoint, they want to believe in, and they can find an article on it, whether it be completely right or wrong. So that has been a barrier for us is because there's been a lot of false information being spread or limited knowledge,
7, 8	It's a mixture of everything, and it's just open to be unable to be checked. And some people aren't willing to be checked because they go on the defense. We all have microaggressions , you know, at some point we've, you know, had different biases, and to understand it, and it's okay but your first thought, doesn't have to be your last thought
5	We're all evolving we're all changing but it's the people that don't want to evolve and change that is the biggest hurdle in and outside of our school because the school is really a community.

14	And we've also had more people try to help us. So instead of that whole relationship of "anti anti anti", now they're like, oh we see your movement let's join. Instead of being against we now have created a more community feel. We're all on this together. I know our superintendent, you know goes to town hall meetings, you know with our mayor, and just kind of talks about things that what we can do together to move this work forward
17	[Referencing] police brutality, and we still have an SRO officer, which I know a lot of schools, got rid of. And we did choose to keep it and I think that has been instrumental because we are creating those relationships better relationships like our police officer doesn't wear his gear at school. You know he's not decked out in his uniform. He's dressed in a polo and khakis and he has relationships with these kids and I think that has been great. That trying to talk with the police department and us and figuring out a way that we can work together to move us forward
18	The kids aren't the problem, really, you know, our kids are great, and I think our kids are more in tune with others then we give them credit for. You know it's the adults that we've been struggling with. Our kids are so open to different ideas like it's crazy, the mindset of our students, and they can come in and talk about kids and celebrate their differences and to see how they grow is why I am where I am. And they teach me more about this work than I could ever get from ICS, or anything that structure that I could read an article, the kids teach me more about this anti-racism, than I could get from anybody else. And maybe, adults and older people kind of need to take a lesson from.
18, 1, 19	I think a big part of this anti-racist equity work is being vulnerable and accepting where you are in this journey. And if you can't accept where you are in this journey, and truly reflect on who you are. It's not going to go anywhere.

District Diversity: Ms. Rogers / District Personnel	
Coder JML: Code #	Quotes

1, 3, 33	ICS equity training. And so, there was a, so we hosted, and we took a crew of teachers to, to that piece. There were not building administrators, there was one district administrator, along with myself who, who did participate as well as a handful of elementary middle and high school teachers, and so, so that was our first kind of exposure to this idea that, given the ICS framework and the four quadrants
2, 8, 28	That first quadrant is really your, your outcome before you can get into the second one is really like your non negotiables, understanding the history of inherent bias and racism, you know, as it exists. And so, so doing that, we knew that this was going to be something that we needed to probably develop.
1, 2, 33	We had training here in the district so it might have been 2.5 or three years into the journey. We, we had professional learning from [Beth Smith] and [Eileen Jones] to come into the district, and then provide district wide training. So, we had everyone, literally, with the exception of crossing guards and potentially the lunch staff, but they may even have participated, but custodians participated in everything. So, so we, so we kind of, and then from there, you know the administrative training continued, and then we then ended up as an administrative team then fleshing out what you see, what we would call our "equity for excellence." So [that] became board policy rather than our, what we consider our equity non negotiables, then transformed into that board policy.
17, 26	I think what COVID has done, as well as kind of the social climate that exists, especially around, George Floyd, Briana Taylor, you know, and then the most two recent incidences. I think what that has done is, in general, it has really accelerated people's understanding as to what inequities do exist.

5	So whether that happens through, you know, financial, you know, access to broadband access to devices, child care, health care, you know, you know, housing, you know, all of those pieces, I think what it has done is that it's just really kind of.. so that started in March, right. So through that lens and just saying, oh my god, you know, and so with our districts too, you know we are 80% people of color. We are a over 60% free and reduced lunch. You know people have a device, but it's this [holds up cell phone], you know it's not a functioning device that that one could do schoolwork on, and so I think that what it really did was just shine a light on, you know, so we've had this training, and then like people are like, Yeah, but we're good, we're good. Yeah, and it's like, ah, no we're not.
17, 21	Unfortunately, the murder of George Floyd. On top of that, you know, and I think that it looks at the death of George right so, you know, on top of that, and I think then what it did do was it really provided a pivot point for us in our district to examine kind of who we are
5, 12	I would say, 15%, at best, in terms of instructional staff, I would say maybe 20% of our staff. If you included custodians which is very heavily represented minorities, you know, as is our educational assistants. We're probably 50%, people of color. In our teaching staff, I would say we are woefully, probably, maybe less than 10%, you know, so maybe 10%. So, I think when you add that up, you know we are. It's so we have, we kind of have that that core. You know that core group of them, but I think majority of us are white.
20, 26, 28	It's fascinating to see because we are a microcosm of the United States. Like, so what issues we face in terms of student achievement or racial equity or educational gaps. You know we are we are representative in terms of, of the United States and our transition of where we have been over the last 10 years or so.
30	I think that what we did as a district I think people were just thrown off kilter, like it was just a smack in the face and people were like, I don't know what to do and we have kids that are just in a state of trauma , and as white adults, we had no means to cope, like we have these principles, it's like, sure this is what we do. But we don't really do this

8, 14, 26, 28	Our superintendent created a forum called "Live at Five", and what it was is, it's a monthly forum that allowed people to kind of get together and just to talk and to share. And I think just a process, but I think people, it was a pivot point for our district, so that we could. I think start to have these conversations about what that first quadrant really was about historical bias, historical racism inequities in our systems, and so, so what "Live at five" did was it allowed, I think white teachers to learn from our colleagues of color.
17, 22, 28, 30	There were some very large concerns about trying to meet the needs of kids, and the trauma that they were facing as a result of this unrest , you know, we had protests in Milwaukee, we had students participate in, we had adults participating, and, you know, how do we make sense of all of this, and, and I think that it, it truly was a tipping point for us, as well as the fact that our new superintendent was going to be a woman of color, and, and I think when we, when we look at that and having her kind of lead us through that was, it has been absolutely essential because she is completely honest and transparent about the issues that she has. And when we talk about racism and policing, you know she shares personal stories, and people are just their jaws just drop, you know, and because of who she is where she's at where she's at now, but yet, this could still happen.
31	With this in mind, we had to really, as we're starting to pull together, and looking at grading , you know. How do we grade kids when they don't have access to technology? You know, kids are trying to connect but they're on their phone or some are working, because their parents have lost their jobs or some are caring for children and, you know, so how do we do this?
31	So how do we afford students, the benefit of the doubt and an opportunity? And so that started with the first piece was, was changing our grading system. And so saying like, so we call it COVID grading . But really what it is is it's best practices for grading in general, you know, so when we talk about a traditional Cardinal scale. You know we don't, you know, there are no zeros, you know, the bottom, you know is 50% because zero is unattainable. It's like you cannot, you can never recover from that, you know, and I think so looking at those practices and then and then potentially moving them toward Pass Fail incomplete
31	This is an equitable grading process given everything that is taking place and happening

<p>8, 21, 28</p>	<p>During our professional learning days, we met with, I'm going to totally jack up her name, and I'm going to remember it in a minute. But, we were talking about bias, inherent bias and racial bias, and, She was phenomenal. So, an African American woman. Loyola, Madison PhD. She lives here in Milwaukee, a woman of color, lesbian, kind of hitting all the checkboxes, but you're just, you know, so see, but then walking us through these processes and then understanding, and then having the talk with our colleagues and it was interesting because I often wonder if we would have been able to have those conversations, had we not been virtual because what she could do. She put us in virtual breakout rooms, and you had to talk, it's for people, yeah and you're like, Okay, so you know and no right or wrong answers</p>
<p>10, 29</p>	<p>Our next step is to really to start whittling away at some of the curricular pieces. When we talk about culturally responsive curriculum as a librarian, I can tell you, when I started just as a library director in a library and 18 years ago, I walked into our libraries and I was absolutely horrified, because we have, as I see our district changing we were about 30% 35% of color. Then, in our schools. And yet we had, you know, no. Like I always feel like that a kid could walk into a library and be able to find a book that it's just like them, represents them, you know, represents them. So, whether it's their family life, their color, their hair, you know, their interests, their passions, whatever, you know, and so, so that has been a Genesis. So this is something that we get in what we do in our in our library program and we have, we have made leaps and bounds.</p>
<p>32</p>	<p>We've pushed and we've challenged the English language arts, to, to move away from, from potentially harmful classics, and "dead white men", to bring in more contemporary authors and and studies, you know, so that we can, we can have, you know, better conversations about those things, and kids, kids can identify.</p>

10, 32	<p>You know the history books are not so great. So, we are you know so we can kind of create our own curriculum, and what we had was we had an additional member added to the part that department, a woman of color who happens to have a background in African American historic studies, so. So then to be able to offer that perspective in what the kids what they're doing now. Now, so for example, one of the lessons that they did a few weeks ago was about redlining absolutely phenomenal. But my other colleague who's one of my besties, said, We never would have done that I never would have thought of that. But again, it's, it's about kind of the diversification and the representation and experiences of the staff members that are adding these, these little layers, you know to us that will that will help, and, and I think that, you know we can</p>
19, 21	<p>And then, you know, and then when you then start to talk about white fragility and then you have white woman's tears, you know, which is like, she says I can't believe I did that, you know, and then I read the book and then we you know we can have a conversation with my superintendent who's African American and it's just like it's okay, it's okay, don't worry about it you know like it's okay you're growing you're recognizing this and you're right and, you know, so I think that those are all pieces that are, are really, you know, just kind of part of our Genesis and our in our journey</p>
12	<p>We have a new woman of color, who is the superintendent, we have a Director of Teaching and Learning, who is of color, we have a director of Pupil services, as a woman of color. So we're, we're starting we have our elementary and our high school principal, You know our people of color. Again, just the representation that allows the dialogue, to be different, and to happen, our athletic director is a man of color, so I think that we just are looking at. Look, you know those, it does help us kind of evolve and we can have different kinds of conversations, whether we're there yet as a staff to really dive in and understand what this means, but I do feel, we started to peel back the onion, a little bit and it's just it's gonna, gonna take time.</p>
5, 15	<p>So here's the trap, so this is what I will tell you. So, as a, as a white woman trying to think like I know what's best in regards to social justice because the publishing industry tells me like these are, these are diverse titles and this is what's best for you know x y and z, and you know and then the kids come in and they're like, and then there's a white lady trying to sell it to him, you know, and then I think and they're like, yeah, that is crazy.</p>

32	<p>How she sells a book to a kid is way different than I would sell it because I would maybe take a book like Rick Brierton, like the King Chronicles, which is about Egyptian mythology. So, and kids just love them so and so. But I would I would recognize this is a this is a young black boy, I'm going to then try to find a book that's about a young black boy he really likes Percy Jackson and the only bit so I'm going to start on this title. But yeah, I'm just gonna say, oh, it's about Egyptian mythology, you know, and I'm making all these cultural assumptions and he understands like Egypt as part of Africa and then therefore he would be black and he would be, you know these main characters, whereas then [Dorothy] just goes up and goes, it's an awesome book, lots of magic, lots of adventure, black kid, and the kids like, I'll take it. You know, and it's like and it's one of those things where, again, I, it's, It's one of those things that we all have value added assets, and I can wear my asset is, is to help [Dorothy] be successful through through budget, through coaching</p>
1, 32	<p>I think for us, one of the key turnarounds here at the middle of high school especially, is, is that representation, and, and that is truly I think going to be the crux of education and for [District A] our success is really going to be dependent on on that because that's how we're going to be able to connect with the new families that we have coming into the district, the majority of the families that represent them and so on. And then, you know and I and I feel and then the diversity of the programming, you're talking about creating opportunities so it's because equity just isn't about race, it's about, you know, how we can we classify special education, you know, opportunities for children but it also representation and advanced courses, things like that, you know, making sure that you know we're not pushing kids in one direction versus the other. And, and so just all of those opportunities but, but coming through with those lenses and, you know, but I think that for us. That has been our biggest transformation is, is having that that representation there and, you know, and, and that's been huge</p>
15	<p>I'm like, okay, so we're gonna come up with a social justice list. It's a theme for one of the language arts classes, so I come up with my list, she comes up with her list, and they're different, which is okay. Yeah, so we have some crossover but what my view of social justice is and what her view is and what's gonna sell to kids, it's just different. And, and that's okay.</p>

32	<p>We're in the process and it's an ugly business, It's a messy business, and I think I feel like we may not be in the same place that that others are, but then yet I also know that we are. Maybe lightyears ahead from others as well. So, you know, And I think we're where, you know where we shouldn't compare ourselves to anybody else or anything like that but we're just um, But I think that this next year, you know, with, with your friend leaving, and stuff like that as well as there's a massive changeover and administration, and we have interviews, and there are some phenomenal candidates that are that are coming in potentially with, you know, who, who could offer us a different assets and, you know, and move us forward in this process and. And I think it's, it's exciting, but, but it's, it's hard work but it's so worthwhile.</p>
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District Homogenous: Ms. Williams / School-Based Personnel	
Coder JML: Code #	Quotes
1, 2	<p>She has done some reports on our equity and inclusion work, and part of what she noted in there was an opportunity for us to look at setting non negotiables.</p>
23	<p>Inclusion means it doesn't just mean special education. And so we were able to start working on some of the other identified areas that might be more embedded in our cultural ways, that would be harder to get up, but starting somewhere is where you have to be right so that's where we are now</p>
1, 12, 23	<p>I'm not sure that I can say that, specifically in [District Homogenous] we push out and say we want to be anti-racist or we want to focus in on anti-racism, we come at it from a perspective of diversity, equity and inclusion</p>

16, 10, 24	But I think we do outside consultants we do internal book clubs we have professional learning communities that supportive. We also host a camp that I know some of the breakout sessions will promote that as well and we'll provide learning on that of how to be more culturally sensitive. I also know that our curriculum teams review. The books that are on our reading list, and are looking at them more closely to make sure that there is representation from a variety of cultures, included in those books, and making sure that there's not an over representation of white privilege in them.
2, 25, 26, 33	We also have opportunities for self-reflection . We have the ENN work group that's going on right now where we eliminate our inequities for all students. And part of that is to have a self-reflection component to it, making sure that we're using equity and equality understandings accurately, and knowing that what is fair isn't always equal
3	So, we have the tools as a system and as professionals, to, to call each other on some of the different moments that may happen, unintentionally, but that have big impact.
3, 23, 27, 33	iSummit-- I have the privilege of being a part of that team that gets to work and setting that up, it's super cool. It started several years back, and the iSummits purpose is to bring equity inclusion to light, and to invite up parties to the table. So it is an opportunity for us as the school district of [District Homogenous] to bring our teams together and attend an opportunity like this as a team, not just people who are in by title, special Education. And the purpose of that is to have the outside professionals to come in and really talk about how to get motivated behind inclusive practices, how do we listen to stories from other people who may have felt a lack of belonging, within a school system for some areas that they felt marginalized by, be it LGBTQ, be it gender, be it race.
26	I would say that it's really about understanding the perception of what's going on within the building. Especially if we have anything that comes to our brought to our attention that there is a level of inequity, that's going on
1	So, I firmly believe that when leadership is aware that stuff is going on. They respond and then do more than just respond we build systems of equity to support it and sustain it.

1, 12, 23, 14, 21	I also know that we didn't feel that we had the, the opportunity to have the conversation with our community around diversity, equity and inclusion. And so we did host that professional learning opportunity with the two alum, that also have a local business in the area that they present around the nation, and teach at the collegial level in regards to diversity, equity and inclusion. We open that up to our staff in the evenings as well as to our families. And, so it was a collaborative conversation opportunity for us to listen to what the presenters were sharing but then also engaged collectively as a community in what's going on. And that was in a direct response to making sure that voices felt like they were being heard and that we were setting a stage of transparency and understanding of diversity and equity and inclusion.
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District Homogenous: Ms. Scott / District Personnel	
Coder JML: Code #	Quotes
12, 23	And as we've continued to grow our work around inclusive practices, and really think about how we're meeting the needs of diverse population from a variety of identities, whether that be students disabilities, students who are English language learners, students who maybe have school based mental health concerns just a wide variety of types of students that we serve. And knowing that the work that we needed to do in that area continues to grow. And the decision was made to add Assistant Superintendent of teaching and learning for student services. In addition to the assistant superintendent for curriculum instruction.
3, 27	So integrated programs and services, and really a core belief of your work is, until you make a concerted effort as a system to interrupt systematic ways of doing things that perpetuates barriers for all students to access opportunities. You can do lots of packets of things but you're probably not going to get that more systematic outcome. So, we have done a lot of learning around history of marginalization for non-dominant groups in the areas of disability, and the areas of race, in the areas of gender, just all the different isms.
8	We often make those decisions from that place of our own experiences. And so in a community like ours, it's very easy to make, to kind of forget that you also serve other populations, and other types of a family unit, that might not look like yours. That implicit bias of what's your go to thought when you think of a family.

28	There's traditionally not really big, like a flashy things that would be headlines of racism or things that feel oppressive, but it's the collection of 1000 times paper cuts of things that happen over time, that start to reinforce at a really young age I'm different, and the different might mean less valued, or begins to perpetuate that sense of other reasons, know that you don't belong because you're doing.
5	I think the political rhetoric that has been permeating communities. Over the last over four years, continues to be a challenge
5, 1, 18	Strong void of people that probably would self-prescribe them self, self-identify as a patriot and Republican and conservative, and have a very strong viewpoint of what it means to be a family, what it means to have some of those identities that are the dominant culture, and have some really strong feelings about maintaining a hold on those things. And that has been a huge barrier, where members are public official, they're reflected. And so, their job is to work on behalf of the people that elected them. And so, when there's a contingency of people that are very vocal against this kind of work. I think the current rhetoric is, you know, when we're talking about an equity, Anti-racist curriculum, or we're default saying that we currently are, at least, because we need an anti-racist curriculum, right.
2, 16, 5, 27	Language is just a lightning rod, a current draft of equity non negotiables talks about decentering, the dominant culture. And that is very offensive to some people, even before maybe they have a true understanding of what do we need in our current contemporary situation, I think those right now. That's the biggest barrier, and people being willing to come together to seek to be curious and being curious about, I don't understand what you mean when you talk about prioritizing historically marginalized groups, what does that mean and help me understand. Instead of getting more anger out of, "you can't prioritize marginalized groups because what about me? You know I'm a dominant culture."

29, 8, 12	A lot of people, people hear non-discrimination and think, you know, most of the training around race and ethnicity would really go back to culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally relevant responsibility in whether you're thinking about that or you're thinking about, you know, how do we teach, educators, evidence based practices about how you best serve students [with] disabilities, you know, we think about any of the different groups. You know all that work really starts with examining your own beliefs, examining your own bias, and really having people dive in. I think when you think about kind of a racial reckoning, that's happening across the country. In response to really kick it off you know from George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis, I think a lot of people are stepping back and saying, "What do I think about this, what maybe am I doing that I'm not even aware of, you know, where did that come from, what are my own personal stories and histories with diversity and race and ethnicity"
8	We're working towards helping people understand how that implicit and explicit bias creeps into our practice
5, 29, 14	So I think it's you know it's two things at once, we are not going to solve this problem, person by person by person, we're going to solve these challenges and these barriers by thinking about it systemically, what do we need to do at a systemic and policy level, but then, what do we also need to do to develop people personally because these are really sensitive topics in many, many communities. And so the number one thing is you know what sound pedagogy, and what is training for educators to engage in conversations around sensitive topics in a way that they feel safe and supported and empowered
21	Talking about race and talking about any of the isms, it's a muscle, and you have to build it, because I don't, I don't even go back to all the ground rules about having courageous conversations.

10	<p>We feel that there's, you know a way to look at our curriculum, you know. What is our board approved curriculum and how are we making sure that it is reflective of a broader perspective. You know, kind of, that Anglo Saxon European history perspective right so there's lots of tools that have been put out by the organization, formerly known as Teaching Tolerance. There's lots of really great resources out there that systems can use to do audits of the materials that you're using your textbooks your, your curriculum your standards to making sure that they there's really a more robust representation.</p>
1, 12, 21	<p>This year we started a survey, and it's around, you know, equity, and belonging. And it's a survey that we gave to sixth through 12th grade students, and then, kindergarten through 12th grade educators, and it talks a lot about you know, diversity and how comfortable you feel [inaudible] and you know we're asking kids how do you feel when you want to talk about conversations that involve race. Do you feel like educators will do this with you? A lot of them were like, we want to talk about it, and everybody seems scared of it</p>
20	<p>If you look at our demographics and you look at our performance data. If you're a student in this district who identifies as Asian, you're typically going to be outperforming your white counterparts. Now if you're part of that population that identifies as black, the 3%, you are much more likely to be identified as a student of disability, you are much more likely to have disciplinary consequences that are not in concert with your white counterparts. And you're definitely not achieving at a higher rate than students peers who identify as white. So, our diversity around just talking about people of color, as a whole, is, is really different. And so, we have to be really careful when we talk about what is the lived experience about being black, indigenous, or a person of color in this district. Because we don't have, you don't have the same lived experience to identify as black, or to identify as Asian. And so, we have to really almost dig past that and get more specific around. And let's face it, these, these constructs of race or human developed category.</p>
5	<p>So we're having conversations with our black student unions, our families of students who are Black to really specifically understand, you know what, what is happening in their lives that are barriers and are preventing them from having a level of successes, and that's going to really specifically address, what does it mean to be black in this community, because it's different than what does it mean to be Asian.</p>

21	I think our survey data really told us what we had been feeling is that kids want to talk about really hard things. And they don't feel like the grown-ups, or the teachers and adults in their spaces are willing to create the opportunity for that critical lens of sensitive topics, and what might be viewed as more challenging.
21, 14	I think that they want to talk about hard stuff. We've got parents though that feel that that doesn't have a place in school. Some that do and some that don't, and you know when our teachers have students write about their thoughts and feelings about, for example, you know, the NFL and their stance about kneeling during the national anthem and its protests for how black Americans or, you know, people of color, black, have been treated, you know, and the principal gets 14 phone calls about why are you promoting, you know? Right, so there's this, there's this push, pull between what are kids craving, what do teachers want to engage kids in and what families feel are that appropriate and there's so much local context to that, that it's hard, but I think that that is.

Table of Codes			
1	Equity	17	police brutality
2	Equity non-negotiables	18	antiracism
3	ICS (integrated collaborative systems)	19	vulnerability
4	PLCs (professional learning communities)	20	achievement gap
5	Barriers	21	difficult/courageous conversations
6	SEL (social and emotional learning)	22	BLM, protests
7	microaggression	23	Inclusion
8	bias	24	White privilege
9	stereotypes	25	self-reflection
10	curriculum	26	inequalities
11	accountability	27	marginalization
12	diversity	28	racism, oppression
13	restorative approach	29	culturally relevant pedagogy
14	town hall/community	30	trauma
15	social justice	31	equitable grading
16	culture	32	representative resources/books/personnel
		33	professional development/training

Common themes - RED
Unique to Interview w/ Ms. Smith (District A)
Unique to Interview w/ Ms. Rogers (District A)
Unique to Interview w/ Ms. Williams (District B)
Unique to Interview w/ Ms. Scott (District B)

APPENDIX F

Coding Cycle #3: Exemplary Quotes by Section

Exemplary Quotes: Findings Section “District Academics, Enrollment Data, and Overall Mission”		
Participant	Quote	Theme(s)
Ms. Scott / District Homogenous	A majority of our students that represent people of color are students who would identify as Asian. And that population is historically from India or from China. And most of the families are here as international families. And so, you know, they come with a very high expectations, very high level of value of education and rigor. So, when we look at our data and pull it apart, it’s really interesting because if you look at our demographics and you look at our performance data. If you’re a student in this district who identifies as Asian, you’re typically going to be outperforming your white counterparts. Now if you’re part of that population that identifies as black, the 3%, you are much more likely to be identified as a student of disability, you are much more likely to have disciplinary consequences that are not in concert with your white counterparts. And you’re definitely not achieving at a higher rate than students peers who identify as white.	Achievement Gap

Exemplary Quotes: Findings Section: Equity Based Practices and Defining Equity Non-Negotiables		
Participant	Quote	Theme(s)
Ms. Smith / District Diversity	Informally, every decision that we make is made with those equity non negotiables. Okay, so everything about barriers with technology, helping families, you know, allowing kids to get their needs met before they can learn, that was decisions we could make because we had those non-negotiables in place. So, it did help us with our decision making, but ideally, we want to make that infused into all of everything that we do at the school level.	Equity, Equity Non-negotiables
	I mean as an educator, my vision, my mission is to not just educate people at the academics, but when they leave school, that they’re just kind people and they’ve experienced a lot.	Microaggressions, Bias, Stereotypes

	We're trying to limit the microaggressions, the bias, the stereotypes, the racist comments.	
	I'm a big believer in knowledge and experience is our power. The more we know, the more we experience. I think those biases, stereotypes, prejudices, will be knocked down. I think it's that lack of knowledge that makes us you know the way that we are, we are a person because of our experiences.	Stereotypes, Bias, Prejudices
Ms. Rogers / District Diversity	I think what COVID has done, as well as kind of the social climate that exists, especially around, George Floyd, Briana Taylor, you know, and then the most two recent incidences. I think what that has done is, in general, it has really accelerated people's understanding as to what inequities do exist.	Police Brutality, Inequalities
	I think that what we did as a district I think people were just thrown off kilter, like it was just a smack in the face and people were like, I don't know what to do and we have kids that are just in a state of trauma, and as white adults, we had no means to cope, like we have these principles, it's like, sure this is what we do. But we don't really do this	Trauma
Ms. Williams / District Homogenous	I'm not sure that I can say that, specifically in [District Homogenous] we push out and say we want to be anti-racist or we want to focus in on anti-racism, we come at it from a perspective of diversity, equity and inclusion.	Equity, Diversity, Inclusion
	We have the ENN work group that's going on right now where we eliminate our inequities for all students. And part of that is to have a self-reflection component to it, making sure that we're using equity and equality understandings accurately, and knowing that what is fair isn't always equal.	Equity Non-negotiables, Self-reflection, Inequalities, Professional Development/Training
Ms. Scott / District Homogenous	As we've continued to grow our work around inclusive practices, and really think about how we're meeting the needs of diverse population from a variety of identities, whether that be students disabilities, students who are English language learners, students who maybe have school based mental health concerns just a wide variety of types of students that we serve. And knowing that the	Diversity, Inclusion

	work that we needed to do in that area continues to grow.	
	You know all that work really starts with examining your own beliefs, examining your own bias, and really having people dive in. I think when you think about kind of a racial reckoning that's happening across the country. In response to... George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis, I think a lot of people are stepping back and saying, "What do I think about this, what maybe am I doing that I'm not even aware of, where did that come from, what are my own personal stories and histories with diversity and race and ethnicity?"	Bias, Racism/Oppression, Diversity
	We're working towards helping people understand how that implicit and explicit bias creeps into our practice.	Bias

Exemplary Quotes: Findings Section: Professional Development and Training Opportunities for Staff/Educators		
Participant	Quote	Theme(s)
Ms. Smith / District Diversity	We have professional learning days. We have this bias training. We have a professor that comes in that teaches us about different bias training and helping us understand our microaggressions, where we're at and what we can do to help move us forward.	Bias, Professional Development/Training
	[The students] teach me more about this work that I could get from ICS... the kids teach me more about antiracism than I could get from anybody else.	Antiracism
Ms. Rogers / District Diversity	We had professional learning from Beth Smith and Eileen Jones, and they provided district wide training. So, we had everyone, literally, with the exception of crossing guards and potentially the lunch staff, but they may have even participated.	Professional Development/Training
	During our professional learning days, we talk about bias, inherent bias and racial bias. [The speaker] was an African American woman, Loyola, Madison, PhD. She lives here in Milwaukee, a woman of color, lesbian, kind of hitting all the checkboxes... It was interesting because I wonder if we would	Bias, Professional Development/Training

	have been able to have those conversations, had we not been virtual because... she put us in virtual break out rooms and you had to talk.	
Ms. Williams / District Homogenous	The purpose of that [iSummit] is to have outside professionals come in and really talk about how to get motivated behind inclusive practices, how do we listen to stories from other people who may have felt a lack of belonging within a school system for some areas that they felt marginalized by, be it LGBTQ, be it gender, be it race.	ICS, Inclusion, Marginalization, Professional Development/Training
	We also host a camp that I know some of the breakout sessions will promote that as well and we'll provide learning on... how to be more culturally sensitive.	Culture
Ms. Scott / District Homogenous	Really a core belief of our work is, until you make a concerted effort as a system to interrupt systematic ways of doing things that perpetuated barriers for all students to access opportunities. You can do lots of packets of things but you're probably not going to get that more systematic outcome. So, we have done a lot of learning around history of marginalization for non-dominant groups in the areas of disability, and the areas of race, in the areas of gender, just all the different "isms."	Marginalization
	Most of the training around race and ethnicity would really go back to culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally relevant responsibility in whether you're thinking about that... you're thinking about, how do we teach educators evidence-based practices about how you best serve students.	Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Exemplary Quotes:		
Findings Section: Community Relationships and Resources Made Available to Families		
Participant	Quote	Theme(s)
Ms. Smith / District Diversity	And we've also had more people try to help us. So instead of that whole relationship of "anti, anti, anti", now they're like, oh we see your movement, let's join. Instead of being against, we now have created a more community feel. We're all on this together. I	Community

	know our superintendent... goes to town hall meetings... with our mayor, and just kind of talks about things that what we can do together to move this work forward	
	We still have an SRO officer, which I know a lot of schools got rid of. And we did choose to keep him. I think that has been instrumental because we are creating those relationships, better relationships. Like, our police officer doesn't wear his gear at school. You know, he's not decked out in his uniform. He's dressed in a polo and khakis and he has relationships with these kids. I think that has been great. Trying to talk with the police department and us and figuring out a way that we can work together to move us forward	Community, Police Brutality
Ms. Rogers / District Diversity	Our superintendent created a forum called "Live at Five." It's a monthly forum that allows people to kind of get together and just to talk and to share. And I think... it was a pivot point for our district, so that we could... start to have these conversations about what that first [ICS] quadrant really was about. Historical bias, historical racism, inequities in our system.	Bias, Community, Inequalities, Racism, ICS
Ms. Williams / District Homogenous	I also know we didn't feel that we had the opportunity to have the conversation with our community around diversity, equity and inclusion. So, we did host that professional learning opportunity with equity with two alum, that also have a local business in the area... and they teach at the collegial level in regards to diversity, equity and inclusion. We open that up to our staff... as well as to our families. It was a collaborative conversation opportunity for us to listen to what the presenters were sharing but then also engaged collectively as a community in what's going on.	Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Community

Ms. Scott / District Homogenous	It's hard to find the counterparts that have done the work ahead of us and really felt like what worked, what didn't work, what lessons are to be learned. So, I think that's what we're trying to build... A really strong open communication between the people you serve and the people you've served in the past— what was going and not good. And what could we do differently.	Community
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Exemplary Quotes: Findings Section: Accountability Measures and Barriers to Implementation		
Participant	Quote	Theme(s)
Ms. Smith / District Diversity	The kids aren't the problem, really, you know, our kids are great. I think are kids are more in tune with others then we give them credit for. You know, it's the adults that we've been struggling with. Our kids are so open to different ideas like, it's crazy.	Barriers
	When we try to take two steps forward, it's constantly a step back. You know we're still moving in the right direction but to get everybody on board at the proper place to implement those ethical practices, it's tough. We still have individuals that don't have that growth mindset towards this work, and it is more fixed mindset, especially some of our teachers that think they know everything and that's with any profession, they're just very stuck in their train of thought. They think they know what's best. It's kind of hard to get different perspectives and for them to see, you know, bigger picture.	Barriers
	It's a mixture of everything, and it's just open to be unable to be checked. And some people aren't willing to be checked because they go on the defense. We all have microaggressions, you know, at some point we've, you know, had different biases, and to understand it, and it's okay but your first thought, doesn't have to be your last thought.	Microaggressions, Bias, Barriers
	Some people [are] like, I'm not racist, I'm not racist. And then they don't listen to anything. Right. And that is also a huge	Barriers, Marginalization

	<p>barrier and trying to move this forward is people understanding the history of the marginalization, you know, minority groups. If you don't understand that history, you're never going to get where we're going, moving forward, in other people's path. So, it's hard work but we can do it.</p>	
<p>Ms. Rogers / District Diversity</p>	<p>I think that what we did as a district I think people were just thrown off kilter, like it was just a smack in the face and people were like, I don't know what to do and we have kids that are just in a state of trauma, and as white adults, we had no means to cope, like we have these principles, it's like, sure this is what we do. But we don't really do this</p>	<p>Trauma, Barriers</p>
	<p>So here's the trap, so this is what I will tell you. So, as a, as a white woman trying to think like I know what's best in regards to social justice because the publishing industry tells me like these are, these are diverse titles, and this is what's best for you, know x y and z... and then the kids come in and they're like, and then there's a white lady trying to sell it to him, you know, and then I think and they're like, yeah, that is crazy.</p>	<p>Barriers</p>
<p>Ms. Williams / District Homogenous</p>	<p>I think that we are in a predominantly white, affluent neighborhood, and we are a district that supports 70% predominantly white, white learners and we have our staff ratios [that] do not go with the 30% of minority, demographics, so I would say our community is working to towards that.</p>	<p>Barriers</p>
<p>Ms. Scott / District Homogenous</p>	<p>We often make those decisions from that place of our own experiences. And, so, in a community like ours, it's very easy to make, to kind of forget that you also serve other populations, and other types of a family unit, that might not look like yours. That implicit bias of what's your go to thought when you think of a family.</p>	<p>Community, Bias</p>

	<p>I think the political rhetoric that has been permeating communities over the last, over four years, continues to be a challenge. You know, as a, as a school district, our board's work is really to be nonpartisan. Again, we serve all the kids who come through our door. And that's changed, but we do live in an area of the country where we have a relatively strong void of people that probably would self-prescribe them self, self-identify as a patriot and Republican and conservative, and have a very strong viewpoint of what it means to be a family, what it means to have some of those identities that are the dominant culture, and have some really strong feelings about maintaining a hold on those things</p>	<p>Barriers</p>
	<p>Language is just a lightning rod, a current draft of equity non negotiables talks about decentering, the dominant culture. And that is very offensive to some people, even before maybe they have a true understanding of what do we need in our current contemporary situation, I think those right now. That's the biggest barrier, and people being willing to come together to seek to be curious and being curious about, I don't understand what you mean when you talk about prioritizing historically marginalized groups, what does that mean and help me understand. Instead of getting more anger out of, "you can't prioritize marginalized groups because what about me? You know I'm a dominant culture."</p>	<p>Equity Non-negotiables, Barriers, Marginalization</p>

Exemplary Quotes:		
Findings Section: (What May Not Be Called) "Antiracism: What it Looks Like in Practice"		
Participant	Quote	Theme(s)
Ms. Smith / District Diversity	Equity should be a basis of all of our teaching.	Equity
	I think a big part of this antiracist, equity work is being vulnerable and accepting where you are in this journey. And it you can't accept where you are in this journey, and truly reflect on who are you, it's not going to go anywhere.	Equity, Antiracism

	The kids teach me more about this antiracism than I could get from anybody else.	Antiracism
Ms. Rogers / District Diversity	How do we grade kids when they don't have access to technology? You know, kids are trying to connect but they're on their phone or some are working, because their parents have lost their jobs or some are caring for children and, you know, so how do we do this? So how do we afford students, the benefit of the doubt and an opportunity? And so that started with the first piece was, was changing our grading system. And so, saying like, so we call it COVID grading. But really what it is, it's best practices for grading in general... This is an equitable grading process given everything that is taking place and happening.	Equity, Equitable Grading
	We've pushed and we've challenged the English language arts, to, to move away from, from potentially harmful classics, and "dead white men", to bring in more contemporary authors and studies, you know, so that we can, we can have, you know, better conversations about those things, and kids, kids can identify.	Representative Resources/Books/Personnel
	You know the history books are not so great. So, we are you know so we can kind of create our own curriculum, and what we had was we had an additional member added to the part that department, a woman of color who happens to have a background in African American historic studies, so. So then to be able to offer that perspective in what the kids what they're doing now.	Curriculum
Ms. Williams / District Homogenous	I'm not sure that I can say that, specifically in [District Homogenous] we push out and say we want to be anti-racist or we want to focus in on anti-racism, we come at it from a perspective of diversity, equity and inclusion.	Antiracism, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion
	I also know that our curriculum teams review the books that are on our reading list, and are looking at them more closely	Curriculum, White Privilege

	to make sure that there is representation from a variety of cultures, included in those books, and making sure that there's not an over representation of white privilege in them.	
	I believe that all of our students' voices are encouraged to be heard. I know our superintendent holds listening sessions with students in particular, he does it with staff, as well as parents, but he does invite students to speak to him freely about topics that are concerning.	Difficult/Courageous Conversations
	So, I firmly believe that when leadership is aware that stuff is going on. They respond and then do more than just respond. We build systems of equity to support it and sustain it.	Equity
Ms. Scott / District Homogenous	A lot of people, people hear non-discrimination and think, you know, most of the training around race and ethnicity would really go back to culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally relevant responsibility in whether you're thinking about that or you're thinking about, you know, how do we teach, educators, evidence based practices about how you best serve students [with] disabilities, you know, we think about any of the different groups.	Culturally Relevant Pedagogy
	You know all that work really starts with examining your own beliefs, examining your own bias, and really having people dive in. I think when you think about kind of a racial reckoning, that's happening across the country. In response to really kick it off you know from George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis, I think a lot of people are stepping back and saying, "What do I think about this, what maybe am I doing that I'm not even aware of, you know, where did that come from, what are my own personal stories and histories with diversity and race and ethnicity" or you know any of those other places. So, I think that, you know, we're, we're working towards helping people understand how	Bias, Police Brutality, Diversity, Bias

	<p>that implicit and explicit bias creeps into our practice.</p>	
	<p>So, I think it's, you know, it's two things at once. We are not going to solve this problem, person by person by person, we're going to solve these challenges and these barriers by thinking about it systemically, what do we need to do at a systemic and policy level, but then, what do we also need to do to develop people personally because these are really sensitive topics in many, many communities. And so, the number one thing is you know what sound pedagogy, and what is training for educators to engage in conversations around sensitive topics in a way that they feel safe and supported and empowered. I mean, to me, talking about race and talking about any of the isms, it's a muscle, and you have to build it, because I don't, I don't even go back to all the ground rules about having courageous conversations.</p>	<p>Barriers, Difficult/Courageous Conversations, Community</p>

APPENDIX G

IRB Approval #21.233



Department of University Safety & Assurances

Melody Harries
IRB Administrator
Institutional Review Board
Engelmann 270
P. O. Box 413
Milwaukee, WI 53201-0413
414-662-3544

New Study - Notice of IRB Exempt Status

Date: February 25, 2021

To: Marie Sandy
Dept: Administrative Leadership

CC: Jennifer Luken

IRB #: 21.233
Title: Anti-Racist Education - Luken

uwm.edu/irb
harries@uwm.edu

After review of your research protocol by the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Institutional Review Board, your protocol has been granted Exempt Status under **Category 2** as governed by 45 CFR 46.104(d).

This protocol has been approved as exempt for three years and IRB approval will expire on **February 24, 2024**. Before the expiration date, you will receive an email explaining how to either keep the study open or close it. If the study is completed before the expiration date, you may notify the IRB by sending an email to irbinfo@uwm.edu with the study number and the status.

Any proposed changes to the protocol must be reviewed by the IRB before implementation, unless the change is specifically necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. You are responsible for adhering to the policies and guidelines set forth by the UWM IRB, maintaining proper documentation of study records and promptly reporting to the IRB any adverse events which require reporting. You are also responsible for ensuring that all study staff receive appropriate training in the ethical guidelines of conducting human subjects research.

You must also adhere to UWM and UW System Policies, and any applicable state and federal laws governing activities which are independent of IRB review/approval (e.g., [FERPA](#), [Radiation Safety](#), [UWM Data Security](#), [UW System policy on Prizes, Awards and Gifts](#), state gambling laws, etc.). When conducting research at institutions outside of UWM, be sure to obtain permission and/or approval as required by their policies.

Contact the IRB office if you have any further questions. Thank you for your cooperation, and best wishes for a successful project.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Melody Harries".

Melody Harries
IRB Administrator

APPENDIX H

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Researcher's Introduction:

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone whose job title grants them specific information regarding antiracist practices inside schools. My study does not aim to evaluate your practices or judge your experiences. Rather, I am trying to learn more about how current practices are reflective of antiracism.

Researcher's Oral Description of Disclosures

To facilitate notetaking, I would like to record our conversation today and I need written permission to do so. As stated in the consent form: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time, (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Only pseudonyms and de-identified information will be used when reporting data. If you still agree to this, please say so at this time.

As part of the interview process, I ask that you not share any information that could directly identify any fellow co-workers or students. If this should happen, I will make the changes on the written transcript.

If you have any questions after our interview about the research or your rights as a participant, please consult the consent form for the appropriate contact information:

- Research – please contact Jennifer Luken (Student PI) at jluken@uwm.edu.
- Your rights as a research participant – Institutional Review Board (IRB) at irbinfo@uwm.edu or 414-662-3544
- Complaints or problems – Jennifer Luken (Student PI) at jluken@uwm.edu, Dr. Marie Sandy (PI), sandym@uwm.edu, or IRB at irbinfo@uwm.edu.

You will be asked a set of probing questions, but this interview will be semi-structured in nature. Before we begin, I'd like you ask you a few questions to help me understand your background better:

Just a few questions before we begin:

A. Interviewee Background

- a. What is your current role in the district?
- b. How long have you been there?
- c. How many years in current position?

Thank you! I will now turn on the recorder.

Audio-Recorded Questions

Building Rapport:

- a. What is your current role in the district?
 - b. How long have you been there?
 - c. How many years in current position?
2. How did you choose or come to be in this role?

Descriptive questions:

Without revealing any information about your students' or co-workers' identities, please attempt to respond to the following questions. If at any time you were to reveal identifiable information about others, it will be redacted from the transcript.

1. On your district website, you have defined **equity non-negotiables**. Who was involved in that process?
 - a. What do these equity non-negotiables look like in practice?
 - b. In what ways were local or national policy (or event) an influence on these?
 - c. What supports are in place for implementation?
 - d. What challenges do you see or anticipate (with implementation)?
2. In what ways do you believe teachers are involved with this equity process?

****Antiracism, along with equity, can mean different things to different people. For the purposes of my research, antiracist refers to any ACTIVE role/practice taken to confront racism/oppresion, and refrain from perpetuating white privilege/supremacy****
3. More recently, **antiracist policies** have been adopted by school districts. In what ways do you believe your district demonstrates an antiracist agenda?
 - a. Within your district, what are some barriers to these policies?
 - b. What kind of training/professional development do you or your teachers receive on antiracism/equity?
 - c. What type of accountability or measurement tools are used for these practices?
4. What steps does your district take to create an equitable, inclusive environment?
 - a. Can you give me an example of how your policies are reflective of this?
 - b. Can you give an example of how this is represented in the curriculum?
5. From your perspective, are students encouraged to challenge/critically analyze issues around race, power, and privilege?
 - a. Can you give an example?
6. Racial justice and white privilege/supremacy have been areas of deep focus the past several months. In what ways has your district supported students during this time?

7. Overall, what are challenges associated with implementing antiracism inside your district?

a. From your perspective, has the local community supported these efforts?

Closing questions:

1. Is there anything else you would like to add?
2. Any questions you would like to ask me?

Post Interview Comments and/or Observations:
