

Getting to the Core: Addressing the Overrepresentation of Students of Color in
Special Education through Culturally Relevant Core Instruction

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Final Disquisition

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Abstract

In education, disproportionality, often used interchangeably with overrepresentation, is defined as, "the high probability of being placed in special education, based on membership in a historically marginalized group" (Oswald, Coutinho, Best, & Singh, 1999). Research findings have identified root causes of disproportionality as a lack of culturally competent teachers, curriculum that is not culturally relevant, or a need for professional development on equity. This disquisition, or dissertation in practice, provides an analysis of the implementation and outcomes associated with one school's improvement process that was aimed at reducing the overrepresentation for students of color in special education. The intermediate goal was addressing disproportionality and implicit bias, as well as improving capacity to implement culturally relevant practices through professional development. Pre- and post-test data were collected in the form of survey responses and an efficacy scale related to evidence-based culturally relevant practices. Qualitative data were collected in journal reflections and a focus group, and analyzed using coding to develop themes. Quantitative data were analyzed using a one sample *t*-test to determine if there was a statistical significance. The results demonstrated statistical and marginal significance in teachers' self-efficacy to implement culturally relevant practices, and themes of awareness related to disproportionality and implicit bias. The results of implementation reveal that the professional development was effective at addressing the intermediate goal of awareness. While this disquisition focused on participants being self-reflective to improve their efficacy, future research would be needed to determine if improved efficacy translates to proportional representation of SoC in special education.

Keywords: Students of Color (SoC), Disproportionality, Culturally Relevant Teaching

The Disquisition

Western Carolina University's Educational Leadership department has leaned in to the expertise offered by the Carnegie Project (CPED) and University Council of Education Administration (UCEA) to engage in and rethink the Professional Doctorate in Education (CPED, n.d). This rethinking was based on six guiding principles for program design related to equity, ethics, and social justice, opportunities to develop and demonstrate collaboration, and providing field-based opportunities to analyze problems of practice. Instead of a dissertation, the CPED embraces the disquisition, or dissertation in practice, which impacts a complex problem within the context of the disquisitioner's organization (CPED, n.d).

The disquisitioner's research is unique as compared to traditional researchers as they are situated in the context of the research that they are conducting; acting as the scholar and practitioner. Focusing on a problem of practice, the disquisition requires the disquisitioner to form a design team to make a plan for addressing the problem, and an implementation team to implement the plan. There is a significant amount of research conducted to support a thorough literature review to support causes of the problem and evidence-based interventions to implement to address the problem within the context. Research methods are implemented to collect data and measure whether there was a change as based on the implementation and an analysis of the data. The disquisition prepares educators who are practicing to build on their expertise while also practicing within their context, and able to continue to address future problems of practice in this same strategic manner.

Getting to the Core: Addressing the Overrepresentation of Students of Color in Special Education through Culturally Relevant Core Instruction

The disproportionate representation of minoritized students in special education and their overrepresentation in more restrictive placements and in discipline are important and unresolved issues in our system of public education (Albrecht et al., 2011). According to Capper and Frattura (2021), intra-school segregation has perpetuated the marginalization of, and inappropriate educational service delivery to students and families of color, families living in poverty, and those who are linguistically diverse. Students who are identified with a disability as homeless, as in need of addiction services, as second language learners, or as “at-risk” students are more likely to be removed from the core of teaching and learning where students who identify with the characteristics of the dominant group (e.g. White, middle to upper class, non-disabled, English speaking) are taught (Frattura & Capper, 2021).

The public school system is centered on whiteness around a socially constructed White norm. In the *Journal of Educational Supervision*, *whiteness* is defined as “an assemblage, a racial discourse or perspective supported by material practices and institutions, which exists as a historically and socially developed construct based on oppressions, power, and falsehood” (Lynch, 2018). The *White norm* casts out those who do not assimilate to it or meet its expectations. These outside spaces—many of which are structured under the guise of special education-- include remediation programs, intervention programs, and ability grouping within classrooms. Although research has shown that segregated learning spaces have not improved academic outcomes, educators continue to provide educational services in these spaces because they assume it is best for the students assigned to those spaces. Students of Color (SoC) are often overrepresented in these contexts because those assigning educational services are often White

female educators who view student differences (attributes outside of the socially constructed norm) as disabilities or disorders (Frattura & Capper, 2021). In doing so, they reinforce both a White and a non-disabled normative.

Research has also shown that students receiving special education services are often denied access to high quality teaching and learning afforded to their non-disabled peers (Griner & Stewart, 2012). Access is denied when students are removed from the core of teaching and learning and sent to an outside space to learn. A lack of access to high-quality instruction is detrimental to student success in education and, consequentially, in life. Specifically, as noted in *Schools are Still Segregated, and Black Children are Paying the Price*, denying SoC access to high-quality instruction perpetuates a cycle of depressed outcomes, which can include involvement in the criminal justice system and reliance on public support (Garcia, 2020). Depressed outcomes for SoC have been linked to disproportionate representation in special education programs. Depressed outcomes include the school to prison pipeline (Frattura & Capper, 2021), higher school drop-out rates (Losen & Orfield, 2002), and the ever-growing racial academic achievement gap (Garcia, 2020).

Beyond special education, some studies have documented that SoC are underrepresented in gifted and talented education programs (Grissom & Redding, 2016). According to data collected by the United Negro College Fund in 2011-12, only 57 percent of Black students had access to a full range of math and science courses necessary for college readiness, compared to 81 percent of Asian Americans and 71 percent of White students (2020). They further stated that, even when Black students do have access to honors or advanced placement courses, they are vastly underrepresented in these courses. Black and Latino students represent 38 percent of students in schools that offer advanced placement courses, but only 29 percent of students

enrolled in at least one of them (2020). Some scholars and educational practitioners are calling this disproportionality a new system of segregation (Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005).

The original intention of special education programs under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) was to provide students identified with a disability a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (Zirkel, 2013) to prepare them for higher education, careers, and independent living. Wrightslaw provides the following definitions for FAPE and LRE:

- FAPE is an individualized educational program that is designed to meet the child's unique needs and from which the child receives educational benefit (2017).
- LRE is the IDEA's mainstreaming policy which requires public school to educate students with disabilities in regular classrooms with their nondisabled peers, in their neighborhood schools, (the schools they would attend if not disabled), to the maximum extent possible (2022).

Unfortunately, research around academic success and quality-of-life indicators suggest that special education services may not be providing high quality teaching and learning since those leaving the special education system do not have access to the same opportunities afforded to their peers (Griner & Stewart, 2012). Furthermore, students who are inappropriately placed in special education programs may suffer many consequences including diminished expectations, unequal access to the curriculum, lack of opportunities to connect with peers that haven't been labeled, and the continued within-school segregation between racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically (RCLED) diverse students (National Education Association, 2007). In addition, many RCLED students struggle to make the same connections for learning that may come easier to their [White] peers who belong to the more dominant culture which presents barriers to

students adapting to school processes and expectations, which impedes positive learning outcomes and too often leads to inappropriate placement in programs serving students with special needs (Gardner, 2007; Ogbu, 1992).

There are two intersecting problems at the heart of this disquisition: 1) special education, as it presently operates, often denies students identified with disabilities access to high quality teaching and learning through the provision of segregated service-delivery/removal from the core; and 2) SoC are often inappropriately and disproportionately assigned to special education services, denying them access to high quality teaching and learning.

Positionality Statement

In my earlier years as an educator, I served in the role as a general education teacher. In this role, I had the privilege of working with a diverse population of students. One of the observations that I made was that many of my SoC entered my classroom either being served under the provisions of an individualized education plan (IEP) through special education or they were identified as requiring tier 3 intervention; the most intensive support a student can receive within the MTSS framework. Within my own classroom setting, I provided core instruction that ensured every student could find their entry point to access the general curriculum; aligning with my philosophy that all students can learn. Though this was my belief in my small sector of the overall school and district, it was apparent to me that SoC continued to enter my class, each year, disproportionately represented in special education.

Being in a district where SoC represented a small fraction of the overall population, I realized that this was a potential problem. I began to serve as a mentor to SoC in affinity groups and made an intentional effort to make SoC feel like they had a community within the school in which they felt valued and successful. Building relationships with students and celebrating their

successes; within school or outside of school, was one of my most effective approaches. Despite my efforts to support students and encouraging colleagues to do the same, the cycle of overidentification for SoC in special education was continuous. Even as a special education resource teacher after five years in the general education setting, I worked tirelessly to help SoC achieve their goals and exit from needing special education services.

After ten years in education, I see this cycle continuing in my local context, though I know, wholeheartedly, that SoC are capable of success, just as their white peers. I have arrived at the point of wondering, is it that the students are not able to access the curriculum, or is it that the teachers that are serving the students have a perspective that sets a barrier for students before they even have a chance?

Literature Review

In the following literature review, I will present a brief history of special education and the legislation that supports it. I will then discuss legislation surrounding racial segregation in schools followed by an overview of disproportionality in schools today. This review will lay the foundation for readers to understand the intersection of race and ability and the role that schools play in the disproportionality of SoC in special education.

Historical Overview of Special Education

Early in the 20th century, parents of students with disabilities came together to bring public attention to the unmet educational needs of their children. In response, John F. Kennedy, the president of the U.S. during this time, created the President's Panel on Mental Retardation. In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which provided funding for primary education; expanding access to public education for children with disabilities. Although these efforts were made to support students with

disabilities in the public-school setting, services were still limited in the early 1970s. That changed in 1975 when two federal laws were enacted: 1) The Education for Handicapped Children Act which established the “right to public education for all children regardless of disability” (Wright & Wright, 2020), and 2) The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which requires schools to provide individualized education for children with qualifying disabilities (2009). These laws were enacted to increase access to the “general” curriculum for students with disabilities.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004

In 2004, Congress amended and renamed the original Education of Handicapped Children Act of 1975 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The IDEA is the federal law that supports special education and related service programming for children and youth with disabilities. These amendments were passed to ensure equal access to education for students with disabilities (2019).

According to Wright & Wright, the IDEA has two main purposes. The first being to provide an education that meets unique needs of students, and prepares them for further education, employment, and independent living. The second purpose is to protect the educational rights of both children with disabilities and their parents (2020).

Under IDEA, children with disabilities are granted a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. According to the U.S. Department of Education, students with identified disabilities who receive special education and related services to address their individual needs, are prepared for employment and independent living and are protected under the law. In addition, IDEA assesses special education programs, ensures that institutions are providing services to persons with disabilities and provides assistance to states, localities, federal

agencies, and educational service agencies in providing for the education of children with disabilities (2019).

Despite the efforts of IDEA to increase educational opportunities through the provision of service for once excluded groups, special education has become “. . . a ‘place’ for students, [especially SoC]. It has become less of a systemic approach to uniquely address student learning and social engagement within the same instructional frameworks and settings designed for the whole school community” (National Council on Disability, 2018). Some studies have also found that schools in which the population of students and teachers is predominately White, [minority] students are disproportionately placed in special education (Wright & Wright, 2020).

Brown vs. Board of Education

Brown v. Board of Education (Topeka) 1954 was a landmark court case that marked the beginnings of school desegregation. Specifically, in this case, school children from four states argued that segregated public schools were inherently unequal and deprived them of equal protection of the laws. Furthermore, the Supreme Court found that African-American children had the right to equal educational opportunities and that segregated schools have no place in the field of public education (Wright & Wright, 2020). The Supreme Court described the emotional impact that segregation has on children, especially when segregation “has the sanction of the law” (Ferri & Conner, 2005). When White and “Colored” students were separated from others their age and qualifications simply because of their race, it generated a feeling of inferiority; impacting the motivation of SoC to learn (Ferri & Conner, 2005). Segregation in public schools, as it had been known and implemented, was ruled as an injustice and needed to end. This started the road to school desegregation.

The Unfulfilled Promise of *Brown v. Board of Education*

Brown v. Board was intended to address the segregation of students by race into unequal, separate schools; addressing that this separation is unlawful. However, as Graff and Kozleski state, “it inadvertently legitimized sorting and categorizing, resulting in the perpetuation of lack of access and opportunity for minoritized students” (2015, p. 2). It did not overtly address the segregation of students within schools or school systems (Ferri & Conner, 2005). This phenomenon is evident in tracking (Mickelson, 2001), separate classrooms (Ferri & Conner, 2005), and pull-out services (National Council on Disability, 2018).

Over 60 years post-*Brown vs. Board* court ruling and over 40 years after the initial signing of the IDEA, our schools continue to enact racial inequities. While it is unlawful to segregate schools based on skin color, special education has become a “tool” that does just that. (Barshay, 2020).

Why are Students of Color Overrepresented in Special Education?

The overrepresentation of SoC in special education dates back more than four decades (Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Gibb, Rausch, Cuadrado & Chung, 2008). Studies confirm that the overrepresentation of SoC continues to be a growing problem (Mitylene & Lassmann, 2003). Students of Color are at greater risk of being overidentified for special education than their White peers (Mitylene & Lassmann, 2003).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics between 2015-2017, Black students made up 15-17 percent of the total student population, while White students made up 48-61 percent of the student population (the percentages fluctuated over the time period). During this same time, the percentage of Black students served under IDEA made up 16 percent of the total population and White students made up 14 percent of the population served under IDEA

(2019). This disproportionality, also referred to in educational studies as overrepresentation, is quite evident and has been for way too long.

Disproportionality is defined as, “the high probability of being placed in special education, based on membership in a historically marginalized group (Oswald, Coutinho, Best, & Singh, 1999). On the other hand, a proportionate representation of students would offer a balance of student groups represented in the total school population in comparison to their representation in special education.

According to Hosp & Reschly (2003), the special education eligibility and placement process is highly subjective, which contributes to the disproportionate representation of SoC in special education. Personal judgments by teachers in regards to a student’s ability is relied upon instead of data on the student’s academic progress, performance, or prereferral intervention data.

Some educational research has indicated that factors such as test bias, poverty, poor general education instruction, and insufficient professional development for working with diverse students are some of the causes of overrepresentation (A’Vant, Baker, Chandler, McKinney, Sayles & Sullivan, 2009).

Voulgarides, & Zwerger (2018) shared research findings which stated that the root causes of disproportionality are discipline policies and practices, interventions and referrals, instruction and assessment, differential access to educational opportunity, family and community partnerships, teacher expectations and misconceptions, cultural dissonance, and district socio-demographics. While there is no one cause for the overrepresentation of SoC in special education, some may argue that it is a lack of culturally competent teachers, curriculum that is not culturally relevant, and a need for professional development on equity (Krasnoff, 2016).

Academic Achievement for Disabled Students of Color

Along with national data regarding the disproportionate representation of teachers of color in comparison to the number of SoC, there is also data to support the existence of a racial academic achievement gap. The National Center for Education Statistics defines achievement gaps as occurring when one group of students (e.g., students grouped by race/ethnicity, gender) outperforms another group and the difference in average scores for the two groups is statistically significant (2021). According to 2011 findings of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), on average, White students attended schools that were 9% Black while Black students attended schools that were 48% Black. This indicated a large difference in average Black student density nationally. Analysis of the findings revealed that achievement for both Black and White students was lower in the highest Black student density school than in the lowest density schools, however, the achievement gap was not different. The Black-White achievement gap was larger in the highest density schools than in the lowest density schools (2015).

Education Reform Efforts

Education Reform focuses on changing public education by addressing inequities (Zhao, 2009). To address the racial disparities that currently exist in public education, there have been efforts made on behalf of the government by implementing acts such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, No Child Left Behind, and most recently, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). These acts were initially established to level the playing field for students living and learning in poverty. One of the greatest priorities of ESSA is the push for schools to move from aggregated data to disaggregated by subgroups. It requires states to publish annual public reports on the educational performance of students across several distinct subgroup classifications.

Generally speaking, the primary purpose of collecting and reporting data on different student subgroups is to provide useful information about the performance of public schools and students to those who are monitoring public schools or working to improve them. While both aggregate and subgroup data are essential to understanding how the public-education system is working, district-level or school-level reports (i.e., aggregate data) are generally limited to the identification of broader trends and patterns in education, while subgroup data is used to identify deeper underlying problems—specifically, disparities in educational performance and attainment across different student groups (2015).

When data are reported for different student subgroups, educators also have detailed information about the educational performance and learning needs of specific groups of students, which allows them to design more appropriate or effective educational experiences and academic support (2015).

Theoretical Frameworks

This paper is informed by three primary theoretical frameworks: critical race theory, Whiteness studies, and critical disabilities theory. All three theoretical frameworks demonstrate the challenges faced when race and disability intersect for individuals; specifically for SoC in public school which is centered on white norms.

Critical race theory (CRT) “demands that elite institutions rethink and transform their conceptions of ‘race neutrality’ in the face of functionally exclusionary practices” (Crenshaw, 2011, p. 1260). Going further, the American Bar Association explains,

It critiques how the social construction of race and institutionalized racism perpetuate a racial caste system that relegates people of color to the bottom tiers. CRT also recognizes that race intersects with other identities, including sexuality, gender identity, and others.

CRT recognizes that racism is not a bygone relic of the past. Instead, it acknowledges that the legacy of slavery, segregation, and the imposition of second-class citizenship on Black Americans and other people of color continue to permeate the social fabric of this nation (George, 2021).

Centralizing race, it offers a race-conscious approach to identifying problems and potential solutions (Zamudio et. Al., 2010). This theory connects to the problem of practice (overrepresentation of SoC in special education with the denial of access to the core of teaching and learning) as it addresses the fact that culturally relevant teaching is not a diversity and inclusion training. Instead, it is a practice of interrogating the role of race and racism in society (George, 2021). Referring back to the ruling of *Brown vs. Board of Education*, critical race theorists (and others) have come to question the nature of the effects of the *Brown* decision on the educational experiences of African-American students. Though *Brown* was a move to establish racial equity and bring greater racial justice, critical race theorists have examined both the factors influencing the decision itself and the structures of racial inequity that *Brown* served to reconfigure (Dixson & K. Rousseau Anderson, 2016). It is argued by Bell (2004) that the *Brown* decision ‘substituted one mantra for another: where separate was once equal, “separate” would be now categorically unequal ... By doing nothing more than rewiring the rhetoric of equality, the *Brown* court foreclosed the possibility of recognizing racism as a broadly shared cultural condition’ (p. 197). Thus, the property value of whiteness was maintained, and the promise of substantive change in the education of students of [color] remained unfulfilled.

According to the National Museum of African American History and Culture (2020), *Whiteness* is at the core of understanding race in America. It refers to the way that White people, their customs, culture, and beliefs operate as the standard by which all other groups of people are

compared. Whiteness, as well as the normalization of White racial identity throughout America's history have created a culture where non-White people are seen as inferior or abnormal. This theory connects to the problem of practice as it provides context to the problem of schools being centered on white norms. According to Matias, critical whiteness studies uses a transdisciplinary approach to investigate the phenomenon of whiteness, how it is manifested, exerted, defined, recycled, transmitted, maintained, and ultimately, how it impacts the state of race relations. She also states that whiteness is not limited to being problematic for white people, as people of color can also inhabit whiteness ideology, though it is most prevalent in whites themselves (2015). If whiteness is considered the norm, that which does not conform to whiteness is too often considered abnormal or in need of remediation. So one cannot ignore the role of whiteness in this problem of practice.

Critical disability theory (also referred to as critical disabilities studies) involves scrutinizing not bodily or mental impairments, but the social norms that define particular attributes as impairments, as well as the social conditions that concentrate stigmatized attributes in particular populations (Hall, 2019). This theory connects to the problem of practice as critical disability theorists have identified that the deeply entrenched notion that disability needs to be 'cured' is one of the most powerful forms of exclusion that disabled people experience (Siebers, 2008, p. 3). Furthermore, it undermines the value of a person identified as having a disability by presuming that they are not a whole person, but instead, a person that needs to be fixed. This lessens the value of the mind of the individual as it denies them the opportunity to choose how they approach their disability as society imposes that they need to be cured (Arstein-Kerslake & Black, 2020). With disproportionality of SoC in special education in mind, it is important to consider the notion that is lifted up in *In the Shadow of Brown: Special*

Education and Overrepresentation of Students of Color (2005), which addresses students in special education continue to experience a separate existence in schools, despite being ensured a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. Furthermore, though special education was originally intended as a way to provide support and access for previously excluded students, it has instead maintained, rather than minimize, obvious inequities (Ferri & Connor, 2005). Although special education is seen as serving students with disabilities, it also serves the needs of the larger education system, which demands conformity, standardization, and homogenization (Hehir, 2002). An inclusive school environment accepts and welcomes human difference and diversity, however, the demands of the larger education systems is at major odds with full inclusivity. Instead, when a difference is on the verge of being integrated or included, new forms of containment emerge to maintain the status quo. Separate classrooms have now recreated what was once segregation attained through separate schools to attainment through separate classrooms (Ferri & Connor, 2005).

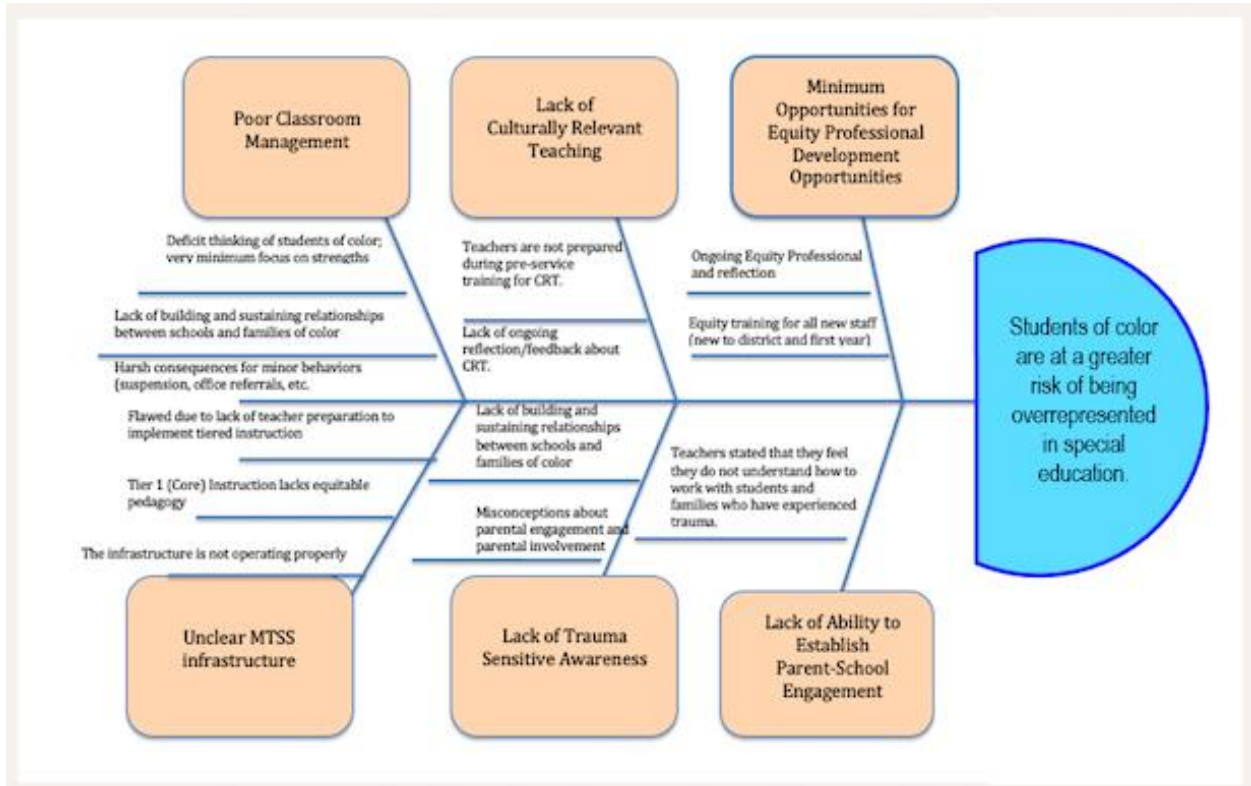
The theoretical frameworks described above collectively illuminate the complexity of oppressions that lead to the disproportionality of SoC in special education. Each theory presents a unique perspective to the impact that race plays on how opportunities differ for students in education. The intersectionality of disability and critical race theory, also known as DisCrit, explores how racial identification can impact the likelihood of being identified as disabled. Furthermore, in a system where teachers are predominantly white females, Matias emphasizes that they should begin to shoulder some of the burden of race to increase the likelihood that they will stop emotionally projecting their feelings of guilt or discomfort onto SoC (2015). In the next section, there's evidence of current practitioners perceptions of the impact that race has on their students' educational experience which aligns with the theoretical frameworks described.

Causal Analysis

In an attempt to dig deeper and understand the potential causes of overrepresentation of SoC in special education at Southeast school, a causal analysis was conducted using a fishbone diagram. According to Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu (2017), a fishbone diagram is a tool which assists in visually representing causes for analysis. Each major bone represents a key factor thought to contribute to the problem (located in the head of the fish). The smaller bones capture the details that emerge from conversations about these factors (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2017). Figure 1 illustrates the fishbone diagram theorizing six possible contributing factors to the disproportionate representation of SoC in special education including 1) classroom management, 2) quality instruction, 3) professional development, 4) MTSS infrastructure, 5) parent-school engagement, 6) trauma-sensitive awareness. Although six potential causes were identified in Figure 1, for the purposes of this paper, I will focus on the cause most closely related to our improvement initiative: culturally relevant teaching and professional development to support it.

Figure 1

Fishbone Causal Analysis



Professional Development

The professional development component of the improvement initiative leaned in to adult learning. According to Knowles's theory of adult learning, andragogy is a constructivist approach to learning that involves facilitating adults to draw on their experiences and so create new learning based on previous understandings (2015). He argues that, readiness to learn for adults is linked to the relevance of the learning to their lives and that they bring an expanding pool of experience that can be used as a resource for that learning. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson identify six characteristics including 1) the need to know, 2) adults are self-directed, 3) adults have an abundance of prior life and work experience, 4) adults learn when they are ready and when they have a need to learn, 5) adults are life-centered in their orientation to learning, and 6) adults respond to external motivators, but for the most part, they are internally motivated (2011).

Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning outline the characteristics of professional learning that leads to effective teaching practices, supportive leadership, and improved student results. Their Standards for Professional Learning include Learning Communities, Resources, Learning Designs, Outcomes, Leadership, Data, and Implementation (2021). While the improvement initiative embraced each of the Professional Learning Standards, there was an intentional focus on Learning Designs. Effective designs for professional learning assist educators in moving beyond comprehension of the surface features of a new idea or practice to developing a more complete understanding of its purposes, critical attributes, meaning, and connection to other approaches (Learning Forward, 2021). The professional development sessions were designed as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to promote active engagement. Active learning processes include discussion and dialogue, writing,

demonstrations, inquiry, reflection, metacognition, co-construction of knowledge, practice with feedback, coaching, modeling, and problem solving which leads to learners actively constructing, analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing knowledge and practices (Learning Forward, 2021). According to DuFour, a professional learning community is a space in which educators work collaboratively—not in isolation, to focus on student learning rather than teaching, and hold themselves accountable for results (2004). Professional learning communities are built on three core principles including:

- 1) Ensuring that students learn,
- 2) A culture of collaboration
- 3) Focus on results

Culturally Relevant Teaching

In education, culturally responsive teaching is often used interchangeably with culturally relevant teaching. There are varying definitions of each term and though they have similarities, there are differences (Muniz, 2019). Each approach strives to achieve the same goal; to defy the deficit model and ensure SoC see themselves and their communities reflected and valued in the content taught in school. I will use definitions that cross the works of Gloria Ladson-Billings, Dr. Geneva Gay, and Zaretta Hammond; all preeminent scholars in the field of equity in education.

Scholar and teacher educator, Gloria Ladson-Billings, defines culturally relevant pedagogy as a form of teaching that engages learners whose experiences and cultures are traditionally excluded from mainstream settings and curriculum (Muniz, 2019). In, “But That’s Just Good Teaching,” Ladson-Billings states that culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria connected to the students’ perceptions and experiences: 1) students must experience academic success; 2) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and 3) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current

social order (1995). Building on the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings, multicultural and equity educator, Geneva Gay, defines culturally responsive teaching as the “doing” of teaching. Her approach takes on a greater focus of the teacher’s strategies and practices. Specifically, she states, “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (Gay, 2002).

Zaretta Hammond describes culturally responsive teaching as:

An educator’s ability to recognize students’ cultural displays of learning and meaning making and respond positively and constructively with teaching moves that use cultural knowledge as a scaffold to connect what the student knows to new concepts and content in order to promote effective information processing (Hammond, 2015).

For the purpose of this disquisition, I want to focus on building teachers’ capacity to enact culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy. Culturally relevant pedagogy is described as more of a way of being or thinking that then manifests into ways of doing (Escudero, 2019). It is not something that has a prescription or a “box to check off” when one claims to be culturally relevant. Instead, it is a perspective, or mindset, that builds the foundation for how educators approach every aspect of their instructional practice. Furthermore, it cannot be simplified to “a set of specific strategies, a checklist for lesson planning, or specific curriculum because all of these must be directly connected to and informed by a teacher’s specific set of students who they are as people and as learners, their communities, their history, and their context” (Escudero, 2019). Before this work can be done with fidelity, educators have to reflect on their own identity, culture, biases, and privilege to critically assess and strengthen their instructional practice (Escudero, 2019).

The intentionality of the design was based on the understanding that learning designers consider how to build knowledge, develop skills, transform practice, challenge attitudes and beliefs, and inspire action (Learning Forward, 2021). For this improvement initiative, professional development content focused on addressing contributing factors to disproportionality such as implicit bias and collaboratively reviewed how it can be dismantled through self-reflection and utilizing initiatives that are already being implemented in the district.

A Lack of Culturally Relevant Teaching

When schools and classrooms lack culturally relevant teaching practices, it becomes detrimental for SoC. It also supports the notion that schools are not designed to meet the needs of all children. According to Capper & Frattura, (2008), historically, schools have been designed to teach to a normed group of students (e.g. White, non-disabled, English-speaking, middle to upper class, etc.). Not only does a normed system identify what is normal, but it also designates what is not normal. If students do not share the identities or assimilate with the normed group, they are treated differently and often denied the access and opportunity offered to their normal peers. (Capper & Frattura, 2008). Since assimilation to the normed group was a widespread expectation in schools, tracking became a means of sorting through growing numbers of students according to race, disability, class, language, etc. When students were not able to assimilate to the norm of their White, non-disabled and English-speaking peers, the perception was the child had deficits beyond what could be addressed in the core of teaching and learning (Valencia & Gorski, 2010). Furthermore, Capper and Frattura state that “marginalized students who are at risk of being identified for special education are often students who are experiencing societal poverty. Due to a perception of schools that poverty is a challenge outside of the school’s control, schools often become complicit in generating and perpetuating societal poverty” (2021) Figure 2 is the Cycle

of Marginalization used by the ICS for Equity to demonstrate the cycle that Capper and Frattura described interrupted.

Research findings have identified the root causes for overidentification in special education as the lack of culturally competent teachers, low socioeconomic status, curriculum that is not culturally relevant, and a need for professional development on equity” (Ford, 2012). Specifically, when educators lack the capacity to implement culturally relevant teaching practices, there’s potential risk of minimizing SoC maintaining cultural integrity (Ladson-Billings, ---). This often leads to schools being perceived as a place that is hostile in nature as SoC feel they cannot be themselves as their culture (i.e. style of dress, and vernacular) is looked upon as inappropriate since it does not fit within the white norm (Hollins, 1994; King, 1994).

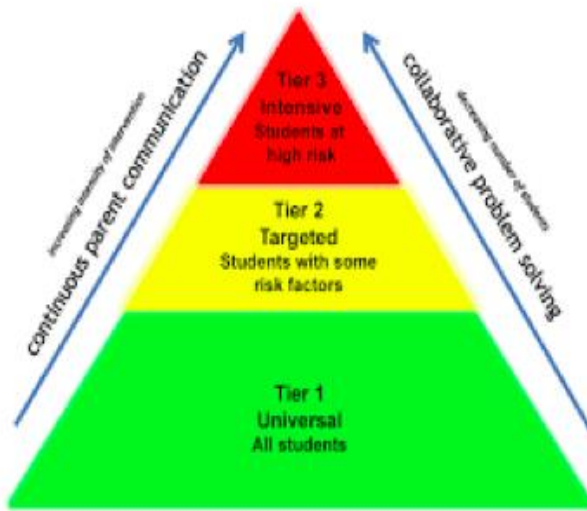
When teachers’ perceptions include implicit biases towards SoC learning abilities, they often lean towards their beliefs that they cannot learn, leading to lower expectations. This ultimately leads to the notion that SoC need something extra; the notion that core instruction is impossible for them to access without the support of an intervention or specially designed instruction from special education services.

Service Delivery Models: Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

In addition to the design of programs to separate students of marginalized populations, there was the formation of the Response to Intervention (RtI) Framework. This framework, now replaced with the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) a process of systematically documenting the performance of students as evidence of the need for additional services after making changes in classroom instruction. MTSS promises to change the way schools support students with learning and behavior problems by systematically delivering a range of interventions based on demonstrated levels of need (Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, n.d.).

Figure 2

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support Tiered Instruction



To ensure students are receiving instruction to best meet their needs, there are clearly defined tiers of instruction. Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the MTSS framework. Tier one instruction is the core curriculum that is taught; what “all” students get. Tier two instruction takes place when students have challenges with tier one instruction. Under tier two, students meet with teachers, for example, in a small group within the classroom setting to support their progress towards goals in tier one instruction. Tier three instruction is more intensive support. It can take place in very small groups or individually, and usually with one of the school’s interventionists. When students do not respond to additional support provided at the tier-two level, they are referred to the tier three team. At this point, the MTSS team collaborates to determine the best-fit interventions for the student to be able to overcome significant barriers in order to be able to achieve tier-one proficiency.

Tier One

The term, “tier 1” refers to core instruction that is offered to all students (RTI Network, date). Effective tier one core instruction is generally understood as instruction that is supported by research evidence (Shapiro, n.d). It is usually provided in a classroom setting where the standard course of study is delivered. teaching. Unfortunately, tier 1 is often a place reserved for students who fit the norm. Teachers in these spaces may not see themselves as responsible for (or capable of) teaching students who are not thriving in these spaces. This can be reinforced by the existence of other tiers, especially if they are associated with separate instructors and spaces. Research supports keeping students in the classroom (Siegal, 2007). Removing them often communicates who is a competent learner and who is not (Steele & Aronson, 2018). Research suggests that what we seek is a heterogeneous classroom where students are not removed and teachers have the capacity to teach to a wide range of learners given support and continued learning from other educators and specialists (Capper and Frattura, 2018). Continued learning topics should include pedagogical practices like culturally relevant teaching.

Local Context

In this section I describe the problem within the context of one elementary school including a description of the demographics for teachers, students, and students receiving special education services. All names are pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

Southeast Elementary School (SES) is in Hope school district. The district lies within a larger district, but it stands independently. The majority of the residents in Hope district are affluent and of Asian or Caucasian ethnicity. SoC make up 34.2 percent (Black 11.2 percent, Hispanic 16.4 percent, Multi-Racial 6.6 percent) of the total student population in the district. Figure 3 provides a chart to visualize student demographics in the district during the 2017-2018 school year. Teachers of color have been disproportionately represented in this district for a

number of years. Between 2012 and 2019, Teachers of color represented between 13-14 percent of teachers in the district, while White teachers represented between 86-87 percent. Figure 4 illustrates the representation of White teachers and Black teachers over the course of 2012 to 2019.

Figure 3
Student Demographics in 2017-18

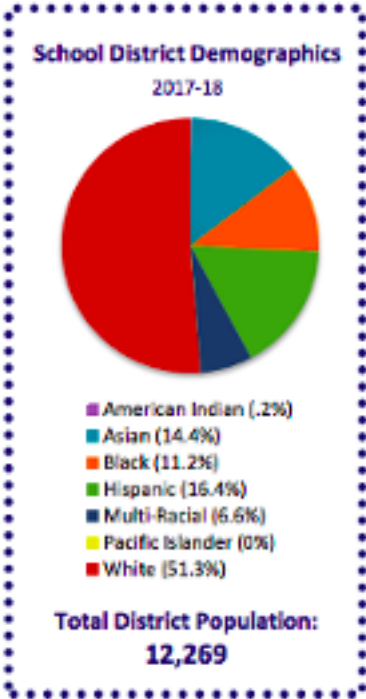
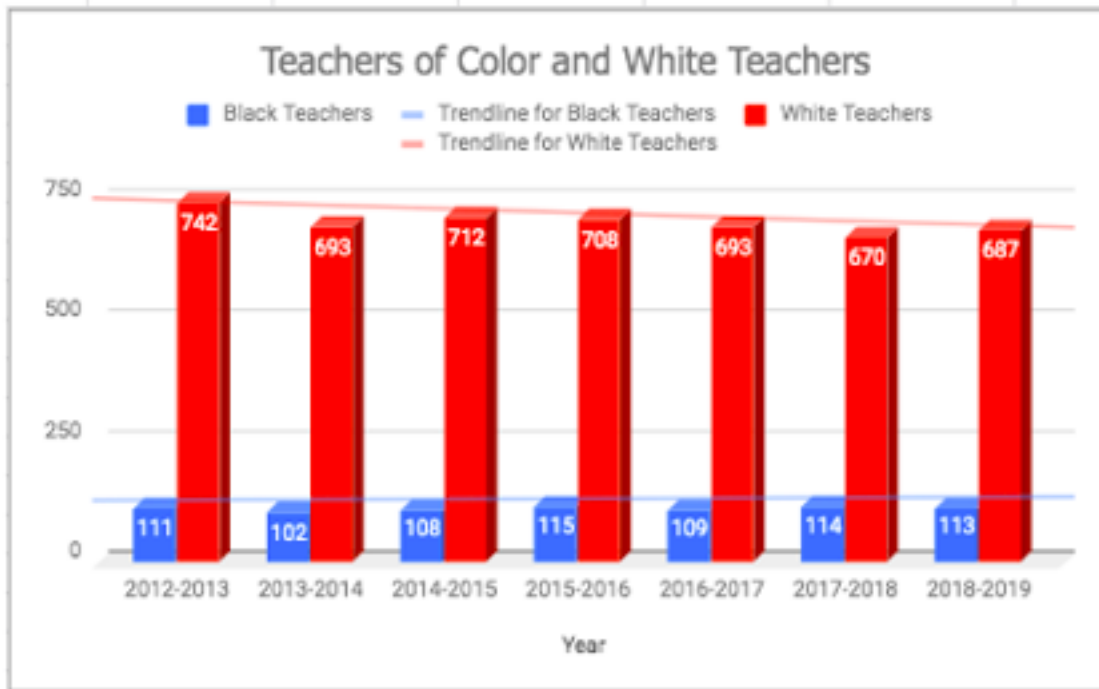


Figure 4

Comparison of Black and White Teachers in Hope School District



The disproportionate representation of teachers makes one wonder whether it is connected to the district's high achievement gap between White and Black students. Could the lack of understanding of cultural differences by White teachers have led to the overrepresentation of SoC in special education. Studies have shown, in affluent school districts with fewer African American children, the percentage of African American children labeled as needing special education was reported to be higher/disproportionate. Similar concerns have been reported for Latinos (Zamora, 2007).

In order to determine if there's a disproportionate representation of SoC, a school psychologist of Hope School District compiled a list of students who had been receiving special education services during the 2017-2018 school year at Southeast Elementary School. When the data were compiled, no names were used; only the date of referral and racial identification. The

data were disaggregated, focusing only on groups of races which had two or more students represented. Specifically, the data were disaggregated by categories of Hispanic/Latino, Black, and White for comparison purposes. While Black and Hispanic/Latino students both represent SoC, the team separated them for the purposes of analyzing the data to see if there was a disproportionate representation of both groups separately.

In column A of Table 1, the racial identities of SoC (Black, Hispanic/Latino) and White students are listed. In column B, the numerical value and percentage of the total population for each racial identification is listed. Next, Column C provides the numerical value and percentage of students represented in each racial identification. Column D represents the numerical representation and percentage of students if representation were proportional. It is important to note that students who are not accounted for in the total of students identified as needing special education services do not identify as White, Black, or Hispanic/Latino. For the purpose of this study and investigating a problem of practice, only the SoC and White students were identified for comparison purposes.

Table 1*Southeast Elementary School's Special Education Population*

Column A	Column B	Column D	Column E
Racial Identification	Make-up of the total population	Identified as Special Education	Target Proportional Representation
Black	67 students or 12%	18 students or 27%	8 students or 17%
Hispanic/Latino	51 students or 10%	8 students or 16%	6 students or 13%
White	235 students or 43%	20 students or 9%	28 students or 10%

Note. Total population of students = 551 students; Total number of students receiving special education = 46

Figure 5

Southeast Elementary School Special Education Student Representation 2017-2018

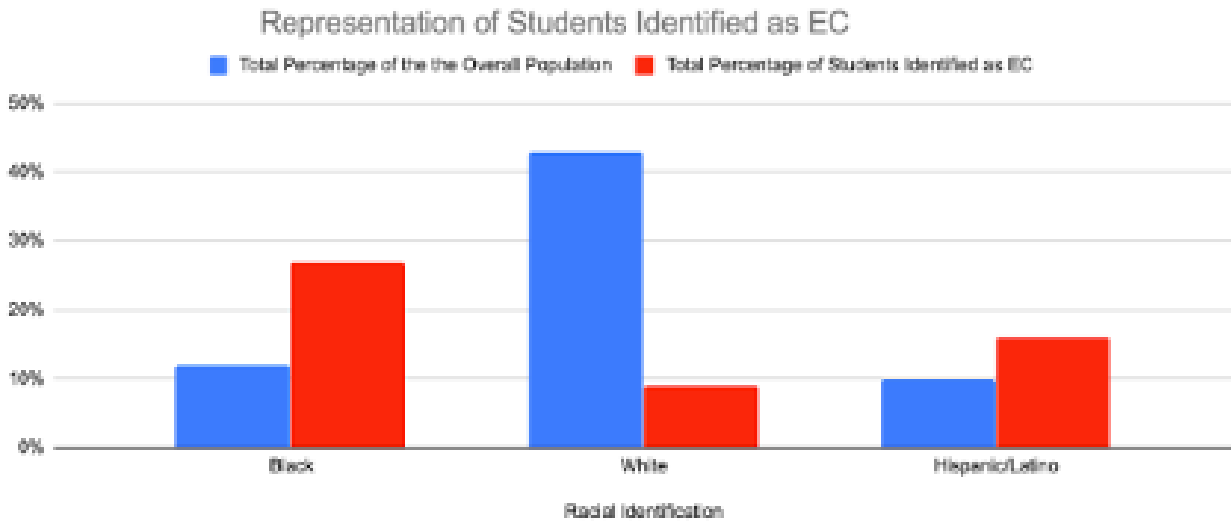
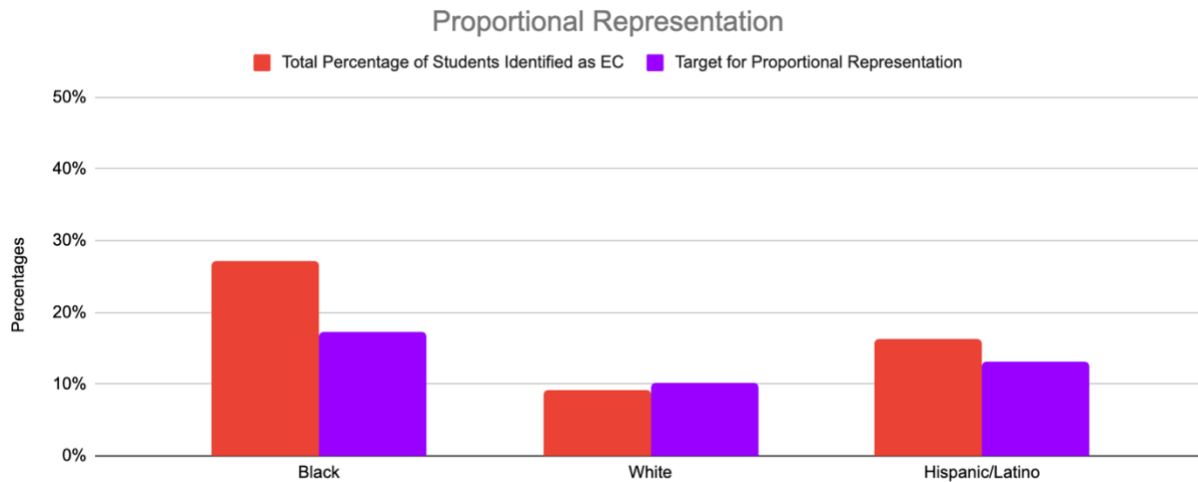


Figure 5 illustrates the data in Table 1 in the form of a graph in order to provide a visual representation of the data. As it can be concluded by the data represented in both Table 1 and Figure 5, a disproportionate representation of SoC in special education does, indeed, exist as compared to their White peers. The data provides that, of the 67 Black students (67%) enrolled at Southeast Elementary, 18 students received special education services which is 27% of the total population. For Hispanic students, of 51 students (10%), 8 students received special education services, which is 16% of the population. Lastly, for White students, of 235 students (43%), 20 students received special education services which is only 9% of the population.

Figure 6

Proportional Representation for Southeast Elementary Special Education Students 2017-2018



To maintain proportionality, sub-group populations should be less than or equal to 12-13% of the total population. Figure 6 provides a representation of what the subgroup population representation should have been if representation was proportional. Proportional representation for each subgroup is also provided in Column D of Table 1. If proportionality were achieved, only 8 Black students, 6 Hispanic students, and 28 White students would be identified as needing special education services. Black students are over proportional representation by 10%, Hispanic students by 3%, and White students 1% below proportional representation. This demonstrates that there is work to be done to address how these data can shift so that SoC are not overrepresented in special education.

Equity Initiatives in the District

The school district has made intentional efforts to address inequities that are often faced by historically marginalized students. There has been a long-standing awareness of the importance of creating an equitable learning environment for all students and staff and developing collaborative partnerships with families and stakeholders that represent the diverse community of the district. To

support the work of equity, the district has an Office of Equity and Engagement. Specifically, the values and beliefs of the Office of Equity and Engagement include that they will “work to eliminate inequities by disrupting systems that have historically marginalized students through empowerment and district support.” Amongst the department, there is an Equity Advisory Council which has a mission to engage, inspire, and empower parental participation and collaboration with the district’s Board of Education and district administrators to improve the quality of education for traditionally underserved students district wide (Equity and Engagement / Equity and Inclusion Overview).

Students’ Six. As a part of the district’s work to address racial disparities for SoC, they have adopted the incorporation of the Students’ Six. The Students’ Six process took shape in a school Southeastern U.S. school district when a troubling trend became apparent. In this school district, the overall performance on standardized tests and other achievement measurements were high.

However, when the data was broken down by race and ethnicity, SoC were being left behind (Schwartz, 2014). When data were explored for the district from the 2012-2013 school year, more than 83% of the White high school students passed the end of year tests. On the other side of the data, only about 48% of Hispanic and 28% of African-American [Black] students passed. To address this issue, district leaders implemented several initiatives; one of them being the Students’ Six. Students in the district played a role in developing the guidelines for Students’ Six components based on research-based strategies that have been proven effective with SoC as well their own experiences. The overall goal was to create more culturally sensitive classrooms for students and teachers. Students’ Six was not developed to be a product or resource, but instead, a process built on facilitating open communication between students and teachers. Furthermore, the strategies have a central idea that students have a lot to teach teachers when it comes to addressing issues like race, racial justice, racial dynamics, and cultural sensitivity in the classroom (2021). The Equity Collaborative defines each of The Students’ Six in this way:

1. Be visible: Make sure every student feels welcome and part of the class. The simplest examples of this are greeting each student when he or she comes into class and knowing everyone's names. Small signs that teachers know and are interested in students go a long way to forming trust.
2. Proximity/Create a safe space: The way a room is arranged and a teacher's physical proximity to students can make a difference when trying to reduce vulnerability students feel. If teachers stay behind their desks, they inadvertently signal they want space between themselves and students. Teachers who walk around the room and check in on student progress create a more equal and focused space.
3. Connect to students' lives: Give students a reason to care about what they're learning by connecting it to situations and concepts that are relevant to their lives.
4. Connect to students' culture: Make positive connections with student culture through class assignments.
5. Address race and racial dynamics in the classroom: This is one of the most uncomfortable steps for many educators who either don't know what to do when a racially-charged incident occurs in class or don't want to seem racist themselves by calling out a student's race. By ignoring a fundamental part of student identity, teachers can inadvertently misstep and damage student trust.
6. Connect to students' future selves: Teachers need to recognize that all their students have dreams about what their futures will look like. Too often, the implicit message in school is that White students have bright futures with many career paths to follow, but SoC aren't likely to go anywhere.

Theory of Improvement

My theory of improvement holds that raising awareness about disproportionality and providing teachers with formalized professional development on culturally relevant teaching, will increase teacher capacity and efficacy to enact culturally relevant practices throughout core instruction thus reducing the likelihood of referrals of SoC to special education. At the beginning of this disquisition, I posited that such professional development would keep more SoC in the classroom thus ensuring access to the core and higher quality teaching and learning.

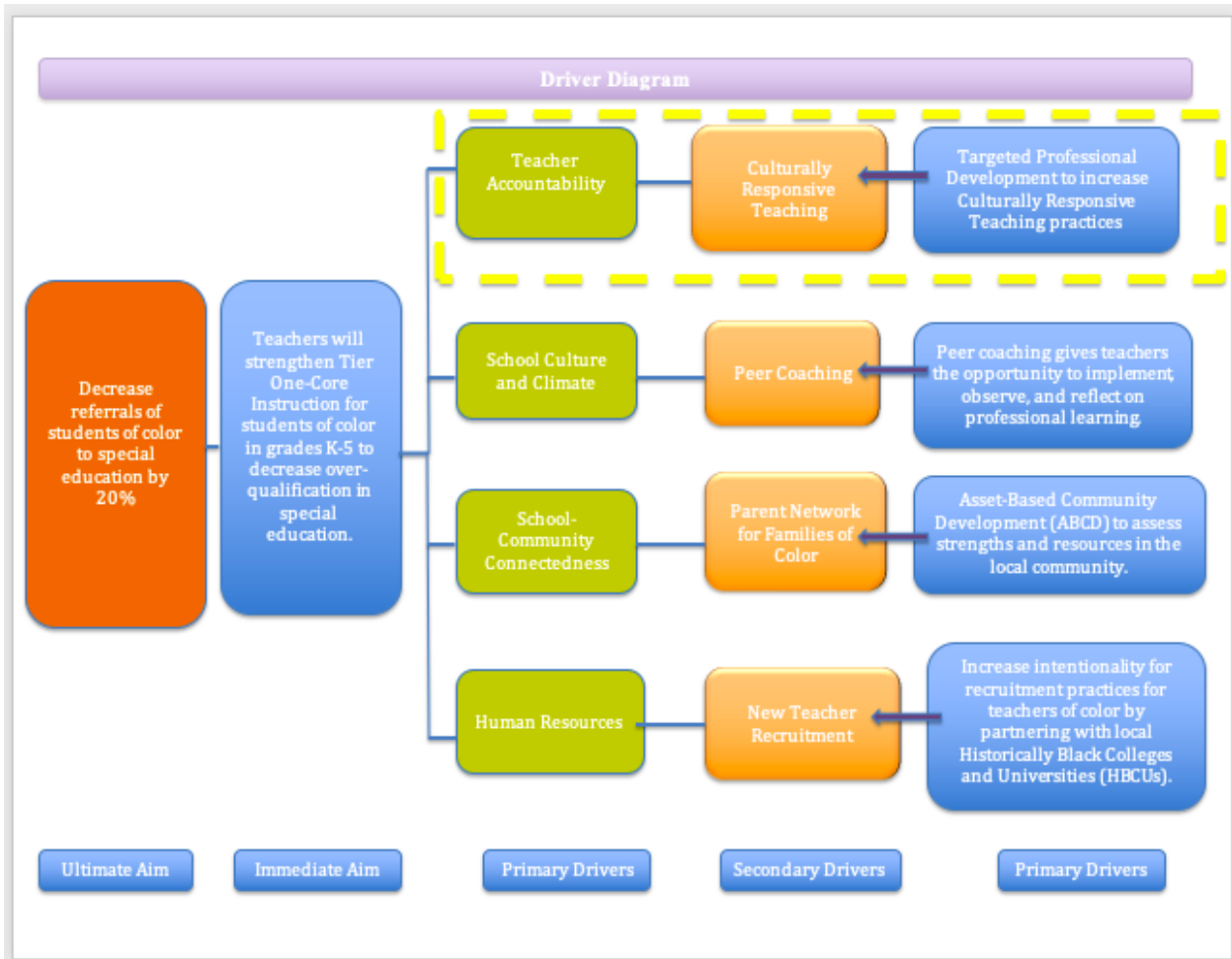
Figure 7 illustrates the ultimate and immediate aim of the proposed improvement initiative, as well as primary and secondary drivers in the form of a driver diagram. Bryk et. al defines a driver diagram as a tool organizes the various changes a network is trying out. It gives participants a common language as they build toward a solution to a shared problem. The diagram focuses on a small set of hypotheses about key levers for improvement, specific changes that might be attempted for each, and the interconnections that may exist among them. The driver diagram consists of a measurable improvement aim, primary drivers, secondary drivers, and change ideas (Bryk, et. al, 2017).

It was my immediate aim for teachers to increase their capacity to deliver tier one instruction with culturally relevant practices to meet a wide range of needs in the classroom, and reduce referrals (support services or discipline) for all students. Primary drivers are a set of small improvement hypotheses which are the best initial bets for what to target in the context of improvement. (Bryk, et. al, 2017). Specifically, for strengthening core instruction, the primary drivers are teacher accountability, school culture and climate, school-community connectedness, and human resources. Primary drivers are too general to guide change; therefore, each primary driver is associated with a secondary driver. For this disquisition, the secondary driver is professional development that focuses upon culturally relevant teaching. Griner and Stewart

stated that culturally relevant practices in schools and classrooms have been shown to be an effective means of addressing disproportionate representation of racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students in programs serving students with special needs (Griner & Stewart, 2012). Figure 7 illustrates a driver diagram that connects to my theory of improvement.

Figure 7

Driver diagram



I chose to focus on the intermediate goal of building teacher capacity to implement culturally relevant teaching as some studies have concluded that “the root causes for overidentification in special education are the lack of culturally competent teachers, low

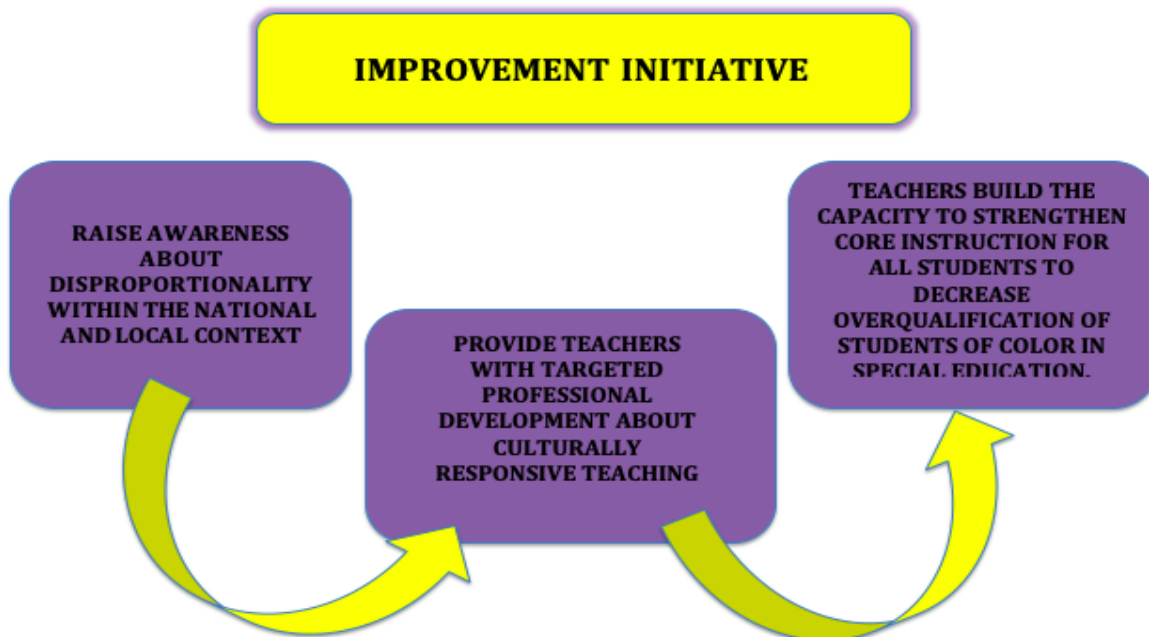
socioeconomic status, curriculum that is not culturally relevant, and a need for professional development on equity” (Ford, 2012). I hypothesize that, building teacher capacity to enact culturally relevant teaching practices has the potential to reduce the number of referrals of SoC to special education thus disrupting the cycle of poor outcomes associated with such an identification.

The Improvement Initiative: Professional Development for Culturally Relevant Teaching

In the following section, I provide descriptions of the two interrelated components of this improvement initiative with relevant research support. The components include: 1) professional development, and 2) culturally relevant teaching. Figure 8 provides a visual of the expectations of the improvement initiatives.

Figure 8

Improvement Initiative



For this improvement initiative, we focused our professional development content on addressing contributing factors to disproportionality such as implicit bias, and collaboratively reviewed how it can be dismantled through self-reflection and utilizing initiatives that are already being implemented in our district.

Improvement Methodology

Improvement science, as defined by Bryk, et. al. focuses on the ways that work-systems are designed and thereby shape how individuals carry out their responsibilities. It focuses on the specific tasks people do; the processes and tools they use; and how prevailing policies, organizational structures, and norms affect this. Though improvement science originated, with success, in industry and health science, it has also proven beneficial in the education sector. Bryk, et. al. further states that, “applying improvement science to education would direct greater attention to how better to design and fit together the many elements that shape the way schools work.” Ultimately, improvement science in education plays a key role in making our educational institutions more effective, efficient, and personally engaging (2017).

Design Team

After careful exploration of leadership teams, committees, and grade level professional learning communities at McHill elementary, as the researcher, I decided to inquire with the equity committee about designing the improvement initiative. These individuals were selected to participate on the design team due to their knowledge of the equity goals of the school district, their extensive training related to having courageous conversations about race, and their capacity to apply an equity lens to bring forth change for SoC. There was a total of twelve members on the team. The members of the equity committee included: one pre-k teacher, two kindergarten teachers, one second grade teacher, two third grade teachers, one fourth grade teacher, one fifth

grade teacher, one special education teacher, one Spanish teacher, one English as Second Language teacher, and the school social worker.

The role of the design team was to coordinate the specific dates for which the PD sessions would take place; and gather baseline data (via surveys) from teacher participants prior to the beginning of the study. Specifically, the design team focused on the three fundamental questions of the Model for Improvement to guide their work (Langley, 2014):

- 1) What are we trying to accomplish?
- 2) How will we know that the change is an improvement?
- 3) What change can we make that will result in improvement?

Using these questions supported efforts to ensure clarity about the specific problem we are trying to solve (question 1), demanded some reasoned explanation about the particular changes to be attempted and what we expect these changes to accomplish (question 2), and lastly, to ensure that we relied on data to know if changes introduced were actually an improvement; not relying on our own ideas (question 3) (Grunow, 2020).

Guiding Questions & Improvement Goals:

Question 1: What are we trying to accomplish?

The ultimate goal of the improvement initiative was to decrease referrals to special education for SoC. The intermediate goal was to raise awareness of disproportionality and build teacher capacity to provide all students with culturally relevant instruction. Presenting this information assisted in setting the foundation for the purpose of the study; to build teacher capacity to implement culturally relevant teaching through professional development.

Question 2: How will we know that the change is an improvement?

To determine if any changes were an improvement and not just a change, the team used practical measures including outcome, process, and balancing measures. These measures and their results are discussed below.

Question 3: What change can we make that will result in improvement?

The change that we anticipated to make as a team that would result in improvement was to build teacher capacity to implement culturally relevant teaching through targeted professional development.

Goals/Outcomes

The long-term goal of strengthening tier one core instruction with culturally relevant practices was aimed at reducing the overrepresentation of SoC in special education 12%. This will reduce the representation from being disproportionate to a proportionate representation instead. It is also a long-term goal of this work that teachers will begin to gain clarity and progress on Standard II of the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation (Appendix A). Standard II focuses on teachers establishing a respectful environment for a diverse population of students.

Participants

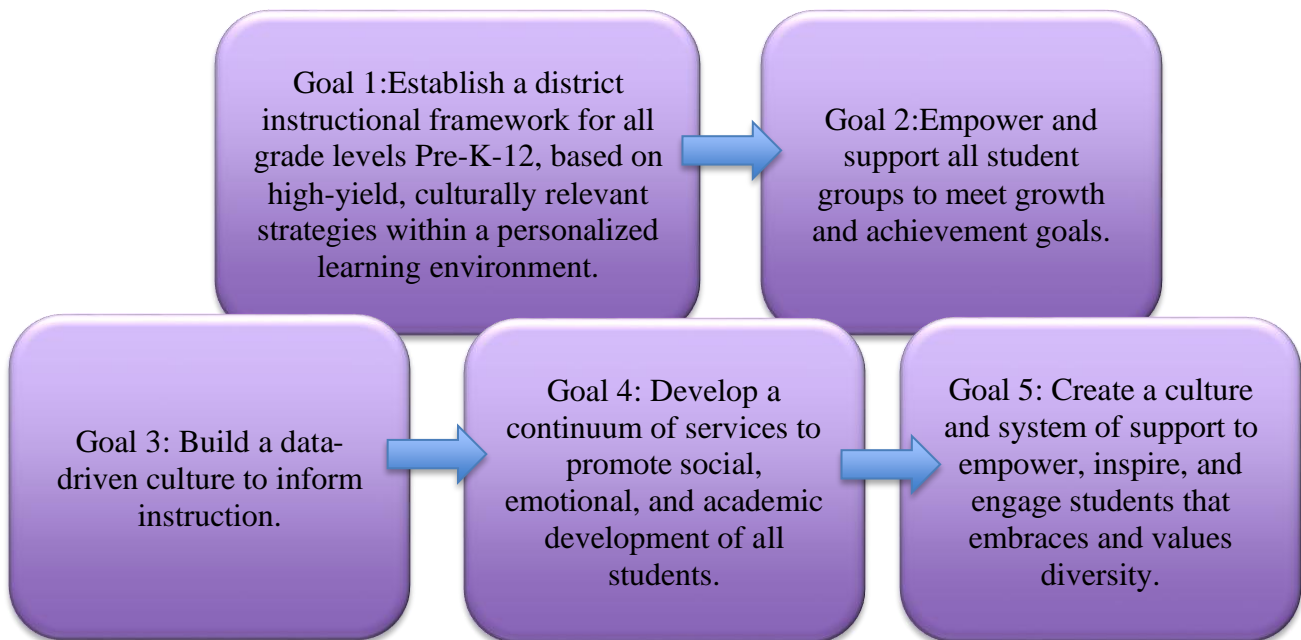
I define participants as the teachers who received the professional development and provided feedback on their learning experience. Participants were general education teachers at McHill Elementary School in Hope School District--recruited at the beginning of the 2021-22 academic school year. The term 'general education' teacher refers to the teacher responsible for providing instruction in the core curriculum. The general education is also responsible for collaborating with the special education teacher to provide an inclusive learning experience for both students with disabilities and students not identified with disabilities. Participants were willing, non-coerced volunteers. Consent was obtained from participants via a digital informed consent document embedded in a recruitment email. The number of participants in the

improvement initiative was proposed to be no more than ten participants. This was an intentional approach as to establish a professional learning community amongst participants with the focus of student learning (for all students) at the core of the improvement initiative. Through the improvement initiative, participants were provided with an opportunity to work collaboratively with one another to share ideas and brainstorm how they can improve their practices for SoC to access general curriculum.

As the researcher, I shared how the study aligned to the work of the school district; Student Success Goal, Figure 9, so that the team acknowledged how this work is supportive to a larger goal to move our district forward.

Figure 9

Southeast School District Strategic Plan: Student Success Goals



In *Drive, The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, author Daniel Pink addresses the importance of forming a team in which motivation is a key principle for the team involved (2009). Pink specifically states that “science shows that the secret to high-performance isn’t our biological drive, or our reward-punishment drive, but our third drive-our deep-seated desire to direct our own lives, to extend and expand our abilities, and to make a contribution” (2009). As the researcher, I wanted the team to feel an intrinsic motivation to fulfill the needs of the study. It was vital for the team to identify what their participation in the study would mean for them in their stance as an educator. Members of the implementation team reflected on their own philosophy as an educator, and determined how it aligns to the important work that they will embark on in this study.

Implementation Team

The purpose of the implementation team was to gather diverse individuals who collectively have the expertise and a wide range of experiences and perspectives necessary to implement the evidence-based practices of the study. In addition, they served the purpose of developing and maintaining the system and infrastructures to support effective and equitable implementation (Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, n.d.). The implementation team was composed of select members of the equity committee. On the implementation team, there was one member from each grade level (pre-k, kindergarten, first, second, third, fourth, and fifth grades), as well as one special education teacher, one ESL teacher, school counselor, school psychologist, and the school social worker. The purpose of designing the implementation team in this way, is to have a representative from each grade level and a representative from multiple departments. With representation from various departments within the organization, we can incorporate a variety of perspectives. Table 2 includes the improvement initiative

implementation schedule. The schedule captures each initiative, task, and the month that it was implemented. Initiatives included design team meetings, gathering of baseline data, targeted professional development, reflection, and impact of professional learning.

Implementation Design

In order to measure the effectiveness of the improvement initiative, I used the PDSA, (Plan, Study, Do, Act) cycles. A PDSA cycle is a model for improvement which provides a framework for an efficient trial-and-learning methodology (Langley, 2014). The specifics of each component of the PDSA cycle for the study are provided in detail below. See Appendix B for the PDSA Cycle figure.

Participants took a pre survey before the implementation of the initial professional development session. The professional development began with raising awareness of disproportionality at the national level. This information was presented via a bar graph representing Black students and Hispanic students within the school district. We then proceeded to cover the positive impact that culturally relevant core instruction has on academic success for SoC. The pre-survey was utilized to gauge teacher understanding and perspective of culturally relevant teaching. After the study, teachers took a post-survey which consisted of the same questions used in the pre-survey to gauge teacher understanding and perspective of culturally relevant teaching from the beginning of the study to the end.

Study

Week 1. During week one of implementation, the design team met to define the purpose of the work of strengthening core instruction. The team also determined the portion of the district's instructional framework that is aligned to addressing culturally relevant teaching practices. In addition, the team identified the equitable practices that were connected with the specific

instructional framework that was focused on. The instructional framework addresses environment, planning, instruction, and assessment. See Appendix G for each instructional framework.

For the purpose of the study, the team decided to only focus on environment from the district’s instructional framework. The focus and intention of environment in the instructional framework is provided in Table 2.

Table 2

Environment look-fors from the instructional framework

Environment
Look-Fors: Learner experiences have been designed to foster safe and inclusive environments, which honor students’ unique voices, strengths, interests, and needs.

There are six sub components within environment (E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, E6). The design team decided to specifically focus on one component, E6 which is provided in Table 3.

Table 3

E6 Environment component related to Students’ Six

E6. Adults use the “Student Six” strategies to promote success for every student: visibility, proximity, connecting to students’ lives, engaging students’ culture, addressing race, and connecting learning to the larger world.

There are two key reflective questions to ask teachers related to environment. They are included in Table 4. The design team decided to reflect upon question 1 midway through the study.

Table 4

Reflective questions for teachers to ask related to environment

Question 1	How do you build relationships with your students? How do students know your expectations?
------------	--

Question 2	How do you ensure that all students are included in your lesson?
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Week 2. During week two, participants completed two pre-surveys which were self-created. The first survey titled, Equity PD survey. The survey generally measured teacher beliefs and understanding about equity topics including SoC ability to access general curriculum (core), and beliefs about implicit bias. The second survey title, Culturally Relevant Teaching survey which measured participants understanding of the Students’ Six on a Likert scale and whether they consider themselves to be a culturally relevant educator. The pre-surveys were shared with participants via Google Form. Responses were collected anonymously. Appendix D has the pre-surveys.

Weeks 3 and 4. Time was provided on the first day of the professional development for completion of the survey if all participants have not completed it at this point. I decided to provide this time to help to maximize the accuracy of the data collected at the end of the first PDSA cycle (Langley, 2014). PD sessions focused on the topics of disproportionality within the local and national context, what literature states to be contributing factors to disproportionality. To start the PD session, as the researcher, I shared the problem of practice and my positionality. We also reviewed equity norms which are adapted from a combination of the work of Glenn Singleton (Singleton et al., 2007) and Advancing Racial Equity in Schools (2015). Equity norms were also reviewed. See appendix J for these norms.

- Stay Engaged
- Speak Your Truth
- Listen for Understanding
- Step Up and Step Back
- Experience Discomfort
- Expect and Accept Non-Closure
- Maintain Confidentiality
- Focus on Impact vs. Intent

Participants became familiar with the norms as they were reviewed frequently during faculty meetings and professional development with the equity team. The design team felt it was very important to ensure that norms were reviewed at the start of each session.

Prior to reviewing what the literature says to be contributing factors to disproportionality, participants completed a journal reflection via Padlet. The journal entry was based on the question, “What do you believe to be some of the contributing factors to disproportionality of SoC in special education?” Participants were invited to use their cell phones to scan the QR code shared or the link provided.

Weeks 5 and 6. During weeks five and six, participants participated in targeted professional development focused on defining culturally relevant teaching and distinguishing it from culturally relevant instruction. There was also discussion about culturally relevant teaching being embedded in core instruction to address the misconception that it is a separate entity.

During this session, time was dedicated to reviewing district initiatives to address, monitor, and improve culturally relevant teaching. This included a review of the Hope school district’s Strategic Plan for Student Success, 27 Equitable Practices, Instructional Framework,

and how they all align with the state's teacher evaluation. As the facilitator, I also presented information about the Students' Six; providing a definition and background information on how and when they originated.

After the presentation of district initiatives, participants focused solely on the portion of the equitable practices identified by the design team during weeks one and two of the study, which aligned with the portion of the instructional framework that we focused on; Environment. Participants were assigned to use the equitable practices classroom visit tool to monitor and self-reflect on their equitable practices. They self-selected a subject to focus on (individually) and reflected on their practices. The checklist measures are "observed" and "not observed." Appendix H consists of the checklist that participants utilized to monitor CRT in their core instruction. Participants did not provide their results for the researcher, but instead, there was a discussion planned for weeks 8 and 9 to reflect in the format of a focus group.

Weeks 7 and 8. During weeks eight and nine, participants provided an update on their self-monitoring of the equitable practices tool, defined implicit bias, and completed an implicit bias survey.

Participants utilized the implicit bias survey by Project Implicit (2011). Project Implicit was founded by three scientists, Dr. Tony Greenwald of the University of Washington, Dr. Mahzarin Banaji of Harvard University, and Dr. Brian Nosek of the University of Virginia. The mission of Project Implicit is to educate the public about bias and to provide a "virtual laboratory" for collecting data on the internet. The scientists behind the work produces high-impact research that forms the basis of scientific knowledge about bias and disparities. The survey, Implicit Association Test (IAT), gave participants the opportunity to test their own bias through exploring the unconscious roots of thinking and feeling. Project Implicit provides a

variety of implicit surveys including surveys testing bias towards age, presidents, sexuality, religion, race, and a variety of others. For the purpose of the study, participants took the survey related to implicit bias related to race. Though I did not require participants to provide their results in a documented format, they did report their results during the session upon completion of the survey. Of the six participants, there were five participants that identified as white and one participant that identified as Black. As they shared their results, there was a majority of participants, five out of six, that had an implicit bias of being more apt to identify with or have a preference for White people. The one participant that identified with and had a preference for Black people was the participant that identified as Black. As participants reflected on this, they shared that they wondered about the validity of the tool, but also acknowledged that, as educator practitioners, they have a lot of work to do in the area of addressing their implicit bias, despite their personal beliefs about where they stand with implicit bias. Some participants referred to the results of the survey as a “wake-up call.”

During this session, participants viewed a video which displayed a young black boy over the course of his life (from kindergarten to about middle school) as he experiences implicit bias. Prior to viewing the video, participants interactively defined implicit bias using a Frayer Model. Developed by Dorothy Frayer and colleagues in 1969, the Frayer Model is a graphic organizer with the purpose of supporting a learner to identify and define unfamiliar concepts and vocabulary. It is divided in to four sections including definition in the top left corner, characteristics in the top right corner, examples in the bottom left corner, and non-examples in the bottom right corner. The Frayer Model gives learners the opportunity to build a deep understanding of the term they are studying (2017). Incorporating the Frayer Model was

necessary as there are misconceptions of the term which often leads to it being used interchangeably with racism.

Week 9. Participants reflected on their self-monitoring of the equitable practices tool via a focus group during weeks eight and nine. It was during this session that participants engaged in an open discussion about their reflection of their practices. Though they did not share specific results, as the researcher, I guided the conversation by referring to the questions in the Environment portion of the instructional framework related to the equitable practices observed, “How do you build relationships with your students? How do students know your expectations?”

Participants also had an open discussion about their overall experience of being reflective about their teaching practices. Overall, the majority of participants reported “observed” for most of the equitable practices. The four general education classroom teachers mainly reported to have observed the equitable practices in their self-reflection. The other participants; school social worker and physical education teacher more frequently reported “not observed” in some areas. Following the discussion, participants engaged in brainstorming next steps for McHill elementary school.

Week 10. During week ten, participants completed the post-surveys. Duplicate versions of the Equity PD and Culturally Relevant Teaching surveys were utilized as the post-surveys. They were given two weeks to submit their surveys as it was just before winter break.

Week 11. During week eleven, the implementation team worked on analyzing the data that was collected over the course of the study. Surveys, journal reflections, and focus group discussions were all reviewed.

Table 5 provides an overview of the improvement initiative and implementation described above.

Table 5*Improvement Initiative Implementation Schedule*

Change Initiative Implementation & Evaluation Timeline							
Initiative	Task	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.
Design Team Meeting 1. The design team will meet to define the purpose of the work of strengthening core instruction	Define the “why”	X					
Gather Baseline Data 1. Assess participant knowledge of Culturally Relevant Teaching and Implicit Bias/Disproportionality prior to the targeted professional development	Baseline Assessment Outcome Measure	X					
Targeted Professional Learning 1. Participants will engage in professional learning, raising awareness about disproportionality of SoC in special education 2. Participants will engage in professional learning, acknowledging bias 3. Participants will engage in professional learning focused on strengthening core instruction to be culturally relevant	Plan, Do Intervention Component		X				
Reflection 1. Participants will reflect on their own bias 2. Participants will reflect on aspects of their own teaching practices that can be improved to incorporate culturally relevant teaching practices in their core instruction	Study (Process Measure)		X	X	X		
Impact of Professional Learning 1. Participants will complete a post-survey to assess their learning from the before and after implementation of the change initiative 2. Participants will utilize a CRT checklist to monitor their implementation of culturally relevant teaching in their core instruction 3. Participants will monitor their referrals to intervention and special education teams	Act Outcome Measure, Balancing Measure		X	X	X		

The COVID-19 Pandemic

During the implementation of the improvement initiative, schools were impacted by the global COVID 19 Pandemic. Initially, as a result of the pandemic, schools operated on Plan C, 100% virtual learning starting in March of the 2019-2020 school year. 100% virtual learning continued in to the 2020-2021 school year until March of 2021. Schools began to slowly reopen, first offering a hybrid model in which students had the option to return to school in person or continue to engage with instruction remotely.

During the implementation phase of the improvement initiative, starting in September of 2021, schools were operating on full in-person learning. There were options for an alternative learning arrangement in which families could choose to keep their child at home to learn virtually, but for the most part, the majority of students returned to in-person learning. Students with significant health needs typically opted for the alternative learning arrangement. Re-opening schools required very strategic planning with the priority of taking every precaution to minimize the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Minimizing the spread meant that teachers and students were back in person, but things were very different. Everyone in the building would be required to wear a mask at all times (except for during lunch while students eat or during scheduled mask breaks), and social distancing continued to be strongly encouraged.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the study as it had to be conducted virtually to minimize risk of spread of the virus. After implementation, there were other impacts that were revealed; they are included in the limitations section later in the paper.

Formative Evaluation of the Improvement Process

To measure the effectiveness of the improvement initiative, I used the PDSA, (Plan, Study, Do, Act) cycles. A PDSA cycle is a model for improvement which provides a framework for an efficient trial-and-learning methodology (Langley, 2014). The specifics of each component of the PDSA cycle for the study are provided in detail below. See Appendix B for the PDSA Cycle figure. Table 6 provides an overview of the practical evaluation measures which will be described in the following sections.

Table 6*Practical Evaluation Measures*

Practical Evaluation Measures			
Type of Measure	Instrument	What it measures	Frequency of Administration
Summative Measures			
Outcome Measure (Quant/Qual)	Pre- and Post-surveys	1) teacher beliefs about implicit bias and disproportionality; 2) teacher self-assessment of their knowledge and use of culturally relevant teaching practices	Beginning of the study and end of the study
Outcome Measure (Qual)	Focus Group	Participant learning over the course of the intervention.	End of the study
Formative Measures			
Driver Measure	Modified, 27 Equitable Practices	Participants would self-assess their use of CRP in the classroom;	Post-PD on the topics of implicit bias and CRT.
Process Measure (and benchmark outcome)	Reflection journals: participants reflect on knowledge gained from each PD session.	1) This information will be used by the design team to inform subsequent PD sessions (Intended use) 2) It also revealed additional teaching learning data	Results analyzed by team midway through the study
Balancing Measure	Referrals to MTSS and Special Education (EC) referrals for SoC	1) Number of referrals of Students of Color to special education 2) Number of referrals of Students of Color to MTSS	Measured at the end of the study
	Focus Group	1) Participant implications for next steps in their work to continue to dismantle disproportionality for their school.	Measured at the end of the study

Formative Evaluation Results and Analysis

Driver Measure

A driver measure is a measure associated with primary drivers. Since these drivers are intermediate outcomes in the working theory of improvement, they play a key role in the testing of a working theory of improvement (Bryk et al., 2017). The driver measure was originally proposed to be a culturally relevant teaching self-monitoring checklist. The implementation team decided to utilize the tools from the district as it would be relevant to participants and it could reinforce what it already expected. Specifically, for the driver measure, an adapted version of the 27 Equitable Practices Classroom Visit tool was utilized. Though participants did not formally observe each other, or themselves, the tool was utilized to self-assess and reflect. Of the 27 Equitable Practices, nine aligned to the purpose of the study and included in Table 6.

Table 7

Adapted Version of the 27 Equitable Practices Classroom Visit Tool

Equitable Practice Number	Equitable Practice	Description
Equitable Practice #1	Arranges the classroom to accommodate discussion	Arranges seating to facilitate student-student discussion; seating to facilitate teacher-student discussion
Equitable Practice #2	Ensures bulletin boards, displays, instructional materials, and other visuals in the classroom reflect the racial, ethnic, and cultural	Displays and uses materials (supplemental books) that reflect all students' racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds year-round; Displays products and props from students' home and community background

backgrounds represented
by students

Equitable Practice #3	Uses a variety of visual aids and props to support student learning.	Uses multiethnic photos, pictures, and props to illustrate concepts and content; Uses appropriate technology to illustrate concepts and content
Equitable Practice #6	Welcomes students by name as they enter the classroom	Asks students for correct pronunciation of their names; correctly pronounces students' names
Equitable Practice #7	Uses eye contact with all students	Makes culturally appropriate eye contact with all students
Equitable Practice #8	Uses proximity with all students equitably	Circulates around student work areas to be close to all students
Equitable Practice #9	Uses body language, gestures, and expressions to convey a message that all students' questions and opinions are important	Smiles, Nods head in affirmation, Leans towards students, Turns towards students who are speaking to show interest

Equitable Practice # 15	Acknowledges all students' comments, responses, questions, and contributions	Uses affirming, correcting, or probing to acknowledge all students' responses
Equitable Practice #19	Uses students' real-life experiences to connect school learning to students' lives	Asks students to reflect.

Process Measure

A process measure is a measure that feeds back valuable information about how specific processes being tested are performing under different conditions (Bryk et al., 2017). I chose to implement the use of journal reflections. In the journal reflection, participants responded to the question, “What do you believe to be some of the contributing factors to the disproportionality of SoC in special education?” This question was proposed and reflected upon during the first PD session and again midway through the study. The design team’s intended purpose of utilizing journal reflections was to inform subsequent PD sessions. In addition, it revealed additional teacher learning data related to the concepts being covered. The data were collected midway through implementation of the study.

Balancing Measures

A balancing measure is a measure that helps improvers keep an eye on the other parts of the system that are not currently the target of improvement but nevertheless may be affected by the changes being pursued (Bryk et al., 2017). I chose to use referrals to special education and MTSS for SoC as a balancing measure. I was concerned that after participants learned about disproportionality and the harm it can cause, they would stop referring or significantly reduce their referrals to special education. Although a reduction is the goal, there is a risk of under identification for services, which would cause an injustice for some students who could actually benefit from identification and additional support. Referrals to MTSS and special education were monitored by the implementation team over the course of the study.

During the last session of the professional development, participants shared their next steps in the form of a focus group upon completion of the series of professional development. These data were collected to gain an understanding of what participants perceived to be the necessary next steps for themselves and their school to continue to dismantle disproportionality. They responded to the following questions from the instructional framework related to incorporating Students' Six in the instructional framework for the district:

- How do you build relationships with your students?
- How do students know your expectations?

Summative Evaluation of the Improvement Process and Outcomes

Outcome Measure

An outcome measure operationalizes the aim statement in the driver diagram. These data provide a way of assessing whether progress is being made on the specific problem to be solved (Bryk et al., 2017). For this disquisition, there were two outcomes: 1) I implemented pre and post

surveys measuring teacher beliefs about implicit bias and disproportionality; as well as their knowledge and use of culturally relevant teaching practices. See appendix D for the surveys. The surveys included likert questions such as, “rate your understanding of each of the Students’ Six strategies.” It also included true/false questions such as, “implicit bias is linked to disproportionality.” There were also efficacy scales which participants captured their overall sense of SoC’s ability to access the general curriculum. This included responses to the following questions, “based on my experience, I believe that Students of Color are less likely to access the general curriculum without extra support from me as compared to their White peers, based on my experience, I believe that Students of Color are less likely to access the general curriculum without intervention from Tier 3 intervention as compared to their White peers, and I implement Students’ Six strategies in my classroom.” There was an open-ended question, as well, which required participants to share what they believe to make them culturally relevant educators.

Summative Evaluation

The purpose of this disquisition was to attain an intermediate goal of building teacher capacity to implement culturally relevant core instruction. I used data collected during the professional development as well as pre- and post- surveys to measure effectiveness. After the intermediate goal is achieved, teachers will be encouraged to monitor their CRT practices. They will also be encouraged to engage in critical conversations amongst their professional learning communities (PLCs) about referrals to the intervention team and/or special education for all students.

Data Collection

To determine if the change was actually an improvement, I employed In Vivo coding and descriptive analysis for qualitative data, and one sample t-test were utilized to analyze

quantitative. The data collected from the surveys using a simple t-test to determine if there was significance between the pre and post surveys. I used a one sample t-test and compared the outcome to the mean score at the beginning, instead of paired sample t-test, because all quantitative data collected was anonymized. In Vivo and value coding were employed to analyze journal the reflections as well as the focus group discussion. Descriptive analysis was utilized to interpret data about participants beliefs about SoC from the beginning to the end of the study.

In Vivo Coding. As defined by Saldana (2009), In Vivo coding (or verbatim coding) is a form of qualitative analysis which utilizes the language and terminology used by participants in response to practical measures. Furthermore, it helps researchers attain an in-depth understanding of the direct stories, ideas, and meanings that are expressed by research participants.

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One Sample t-test. The sample t-Test is utilized to determine differences between groups. To determine if there's a significance, the t-Test analyzes measures of central tendency. For the purpose of this study, the t-value, degree of freedom, and significance were analyzed comparing pre and post survey responses. In instances where significance was demonstrated, the value of the significance had to be 0.05 or less. SPSS was used to conduct the sample t-test.

Descriptive Statistics. Descriptive statistics are used to describe the basic features of the data in a study. It refers to statistically describing, aggregating, and presenting the constructs of interest or associations between constructs. The analysis of the data can be presented in the form of graphics including bar graphs, pie charts, and other graphs.

Data Analysis

Students' Six. Table 8 includes the results of the sample t-test conducted for the Likert scale which required participants to rate their understanding of each of the Students' Six strategies. Of the strategies, the only significance was with visibility at .047. While participants demonstrated an improved understanding of being visible for their students, there was only a marginal significance for Engaging Students' Culture. For proximity, there was no variance as participants all rated themselves highly at a 4 ("I use this strategy in my classroom everyday"). This conveys the idea that all participants believe that they consistently provide students with appropriate proximity by arranging their space (classroom) and their physical proximity to students to reduce vulnerability students feel. Furthermore, it conveys that participants rate themselves to always walk around the room and check in on student progress to create a more equal and focused space. Though participants rated themselves highly on proximity, it is important to note that it is common that participants will rate themselves highly on surveys which may not demonstrate the actual growth that was made.

Table 8*Sample t-Test**Survey question: Rate your understanding of each of the Students' Six Strategies*

Strategies	Pre-Survey		Post-Survey		t	df	Significance
	M	SD	M	SD			
Visibility	3.5	.837	3.86	.378	2.500	6	.047
Connecting to Students' Lives	3.833	.408	3.929	.189	1.334	6	.231
Engaging Students' Culture	3.333	.516	3.71	.488	2.067	6	.084
Addressing Race	3.333	.516	3.50	.500	.884	6	.411
Connecting to the Larger World	3.5	.548	3.57	.535	.354	6	.736
Proximity	3.83	.408	--	--	--	--	--

Note: Significance = less than 0.05

Equitable Practices Self-Reflection. After utilizing the equitable practices tool to self-monitor whether participants “observed” or “not observed” each practice in their own teaching, they shared aloud their results. As they shared, I kept a tally record of each person’s results. Table 9 captures the results of each practice. Overall, each participant that was a classroom “observed” each of the practices in their teaching. In the instances in which a practice was “not observed,” it was typically the school social worker or the physical education teacher. They shared that their role/space does not always lend itself to the practices that they did not observe, however, they would like to reflect on how they can begin to incorporate more of the practices in to their daily interactions with students to improve their environment for student experience.

Table 9*Equitable practices self-reflection results*

Equitable Practice Number	Observed	Not Observed
Equitable Practice #1 Arranges the classroom to accommodate discussion.	6 participants	0 participants
Equitable Practice #2 Ensures bulletin boards, displays, instructional materials, and other visuals in the classroom reflect the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds represented by students	6 participants	0 participants
Equitable Practice #3 Uses a variety of visual aids and props to support student learning.	4 participants	2 participants
Equitable Practice #6 Welcomes students by name as they enter the classroom.	6 participants	0 participants
Equitable Practice #7 Uses eye contact with all students.	6 participants	0 participants
Equitable Practice #8 Uses proximity with all students equitably.	4 participants	2 participants
Equitable Practice #9 Uses body language, gestures, and expressions to convey a message that all students' questions and opinions are important	3 participants	3 participants
Equitable Practice # 15 Acknowledges all students' comments, responses, questions, and contributions.	3 participants	3 participants
Equitable Practice #19 Uses students' real-life experiences to connect school learning to students' lives.	4 participants	2 participants

Teacher Beliefs. On the pre and post Equity PD surveys, the following questions were asked to measure participants' beliefs about SoC ability to access the general curriculum from the beginning to the end of the study.

Survey question 1: Based on my experience, I believe that Students of Color are less likely to access the general curriculum without intervention from Tier 3 intervention as compared to their White peers.

Survey question 2: Based on my experience, I believe that Students of Color are less likely to access the general curriculum without extra support from me as compared to their White peers.

Figure 10 captures participants' responses to survey question 1 on the pre survey. Figure 11 captures participants' responses to survey question 1 on the post-survey. Participants reported their experience/beliefs as: this is not/ has never been my perception, this is sometimes my perception, or this is/has always my perception. In the beginning of the study, 33.3% of participants expressed that it is always their perception that SoC are less likely to access the general curriculum without intervention from Tier 3 intervention as compared to their White peers. 66.7% of participants expressed that this is sometimes their perception. As represented in Figure 11 for the post survey, 33.3% of participants expressed that it is sometimes their perception that SoC are less likely to access general curriculum without the support of Tier 3 intervention, while 66.7% reported that this is not their perception. From the pre to post survey, there was growth demonstrated in teacher beliefs about SoC ability to access general curriculum without the support of Tier 3 intervention, as no participants reported that this was always their perception on the post survey.

Figure 10

Equity PD Pre-Survey Responses Survey Question 1: Students of Color need additional support from Tier 3 intervention to access general curriculum.

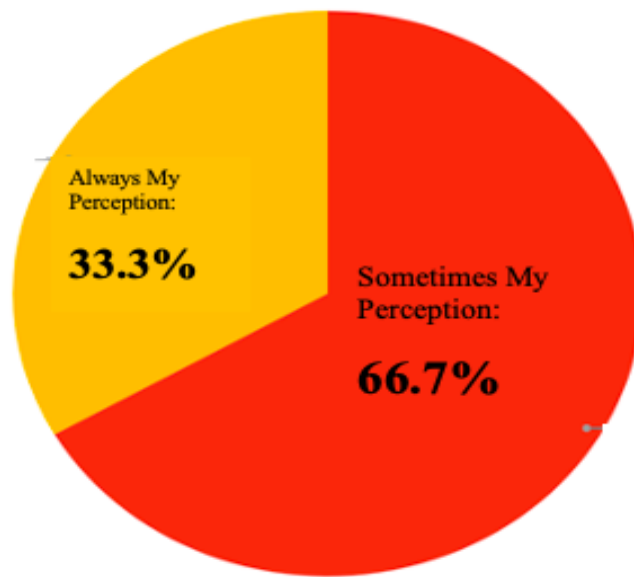


Figure 11

Equity PD Post-Survey Responses Survey Question 1: Students of Color need additional support from Tier 3 intervention to access general curriculum.

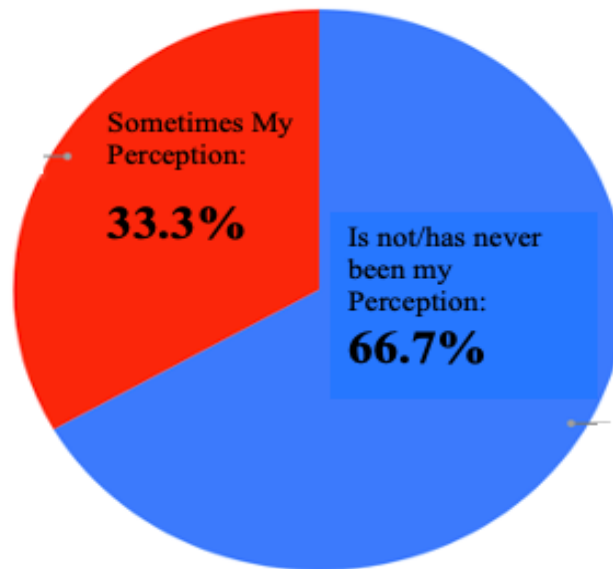


Figure 12 captures teacher beliefs related to survey question 2 on the pre survey, while Figure 13 represents participants responses on the post survey. On the pre-survey, 16.7% of participants reported that it is always their perception that SoC require support from them (the teacher) to access general curriculum. 83.3% of participants reported that this is sometimes their perception. On the post-survey, 33.3% of participants expressed that it is sometimes their perception, while 66.7% reported that this is not their perception. From the beginning to the end of the study, there was a shift in their perception of SoC ability to access the general curriculum without additional support from the teacher, as no participants expressed this is always their perception. Furthermore, on the pre survey for question 2, no participants expressed that this is not their perception, while over half of participants reported this to be their perception at the end of the study.

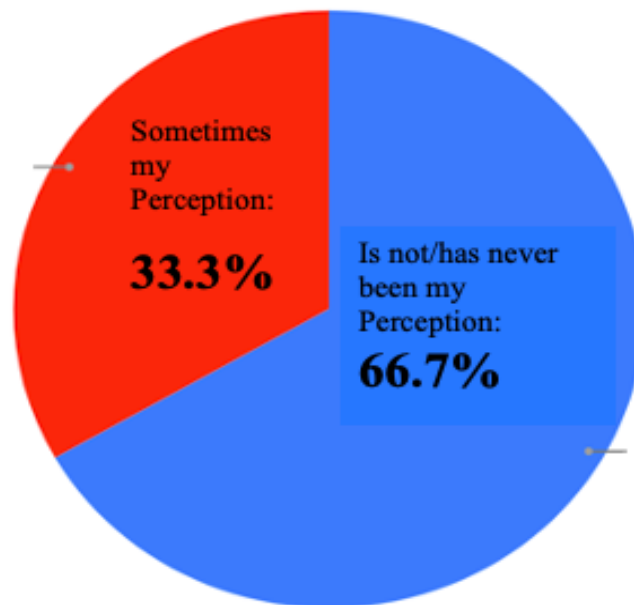
Figure 12

Equity PD Pre-Survey Responses Survey Question 2: Students of Color need additional support from their teacher to access general curriculum.



Figure 13

Equity PD Pre-Survey Responses Survey Question 2: Students of Color need additional support from their teacher to access general curriculum.



Journal Reflections. Appendix F includes the journal reflections that were completed by participants midway through the study about contributing factors to disproportionality. The question that participants responded to was:

Journal reflection question: What do you believe to be some of the contributing factors to the disproportionality of SoC in special education?

During session one of the professional development, participants were asked to respond to this question prior to being introduced to what the literature states to be contributing factors. This was an effort to gather a baseline understanding of participants perceptions of the causes of disproportionality. Themes that emerged were “families” and “access.” In their initial responses, participants expressed factors such as “early access to childcare/education,”

“generational gap of teachers and students,” “differences in family dynamics,” “poverty,” “White dominant culture,” and “student engagement/effort/sense of belonging.” Midway through the study, themes that emerged were “bias,” “systems,” “dismantle.” Specific responses included, “we need to challenge our own bias and dismantle an educational system that is based on White cultural norms,” “teacher misunderstanding,” “educational system this is inherently culturally irrelevant and racially biased.” Participants also expressed why it is important to dismantle disproportionality with responses such as, “it is important to dismantle these things so that we actually live our values,” “it is important to dismantle these things so we can meet the needs of all learners and make sure all voices are heard and valued.” In comparison to the initial responses, participants appeared to have a shift in their understanding of the causes of disproportionality which was more reflective of the system and practitioner; less emphasis on the student and/or their family. This demonstrates the exact shift that the work of becoming culturally relevant requires and for changing the narrative for SoC; critical practitioner reflection of their own biases and how the system is currently based on White norms.

Focus Group Discussion. To wrap up the study, participants reflected on their learning in the format of a focus group. The reflection question for environment was used to guide the discussion.

Reflection question: How do you build relationships with your students? How do students know your expectations?

With participants consent, we recorded the last session so that the discussion could be transcribed. With the transcription, I was able to use In Vivo coding to determine if there were any themes. One major theme that emerged was the reference to mask-wearing and how it has presented challenges with building relationships with students. Terri, a first-grade teacher,

expressed some of the ways that she is breaking the barrier of building relationships despite mask-wearing. She shared that she steps outside on her class porch and pulls her mask down when she needs to have critical conversations with students. She expressed that this gives them the opportunity to show students (facial expressions) that they care about them and want the best for them. Also, when students are outside in larger areas, it was shared that it is important to just have conversations with students to connect with them and know them on a personal level.

Lynn, a fourth-grade teacher, shared since implementation of the improvement initiative, she decided to take individual pictures of each student with their mask off (outside), and she created a walk with their pictures that she titled, “Who We Are Behind the Mask.”

Sherlisa, the social worker, expressed that, with all the things that are going on in school buildings daily, it has become very easy to be distracted by things that she has to do, even when being present with a student. She stated that she has had to sharpen her active listening so that students feel that she is fully present.

Molly, a third-grade teacher, shared that she has an “I am” mirror in her classroom. She and her students use the mirror daily to recite affirmations. This supports the work of ensuring students are connecting to each other and themselves.

Linda, another third-grade teacher, expectations have morphed over the course of the year. Due to what students have faced over the past two years as a result of COVID, learning from home, and other challenges, once students returned to the building this year, they needed to feel like they were back together. They needed time to “relearn school” and the confirmation that their classroom is a safe space to make mistakes and always give their very best. It is after this that learning could happen now that they feel safe in their space with their teachers and peers.

Also, demonstrating and acknowledging for students that teachers are not perfect and they are also always learning.

Because responses were not specifically addressing building relationships with SoC, the question was restated to include SoC.

(Restated) Reflection question: How do you build relationships with your SoC? How do students know your expectations?

Lynn shared that one of her students stated to her, “I don’t know what you expect from me, I am a Black boy in a mostly White school.” She described the student as very sharp but struggles with some of his social-emotional needs. Connecting with this student and building a trusting relationship with him has been particularly important, especially being a “warm demander.”

Once the question was restated, Linda expressed one issue at McHill is that some classes are not diverse. This makes it awkward when having critical conversations about diverse cultures, as it seems to put certain students on the spot (for example, all of the kids look at the two Hispanic students when the class has conversations about Hispanic culture).

During the focus group discussion, the following question was also asked and reflected upon:

- What do you propose the next steps are for McHill Elementary for continuing to move this work forward for your school?

One idea that emerged was to have an equity event with stations sharing the 27 Equitable Practices, Instructional Framework, and Students’ Six. This could be an in-person even in which other staff members have the opportunity to learn about these district initiatives to address issues of equity. Though participants did not observe each other using the tools, they suggested

including an opportunity for teachers to walk around and complete peer observations using the district initiatives.

Another idea shared was to create a “resource bank” with the great things that are happening across the school to establish a sense of community, trust, and belonging for students within classroom settings. Having a resource bank could give teachers ideas of what is already working so that they do not always have to recreate.

Because the school already has a Morning Message that goes out twice a week, participants also proposed the idea of taking pictures of things that are going well in classrooms and doing a “shout-out.” An example of a shout-out was, “Check out how Ms. Jones is incorporating the Students’ Six or Equitable Practice number 2 in her classroom!”

Summary Findings

Upon completion of implementing the improvement initiative, there were several findings based on the data collected. One finding of the outcome measure pre and post surveys, was that teachers had high levels of understanding prior to the PD based on their ratings being high on the pre surveys. With the understanding that participants could have inflated their self-assessment scores, it is important to consider that the responses may not be an accurate report of the true baseline knowledge for evidence-based practices for culturally relevant practices (Students’ Six).

Another finding upon completion of implementation of the improvement initiative was the difference between the perceptions of general education classroom teachers and non-classroom teachers (physical education teacher and school social worker) to implement the equitable practices. While classroom teachers reports indicated that they felt competent to

implement the equitable practices, the non-classroom teachers indicated that they could continue to reflect upon and improve their practices.

Reflection journals were originally intended to inform subsequent PD sessions. Upon review of the journal entries, it was determined that participants were understanding disproportionality and the impact that implicit bias has on it. Therefore, it was appropriate to proceed with the subsequent sessions in the PD plan. Teachers were learning the concepts and it was appropriate to continue with the subsequent PD plan.

Other findings included a demonstrated mindset shift for participants regarding how they contribute to disproportionality and how they can be more intentional about dismantling it. This was found during the focus group at the end of the PD sessions when participants demonstrated an eagerness to move the work forward of dismantling disproportionality within their school. They brainstormed equity events and peer observation cycles that they felt inspired to establish in partnership with the school's equity team.

One finding that could possibly raise concern is the fact that no participants made referrals to MTSS or special education for their SoC. While this was not addressed directly with participants, it could be assumed that there were no referrals as participants new knowledge discourages them from making referrals as to not contribute to the problem of disproportionality. Though dismantling disproportionality is the goal, the negative impact of not making referrals increases the risk of under identifying SoC that may actually have learning difficulties that need to be addressed.

Implications and Recommendations

Limitations of the Study

Number of participants. Limitations of this study include the number of participants and measures taken to minimize the spread of COVID-19 such as mask wearing. The number of participants was proposed to be a maximum of ten. After recruitment via email with a flyer in the school's Morning Message, only seven participants expressed interest on the electronic interest form and ultimately provided consent for their participation. During the implementation of the study, Hope School district placed a moratorium on professional development. There was a large emphasis on mental health of district employees, therefore, they were not being required to participate in PD beyond required school and district level trainings. Also, due to COVID (social distancing) and an attempt to have more buy-in to participate, the PD sessions were offered virtually. Though research does not lean more towards online or in-person learning being more effective over the other, there are definitely advantages to in-person trainings versus online. Continu (2019) report the following advantages of in-person learning versus online learning:

- More fluid exchange of ideas
- Social interaction during training
- Good retention due to decreased likelihood of multitasking
- Improved hands-on training
- Faster response to questions and instructor feedback
- Higher satisfaction scores

Mask-wearing. As teachers self-monitored their equitable practices using the equitable practices checklist, they noticed limitations of mask wearing when building relationships with students.

For example, as a practice of the Students' Six, teachers noted that proximity looked very

different when social distancing is expected. They also noted that some students who benefit from nonverbal praise or visual cues....

Representation of teachers. Another limitation was the representation of teacher participants. There were more teachers in upper grades (two third grade teachers, two fifth grade teachers, one first grade teacher, a physical education teacher, and school social worker) represented in the study. There were also all female teachers represented in the participants.

Lessons for Social Justice

Implicit bias impacts an educator's ability to be culturally relevant for their students. This negatively impacts student learning experience, especially SoC, as it makes it difficult for them to be viewed as capable learners without requiring additional support from their teachers or intensive intervention. This contributes to the ever-growing disproportionate representation of SoC in special education and underrepresentation in gifted education programs. Before an educator can be culturally relevant for their students, they must first acknowledge their implicit bias. Addressing implicit bias lessens the likelihood of thinking of viewing being culturally relevant as a "checkbox" of things to do, and increases the chances that it is embraced on a personal level for the practitioner. Ultimately, this will increase access to the general curriculum for all students.

Schools have taken a deficit perspective of marginalized students (SoC) and their families, believing the students and their families are at fault for underperformance, not the school or its many inappropriately normed systems. Ultimately, the narrative tends to be that these students are less likely to graduate from high school or graduate with lower skills, which severely limits their postsecondary options. As adults, individuals face the possibility of unemployment or lower paying jobs which starts or continues the cycle of poverty for them and

their families (Capper & Frattura, 2008). This is why it is imperative that disproportionality and implicit bias be addressed on an ongoing basis in public school sectors until it is dismantled.

Suggestions for Future Research

One recommendation for further research would be for teachers to report their findings of their self-monitoring in a more concrete way. In the study, participants shared their findings informally in the focus group and provided updates along the way. Though this relieved the pressure of participants having to share personal results of their ability to implement equitable practices, it did not provide a baseline of the mindset of participants.

Since the goal of this study was to address an intermediate goal related to addressing disproportionality, I would suggest that further research incorporates student voice in addition to teacher beliefs and perspectives. Including student voice in future research could capture their feelings and beliefs about the instruction that teachers provide. For example, a survey could include statements such as:

- My teachers make me feel included at school
- I see my culture represented positively at school
- The color of my skin determines how my teachers interact with me

Lastly, this study was implemented at the elementary school level. I would suggest conducting this study across all levels (elementary, middle, and high school) as disproportionality is not only limited to elementary school.

Conclusion

Studies have confirmed that disproportionality of SoC in special education continues to be a growing problem. SoC are at greater risk of being overidentified for special education than their white peers (Mitylene & Lassmann, 2003).

In a blog interview, Zaretta Hammond speaks about CRT not being about using a few strategies, but more about an educator's stance. She states:

"It takes time to master but teachers can put core practices into place now. It's really important to not begin this journey alone; do it in community, with other teachers. That is one of my major goals - to build communities of practice around culturally responsive teaching so that we can point to classrooms that help culturally and linguistically diverse students leverage their cultural learning tools and accelerate their own learning" (Ferlazzo, 2015).

Though we focused on culturally relevant teaching, the design of the improvement initiative supports Hammond's statement about learning together--in a community. Too often, teachers are required to participate in PD that is loaded with information that can support improving their teaching practices. However, they do not always have the opportunity to implement, receive feedback, and refine their practices accordingly based on the knowledge that they have gained through PD

Specifically, for the school district of McHill Elementary, the district strategic plan specifically addresses the need for implementing CRT practices in order to ensure the success of all students. In order to support the goal of the district, I believe that it is critical to be intentional about how teachers implement and reflect their CRT practices. It will be key to provide explicit professional development on how strengthening tier one core instruction could potentially reduce the number of referrals to special education for SoC. There is a growing consensus of opinion from researchers that systematic and ongoing professional development has a greater impact on teacher practice than the 'single-shot' workshop (Yoon et al., 2007). To be effective, this type of work cannot follow the format of a "one-shot" professional development. It would be most impactful to adopt a structure in which teachers have the opportunity to implement and self-reflect. The goal should be to provide focused, sustained, and intensive training that is required

to bring forth change. With this initiative, we make efforts to ensure collaboration, opportunities to demonstrate understanding, and reduce the possibility of failing to account for teachers' new level of expertise (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

While this study did demonstrate a shift in the mindset of participants, I believe that there is more work to be done to build teacher's capacity to have conversations that isolate race. Often, when having discussions, even with framed questions about race, the conversation would shift, for example, to a discussion about girls versus boys, or proper use of pronouns.

As a Black woman, educator, and mother to a Black child, the work of this disquisition is sincerely addressing an educational inequity of which I am passionate. This work requires a great deal of intentionality and is not an easy fix that can be done with a checklist. SoC are very capable and deserve to have the space to shine their strengths and abilities without being expected to conform to White norms. I stand beside Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings in her beliefs of achievement for SoC. She states that:

“...African-American students are capable, smart, and [that] they must be given equal opportunities to excel in schools...” (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

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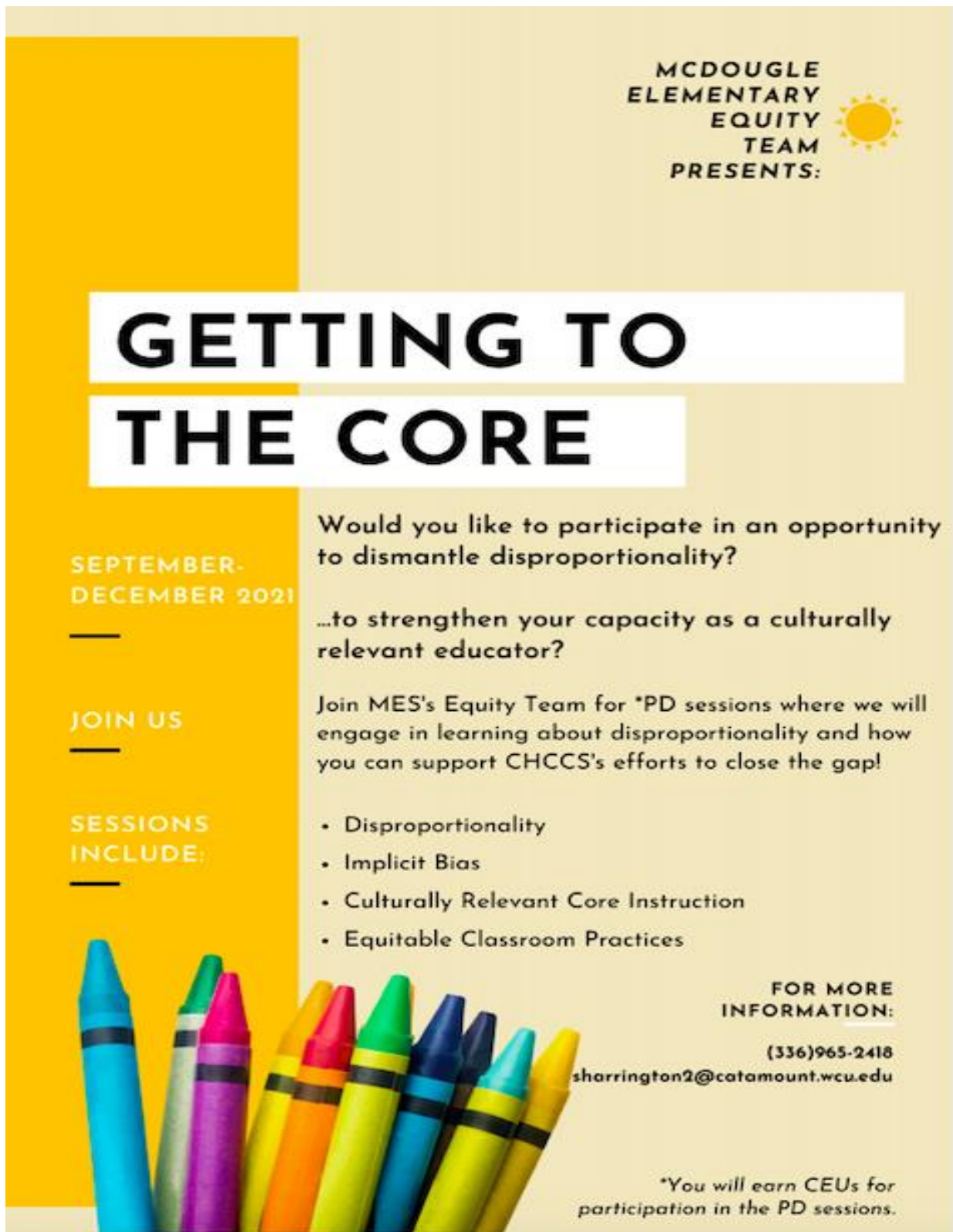
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Appendix A
Recruitment Flyer



**MCDUGLE
ELEMENTARY
EQUITY
TEAM
PRESENTS:** 

GETTING TO THE CORE

**SEPTEMBER-
DECEMBER 2021**
—

JOIN US
—

**SESSIONS
INCLUDE:**
—

Would you like to participate in an opportunity to dismantle disproportionality?
...to strengthen your capacity as a culturally relevant educator?

Join MES's Equity Team for *PD sessions where we will engage in learning about disproportionality and how you can support CHCCS's efforts to close the gap!

- Disproportionality
- Implicit Bias
- Culturally Relevant Core Instruction
- Equitable Classroom Practices

**FOR MORE
INFORMATION:**
(336)965-2418
sharrington2@catamount.wcu.edu

**You will earn CEUs for participation in the PD sessions.*

Appendix B

Western Carolina University Consent Form to Participate in a Research Study

Project Title: Getting to the Core: Addressing the Overrepresentation of SoC in Special Education; Culturally Relevant Core Instruction

This study is being conducted by: Shanice Harrington and Dr. Jess Weiler

Description and Purpose of the Research:

You are invited to participate in a research study addressing the overrepresentation of SoC in special education. By doing this study we hope to learn if increasing awareness of disproportionality and strengthening core instruction will support a decrease in referrals to special education for SoC.

What you will be asked to do: Below is a week-by-week description of what you will be asked to do.

Week 1: Participants will complete pre-surveys on the topics of implicit bias and culturally relevant pedagogy

Week 2: Design team will use the results of the pre-surveys to develop the professional development

Weeks 3-5: Participants will participate in targeted professional development focused on disproportionality and implicit bias provided by the implementation team/school's equity team. The duration of the PD will be one hour over the course of three sessions (1 per week).

Weeks 6-8: Participants will participate in targeted professional development focused on strengthening core instruction to be culturally relevant, including a review of district initiatives to improve culturally relevant pedagogy. This PD will be provided by the implementation team/school's equity team. After the first session of CRT PD, participants will respond to the journal prompt: How do you build relationships with your students? How do students know your expectations? The duration of the PD will be one hour over the course of three sessions (1 per week).

Weeks 9-10: Participants will utilize the equitable classroom practices classroom visit tool to self-monitor their classroom practices after going through both targeted professional developments.

Week 11: Participants will complete the post-surveys to measure growth/learning from the beginning to the end of the study.

Risks and Discomforts:

To mitigate the potential social risks of identifiable data accidentally being disclosed outside of the research setting, I will keep consent forms in a separate place than data and assign random codes to participants.

Benefits:

Teachers who participate in this study can directly benefit as they gain knowledge for addressing disparities for SoC. Through this study, they have the opportunity to refine their teaching practices to work towards closing the racial academic achievement gap at this school site.

Society may benefit from this study, as it addresses an ongoing disparity in education, disproportionality of SoC in special education. Efforts have been made at the national and local level to reduce disproportionality. This study will attempt to support individuals with addressing their own biases to ultimately break the cycle of marginalization.

Privacy/Confidentiality/Data Security:

The data collected in this research study will be kept confidential. Participation in research may involve some loss of privacy. We will do our best to make sure that the information about you is kept confidential, but we cannot guarantee total confidentiality. Your personal information may be viewed by individuals involved in the research and may be seen by people including those collaborating, funding, and regulating the study. We will share only the minimum necessary information in order to conduct the research. Your personal information may also be given out if required by law, such as pursuant to a court order. While the information and data resulting from this study may be presented at scientific meetings or published in a scientific journal, your name or other personal information will not be revealed.

We will collect your information through Google and/or Qualtrics surveys, emails, and electronic journal entries. This information will be stored in a restricted access folder for no more than three years after the research is concluded.

For the purpose of the study, I will use summary data from the whole group to maintain confidentiality. If direct quotes are used, pseudonyms will be utilized for individuals. The research team will work to protect your data to the extent permitted by technology. It is possible, although unlikely, that an unauthorized individual could gain access to your responses because you are responding online. This risk is similar to your everyday use of the internet.

Voluntary Participation: Participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If you choose not to participate or decide to withdraw, please send an email to sharrington2@catamount.wcu.edu to inform me or your withdrawal; there will be no impact on your employment.

Compensation for Participation: For your participation, you will earn 1.0 CEUs. You will use Timekeeper (via the district's employee intranet, The Vine) to log your participation in the PD sessions.

Contact Information: For questions about this study, please contact Shanice Harrington at (336)965-2418 or sharrington2@catamount.wcu.edu. You may also contact Dr. Jess Weiler, the principal investigator and faculty advisor for this project, at jrweiler@wcu.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your treatment as a participant in this study, you may contact the Western Carolina University Institutional Review Board through the

Office of Research Administration by calling 828-227-7212 or emailing irb@wcu.edu. All reports or correspondence will be kept confidential to the extent possible.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

I understand what is expected of me if I participate in this research study. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions, and understand that participation is voluntary. My signature shows that I agree to participate and am at least 18 years old.

Participant Name (printed): _____

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name of Researcher Obtaining Consent: _____

Researcher Signature: _____ Date: _____

If you would like to receive a summary of the results, once the study has been completed, please write your email address (as legibly as possible) here:

Appendix C

North Carolina Teacher Evaluation: Standard II

North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process

Standard II: Teachers Establish a Respectful Environment for a Diverse Population of Students

Observation	Element IIa. Teachers provide an environment in which each child has a positive, nurturing relationship with caring adults. Teachers encourage an environment that is inviting, respectful, supportive, inclusive, and flexible.				
	Developing	Proficient	Accomplished	Distinguished	Not Demonstrated (Comment Required)
✓	<input type="checkbox"/> Appreciates and understands the need to establish nurturing relationships.	. . . and <input type="checkbox"/> Establishes an inviting, respectful, inclusive, flexible, and supportive learning environment.	. . . and <input type="checkbox"/> Maintains a positive and nurturing learning environment.	. . . and <input type="checkbox"/> Encourages and advises others to provide a nurturing and positive learning environment for all students.	
	Element IIb. Teachers embrace diversity in the school community and in the world. Teachers demonstrate their knowledge of the history of diverse cultures and their role in shaping global issues. They actively select materials and develop lessons that counteract stereotypes and incorporate histories and contributions of all cultures. Teachers recognize the influence of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and other aspects of culture on a student's development and personality. Teachers strive to understand how a student's culture and background may influence his or her school performance. Teachers consider and incorporate different points of view in their instruction.				
✓	<input type="checkbox"/> Acknowledges that diverse cultures impact the world.	. . . and <input type="checkbox"/> Displays knowledge of diverse cultures, their histories, and their roles in shaping global issues.	. . . and <input type="checkbox"/> Uses materials or lessons that counteract stereotypes and acknowledges the contributions of all cultures.	. . . and <input type="checkbox"/> Promotes a deep understanding of cultures through the integration of culturally sensitive materials and ideas throughout the curriculum.	
✓	<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates awareness of the diversity of students in the classroom.	<input type="checkbox"/> Acknowledges the influence of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, socio-economics, and culture on a student's development and attitudes.	<input type="checkbox"/> Consistently incorporates different points of view in instruction.	<input type="checkbox"/> Capitalizes on diversity as an asset in the classroom.	
	Element IIc. Teachers treat students as individuals. Teachers maintain high expectations, including graduation from high school, for students of all backgrounds. Teachers appreciate the differences and value the contributions of each student in the learning environment by building positive, appropriate relationships.				
✓	<input type="checkbox"/> Holds high expectations of students.	. . . and <input type="checkbox"/> Communicates high expectations for all students.	. . . and <input type="checkbox"/> Encourages and values contributions of students, regardless of background or ability.	. . . and <input type="checkbox"/> Helps students hold high expectations for themselves and their peers.	

Observation	Element 1d. Teachers adapt their teaching for the benefit of students with special needs. Teachers collaborate with the range of support specialists to help meet the special needs of all students. Through inclusion and other models of effective practice, teachers engage students to ensure that their needs are met.				
	Developing	Proficient	Accomplished	Distinguished	Not Demonstrated (Comment Required)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Recognizes that students have a variety of learning needs. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Is knowledgeable of effective practices for students with special needs.	... and <input type="checkbox"/> Collaborates with specialists who can support the special learning needs of students. <input type="checkbox"/> Provides unique learning opportunities such as inclusion and research-based, effective practices for students with special needs.	... and <input type="checkbox"/> Understands the roles of and collaborates with the full range of support specialists to help meet the special needs of all students. <input type="checkbox"/> Effectively engages special needs students in learning activities and ensures their unique learning needs are met.	... and <input type="checkbox"/> Anticipates the unique learning needs of students and solicits assistance from within and outside the school to address those needs. <input type="checkbox"/> Adapts instruction for the benefit of students with special needs and helps colleagues do the same for their students.		
Element 1e. Teachers work collaboratively with the families and significant adults in the lives of their students. Teachers recognize that educating children is a shared responsibility involving the school, parents or guardians, and the community. Teachers improve communication and collaboration between the school and the home and community in order to promote trust and understanding and build partnerships with all segments of the school community. Teachers seek solutions to overcome cultural and economic obstacles that may stand in the way of effective family and community involvement in the education of their students.					
<input type="checkbox"/> Responds to family and community concerns.	... and <input type="checkbox"/> Communicates and collaborates with the home and community for the benefit of students.	... and <input type="checkbox"/> Recognizes obstacles to family and community participation and conscientiously seeks solutions to overcome them.	... and <input type="checkbox"/> Promotes trust and understanding throughout the school community.		

Comments:

Examples of Artifacts:

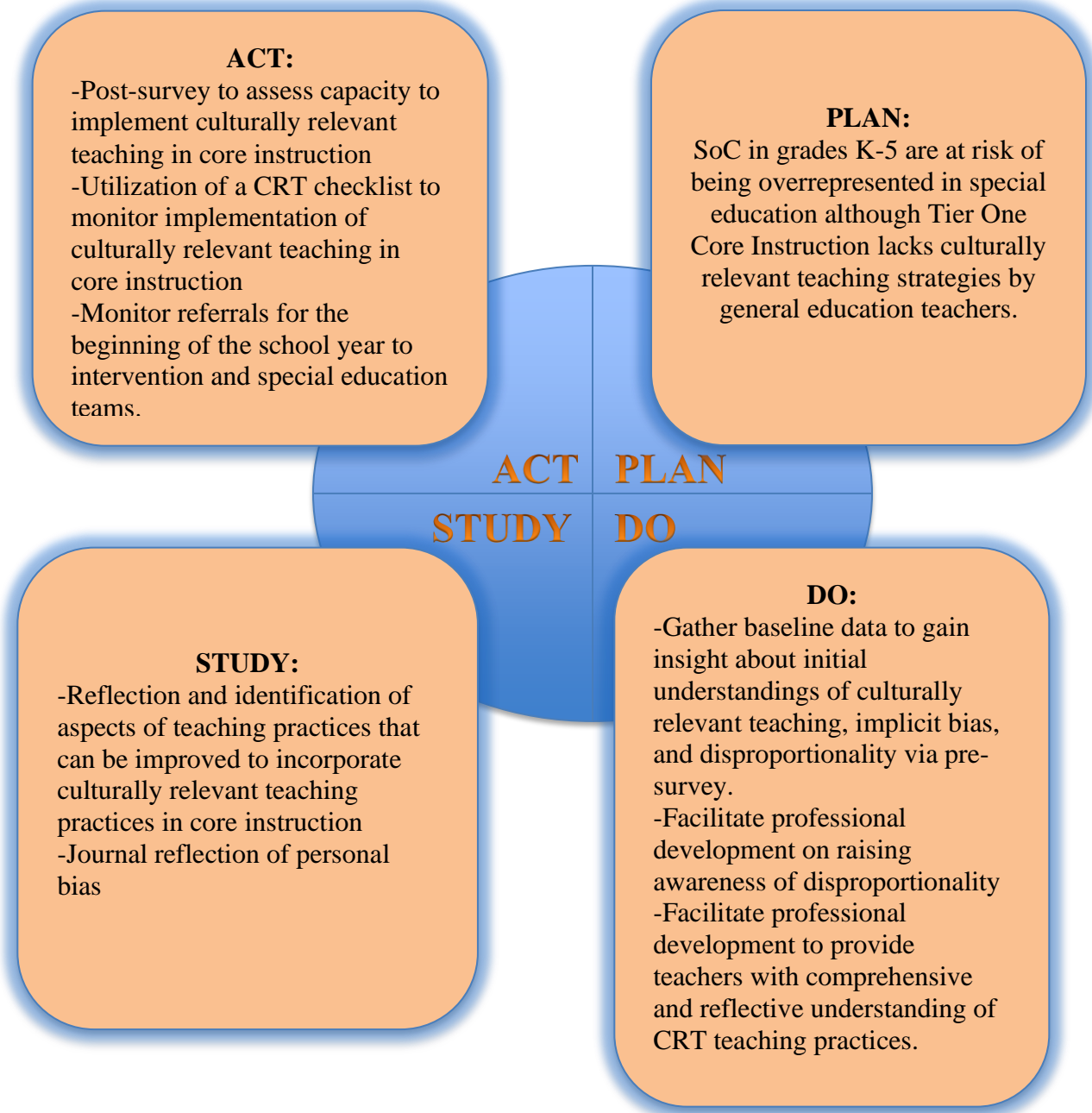
- Student profiles
- Student surveys
- Cooperation with ESL teachers

- Communications w/parents/community
- Professional development on cultural attitudes and awareness

- _____
- _____
- _____

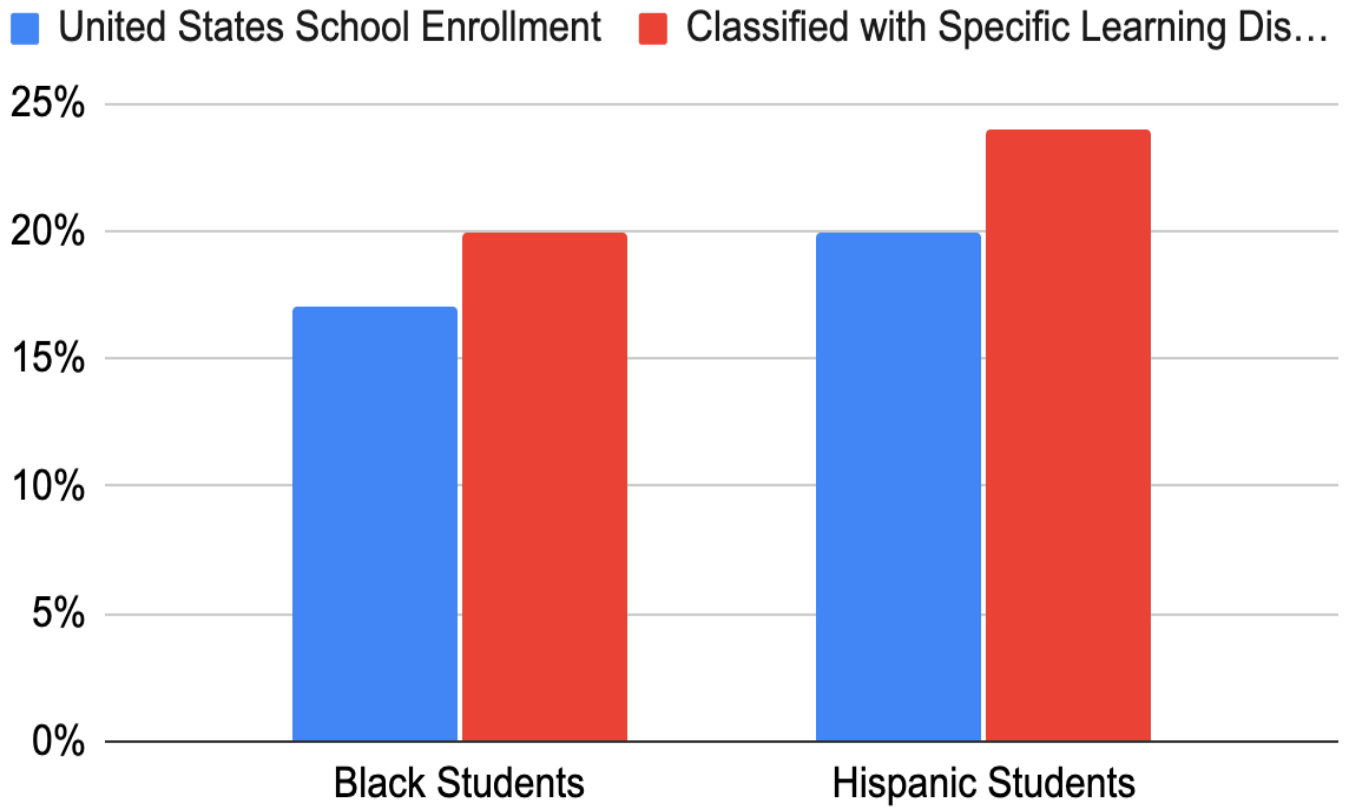
Appendix D

PDSA Cycle: Addressing Disproportionality



Appendix E

Special Education Disproportionality in the U.S. from 2007



Appendix D

Pre and Post Survey

Equity PD Pre-Survey

Please complete this pre-survey based on your current beliefs and understandings. Your responses will be confidential.

 sharrington@chccs.k12.nc.us (not shared) [Switch account](#) 

* Required

Chapel-Hill Carrboro City Schools ranks at number two, nationwide, for its racial academic achievement gap. *

True

False

I have participated in diversity training and/or professional development during my career as an educator *

Yes

No

Based on my experience, I believe that Students of Color are less likely to access the general curriculum without extra support from me as compared to their White peers. *

This has never been my experience.

This is sometimes my experience.

This is always my experience.

Based on my experience, I believe that Students of Color are less likely to access the general curriculum without intervention from Tier 3 intervention as compared to their White peers. *

- This has never been my experience.
- This is sometimes my experience.
- This is always my experience.

I believe that implicit bias means that a person is racist towards a specific group of people. *

- True
- False

Implicit bias is linked to disproportionality of Students of Color in special education *

- True
- False

I implement Students' Six Strategies in my classroom. *

- Always/Daily
- Sometimes
- Never
- What's Students' Six?

Implicit bias is linked to disproportionality of Students of Color in special education *

- True
- False

I implement Students' Six Strategies in my classroom. *

- Always/Daily
- Sometimes
- Never
- What's Students' Six?

I acknowledge that I have implicit bias. *

- True
- False

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Pre-Survey

Please complete this pre-survey based on implicit bias. Your responses will be confidential.

 sharrington@chccs.k12.nc.us (not shared) [Switch account](#)



* Required

I am aware of CHCCS' district initiatives to support effective implementation of culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy *

- True
- False

I consider myself to be a culturally relevant educator *

- Yes
- No

List what you believe makes you a culturally relevant educator. (open-ended) *

Your answer

Rate your understanding of each of the Students' Six Strategies *

	1- None at all	I have not heard about it	I sometimes use this strategy	I use this strategy in my classroom everyday
Proximity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Visibility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Connecting to Students' Lives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Engaging Students' Culture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Addressing Race	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Connecting to the Larger World	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix E

Implicit Bias Frayer Model



Appendix F

Padlet Journal Reflections

Contributing Factors to Disproportionality

What do you believe to be some of the contributing factors to the disproportionality of students of color in special education?

Daycare and early access to childcare and "Preschool skills and group dynamic" practice.

Contributing factors
The growing generational gap of teachers and the students they teach. The unwillingness to be educated and refusal to acknowledge white supremacy.

Access to early education

Uneven access to early learning activities, perhaps even to books and libraries.
Disproportionality to how parents can interact with children - if they are working 2 jobs, then there is less talking time.

Differences in family dynamics. Is there a time for discussion and learning built in to every day - dinner as a "family" and talk time? or just conversation around what needs to happen to get the day done?

Disproportionate poverty among families of color
white dominant culture demanding students of color to code switch

Student effort/engagement/sense of belonging depending on representation in the classroom

Additional help based on income

Curriculum
Curriculum and standards are not culturally relevant for our students of color.

Reflection

1. What are contributing factors to disproportionality? 2. Why is it important to dismantle disproportionality?

We need to challenge our own implicit biases and dismantle an educational system that is based on white cultural norms and is inherently culturally irrelevant and racially biased.

Factors
- socioeconomic status
- engagement in school
- representation in school
- academic progress

It is important to dismantle these things so we can meet the needs of all learners and make sure all voices are heard and valued.

Teacher misunderstanding was a factor I thought a lot about. Important to address this to make sure students feel heard and feel they belong in the class.

Implicit bias, dominant white culture, inequities in racist systems ie., housing, employment, health care, etc.
It is important to dismantle these things so that we actually live our values

Appendix G

District Instructional Framework: Environment

ENVIRONMENT		
Look-Fors: <i>Learner experiences have been designed to foster safe and inclusive environments, which honor students' unique voices, strengths, interests, and needs.</i>	NCEES (Standard II)	Equitable Practices
E6. Adults use the "Student Six" strategies to promote success for every student: visibility, proximity, connecting to students' lives, engaging students' culture, addressing race, and connecting learning to the larger world.	IIa, IIc	1, 2, 3, 8, 19
Key questions to ask teachers/students	NCEES (Standard II)	Equitable Practices
[TEACHER] How do you build relationships with your students? How do students know your expectations?	IIa, IIc	6, 7, 8, 9, 15, 22

Appendix H

District Equitable Practices (used for the study)

Equitable Classroom Practices Classroom Visit Tool						
<i>Name</i>		<i>Observer</i>		<i>Subject</i>		<i>Date/Time</i>
Instructional Equitable Classroom Practice: Learning Environmental Strategies					Observed	Not Observed
1. Arranges the classroom to accommodate discussion Arranges seating to facilitate student-student discussion; seating to facilitate teacher-student discussion						
2. Ensures bulletin boards, displays, instructional materials, and other visuals in the classroom reflect the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds represented by students Displays and uses materials (supplemental books) that reflect all students' racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds year round; Displays products and props from students' home and community background						
3. Uses a variety of visual aids and props to support student learning. Uses multiethnic photos, pictures, and props to illustrate concepts and content; Uses appropriate technology to illustrate concepts and content						
Instructional Equitable Classroom Practice: Engagement Strategies						
6. Welcomes students by name as they enter the classroom Asks students for correct pronunciation of their names; correctly pronounces students' names						
7. Uses eye contact with all students Makes culturally appropriate eye contact with all students						
8. Uses proximity with all students equitably Circulates around student work areas to be close to all students						
9. Uses body language, gestures, and expressions to convey a message that all students' questions and opinions are important Smiles, Nods head in affirmation, Leans towards students, Turns towards students who are speaking to show interest						
15. Acknowledges all students' comments, responses, questions, and contributions Uses affirming, correcting, or probing to acknowledge all students' responses						

19. Uses students' <u>real life</u> experiences to connect school learning to students' lives Asks students to reflect....		
Comments:		

**Adapted from CHCCS 27 Equitable Practices, 2020*

Appendix I

Students' Six Definition

The Students' Six: Strategies for Culturally Proficient Teaching

1. *Visibility*: Making every student feel acknowledged and included in the classroom
2. *Proximity*: Using physical space to engage students and reduce perceived threat
3. *Connecting to students' lives*: Making linkages between classroom content and student experiences and perspectives
4. *Engaging students' culture*: Incorporating positive elements of students' culture into classroom learning and community building
5. *Addressing race*: Talking openly about racial dynamics and how they impact the student experience
6. *Connecting to the larger world*: Helping students identify their future paths and using classroom experiences to guide students toward their personal goals

Appendix J

Equity Norms

Group Norms for Equity	
Stay Engaged	To stay engaged is a refusal to let your heart and mind “check out” of the conversation while leaving your body in place. It is a personal commitment each person makes, regardless of the engagement of others. It means remaining morally, emotionally, intellectually, and socially involved in the dialogue.
Speak Your Truth (knowing it’s only part of the truth)	To speak your truth, you must be willing to take risks and be honest about your thoughts, feelings and opinions, and not just saying what you perceive others want to hear. Unless we can bring our authentic selves to the table the dialogue will remain limited. Honor and respect each others’ truth as their own lived experience.
Experience Discomfort	Talking about race, racism, and inequity is often uncomfortable. Identifying and unpacking our own identity groups and the different levels of privilege associated with them is even more uncomfortable. To engage in conversations about race and inequity in honest, meaningful ways, we ask participants to agree to experience some discomfort.
Expect and accept non-closure	There is no “quick fix,” to-do list, or solution to the complex problems posed by racism and inequity. We are not going to solve racism within our organization, or even within our group today. Therefore, we must commit to an ongoing dialogue and a journey of growth together.
Confidentiality	To support each other in our risk-taking we agree to respect the privacy of each individual’s identity and life experiences. We can share our own learning, but not the names and stories of others.
Additional Norms Covered	
Listen for Understanding Step Up and Step Back Focus on Impact vs. Intent	

Based on Advancing Racial Equity in Schools Equity Norms, 2015