PreK–12 Black Administrators' Narratives in Urban School Districts

By

Jude Vales

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctorate in Education.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

March 2023

Chair: Dr. Vivian Johnson

Reader: Dr. Brown Stanley

Reader: Dr. Fatima Lawson

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the 220,000 victims of the 2010 Haiti earthquake, particularly the 175 + deaths at the Faculty of Applied Linguistique (FLA) from where I graduated and obtained my linguistics license in March 2003. Among the victims, Dr. Pierre Vernet and Wesner Mérant, respectively my thesis advisor and my colleague and friend. Paix à son âme. I also dedicated this work to my beloved mother, Immacula Benjamin, who survived colon cancer in 2015 just to stay longer with us, her loved ones, her children and grandchildren. Mési manma!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Vivian Johnson, who happily came out from retirement just to do what she loves: helping ordinary folks like me to become scholars.

Thank you, Dr. and Principal Fatima Lawson, for letting me be part of your rich and lasting legacy by supporting this research from its conception to the end. Thank you Dr. Stanley Brown for your commitment to promoting educational justice—this time, by doing what you do best, helping a brother out just when he needed help.

To my dear friend and mentor, Principal Lee Bauer (Lee), thank you. Your inspiration throughout the years has helped me to be the educator that I am today. Thank you to Kristin Kusanovich, my very good friend. Your feedback on my life and this work has widened my world and brought me closer to the finish line. Thank you Robert Cannella from Hamline Writing Center, a selfless public servant, now a friend that I am grateful to have. Thank you.

Professor Trish Harvey (Trish) for being who you are and for championing the excellent EdD eleven cohort with so much grace and love. Thank you to my good friend, author and educator, Nicolas Hippolyte from Haiti, where my love for books and scholarship started.

My tribute to the departed Walter Enloe –what a joyful and spirited man to be around, his spirit will live on! I want to thank my writing group, in coming Drs. Nicole O'connor, Jessica Reese, and Eric Turner. These friends held me accountable and inspired me to write no matter the circumstances.

A very special thank you to the eleven research participants, including the pilot

interviewee. These talented and passionate Black leaders have generously contributed to the realization of the project with their time and expertise. Without them, there would be no stories to tell, no narratives to examine, and therefore, this dissertation would simply not exist.

To all my unnamed friends and companions, without your caring and loving hands moving me forward throughout this journey, this work would be just a scholarly product made by a joyless scholar. Thank you!

Lastly, to all my siblings: Margarette, Ketia, Marjori, Jean Richard, Fabiene, Sandra, Jeff, and Luc. This is for you and for all your children, from you baby brother – I love you!

"The purpose of education, finally, is to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself, to make decisions, to say to himself this is black, or this is white, to decide for himself whether there is a God in heaven or not. To ask questions of the universe, and then learn to live with those questions, is the way he achieves his own destiny." — James Baldwin.

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative research was to understand what inspired and motivated Black leaders to join, stay, and thrive in public education in the United States, and how they can help bring structural and transformative changes in preK–12 public education. This study centered on Black preK–12 Administrators' narratives working in urban school settings. For this project, I created a short background survey and conducted a thirty minute interview per participant.This framework allowed ten Black preK-12 school administrators to narrate and reflect on a spectrum of challenges that they faced as well as their remarkable achievements in their roles.

Referring to Black principals' effective leadership among all, particularly Black learners, Bass (2020) stated that "to meet the needs of all their students, these leaders address structural inequality by enacting equity-minded initiatives that reduce opportunity gaps and manifest as caring practices" (p. 358). For generations, Black leaders have played a critical role in fighting systemic inequity in the United States public school system as instructional leaders and advocates on behalf of marginalized student populations. Bailes and Guthery (2020) stated that "only 20 percent of all principals nationwide are nonwhite, . . . there is a distinct mismatch between the demography of school leaders and that of teachers, the largest pool of principals. There are major inequalities within the country's school leadership hierarchies" (para 4). The fact that PreK–12 public schools in this nation, especially in urban settings, are composed mostly of non-White students underscored the need to narrow the current leadership opportunity gap. Participants in this study reported the profound isolation that they experienced due to structural White supremacy. The Black leaders recommended that in order to close the leadership opportunity gap between Black PreK–12 leaders and their White counterparts, two major actions need to take place. First, increase the pipeline from which Black school leaders are selected by raising the number of Black licensed staff, particularly teachers. Second, educational organizations that train teachers and administrators in the state where this research has been conducted must collaborate with policymakers to create organizational-led networking opportunities for potential Black school leaders.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to the Research Questions

Introduction

The underrepresentation of PreK–12 Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) administrators in the American public school system reflects one of the most significant systemic racial disparities in the nation. As the United States becomes increasingly diverse, public schools, particularly in most major cities, have experienced this growth in ethnic and racial diversity as a defining part of their student populations.

> According to the United States (U.S.) Department of Education (2019), In fall 2015, approximately 30% of public students attended public schools in which the combined enrollment of minority students were at least 75% of total enrollment. Over half of Hispanic (60%), Black (58%), and Pacific Islander students (53%) attended such schools. In contrast, less than half of Asian students (38%), American Indian/Alaska Native students (37%), students of two or more races (19%), and White students (5%) attended such schools. (p. iv)

In sum, the population of the public school system is largely dominated by BIPOC students. However, according to the National Center for Education and Statistics (NCES) (2022), these booming diverse learning populations are often taught by teachers and led by administrators who identify themselves as White. NCES (2022) documents that

> In 2011-12, in the United States, over 80% of principals were White while 10% were Black or African American. In the same years, in Minnesota, over 93% of all school principals — the percentage of BIPOC principals is unpublished — were White. (p. 1)

These numbers clearly documented a meaningful racial, socio-cultural gap between public school learners and those in charge of creating, supervising the implementation of visions, and strategies aiming to shape teaching and learning. Given the underrepresentation of BIPOC school administrators, particularly among Black leaders in urban schools, the purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the experience of the relatively small numbers of Black administrators in an urban school district who have managed to obtain and remain in these all too rare leadership positions by exploring the following questions:

Primary Research Question

How do Black PreK–12 leaders describe the influences on their journey to leadership in an urban setting and what it took for them to remain in that position?

Secondary Questions

a) What do Black PreK–12 administrators identify as factors that supported them in becoming a leader and factors that served as roadblocks to overcome?

b) What factors inspire Black administrators to remain in PreK–12 leadership in lesser-resourced urban schools instead of leaving for more affluent communities?

c) What recommendations do PreK–12 administrators describe as necessary for increasing the percentage of Black or African American administrators working at the building or district level?

It is my goal that this research will increase the understanding of how to empower Black educational leaders in diverse learning organizations. Having been in both teaching and principal roles, I have experienced how teaching and school administration are inherently intertwined. Both are essential to effectively foster a more diverse, equitable, and

inclusive school system that equitably represents all learners. These research questions will be explored using a social justice and equity lens and will focus on the differing but related experiences of this study's participants.

Research Participants and Setting

The participants are PreK–12 public school administrators who identify themselves as Black or African American and work at the building or district level in a major urban public school district in the upper Midwest. Using qualitative interviews, these Black PreK–12 licensed leaders will be given the opportunity to add their voices to the research literature by answering a series of open-ended and follow-up questions that allow them to be authentic, honest, and offer relevant insights into the needs of today's learners of all backgrounds. Despite its deeply personalized and introspective approach, this study will also be guided by rigorous scholarly methodologies centering on foundational knowledge and substantial studies on urban public education and its key stakeholders. In light of the objectives of this research, the following are the definitions of the key terms that will be used throughout this study.

Definitions of Key Terms

- **Narrative:** According to Merriam-Webster (2022), a narrative is defined as "a way of presenting or understanding a situation or series of events that reflects and promotes a particular point of view or set of values" (para 2).

- **PreK–12 Black School Administrators**: Principals, assistant principals, and district employees that are required to hold a PreK–12 Principal license issued by the state in which they work and also, identified as African American or Black.

- **Urban School District:** Located in a geographical unit for the local

administration of publicly funded schools.

- **Urban American Cities**: According to the NCES (2022), "Core areas with populations of 50,000 or more are designated as urbanized areas; those with populations between 2,500 and 50,000 are designated as urban clusters" (para 3).

The Lack of a BIPOC Administrative Pipeline

NCESS (1993) provides evidence that public school leadership is inherently connected to classroom teaching opportunities. In a 1993 study, NCES stated, "Traditionally, principals have been drawn from the ranks of teachers . . . . Nearly all principals in the 1990-91 school year reported that they were teachers before becoming principals" (What Percentage of Public School Principals Teach Elementary or Secondary School Before Becoming Principals? How Many Years Do They Teach? section, para. 2). These findings by the NCES (1993) reiterated that the teaching profession is the pipeline to school leadership. This also explains why having an underrepresentation of BIPOC teachers leads to underrepresentation at the leadership level.

In other words, this national public school leadership gap goes parallel with the underrepresentation of BIPOC public school teachers both across the nation and in the upper Midwest. Pew Research (2018) reported that "only 20% of educators across the country come from minority backgrounds" (p. 1). This gap is even wider in upper Midwest cities. As cited by the Minnesota House of Representatives (2021), "Only 5.6% teachers in Minnesota are teachers of color or American Indian" (p. 1). This lack of representation of BIPOC among licensed teachers has fueled the debate about diverse representation in public school settings across the country.

For example, urban public schools in the upper Midwest have struggled to find ways to create a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive teaching and learning environment for educators. However, these numerous and ongoing efforts seem to be a long way from full representation of BIPOC teachers and leaders. Mahamud and Webster (2022) reported that "the situation in Minnesota could get worse as the state's population of people of color is expected to grow at a much faster rate, projections from the state demographer's office show" (p. 1). Meanwhile, communities of color, Black educators, and learners in particular, continue to demand structural change that will lead to equitable working and learning outcomes.

Hodan Hassan, a member of the Minnesota House of Representatives, has noted that diverse learners and organizations want to see more of themselves among the leadership of their learning settings. Hassan (2020) stated, "Representation matters, kids learn best when taught by people who understand their communities and life experiences, and all students benefit from diverse teachers" (p. 1). In other words, the MN State Representative reiterated the need to make public schools' licensed staff, particularly teachers, more representative of the student populations that they serve. Given that the diversification of licensed teachers is directly related to that of diverse leaders, it is critical to look at one in light of the other. There is also historical evidence that supports the importance of BIPOC teachers and leaders for learners.

The Interdependence Between BIPOC Teachers and BIPOC Leaders

Referring to Black teachers and administrators-lead schools before *Brown v. Board of Education*, Bass (2019) argued that

>Black teachers and administrators were successful because they were part of the
>
>close-knit, dynamic communities they helped build, and schools were the central
>
>structures of these communities. Additionally, they strove to meet the needs of
>
>their students and were personally vested in their students' futures, so they created
>
>schools that comprehensively nurtured and supported students. (p. 2)

In essence, these findings argued in favor of a strong partnership between Black teachers and Black administrators as an inherent factor for mutual success of both groups for the benefit of diverse learners. This research also underscored that when this mutual empowerment is lacking in diverse schools, both groups suffer. In other words, the process of promoting Black teachers is fundamentally linked to the endeavors of promoting Black administrators, as each tremendously benefits the other.

When there is a lack of Black teachers and administrators, diverse students often become detrimentally impacted in their academic and emotional learning experience for reasons articulated by Gregory and Mosely (2010). In the following quote these authors describe how

>Student achievement, and discipline portrays a school in which a largely white
>
>teaching force is consistently punishing a largely Black segment of the student
>
>body, who are also more likely to be in the lower tracks and less likely to be
>
>bound for four-year colleges after graduation. (p. 21)

The racial gap between teachers and students can also translate into biased socioemotional and academic policies that are detrimental to the growth of diverse learners. In my former experience as a Black teacher and in witnessing/observing the experiences of other Black teachers, I have come to understand that any successful

conceptualization and implementation of a policy aiming to increase representation among diverse teachers will require diverse leadership as a key feature. The direct involvement of leaders from similar backgrounds is essential to the process. This across-the-board inclusive approach will play a vital role in building stronger trust and collaboration among diverse teachers and their supervisors.

Way et al. (2018) argued that "if trust and education can be used as resources to stop the spread of a deadly disease, can similar strategies be developed to solve other depressing problems?" (p. 160). In speaking about the pandemic of health, we can take their words to be equally applied to the pandemic of racism. In other words, using education at the institutional level to build trust among diverse teachers and leaders could play a key role in addressing the lack of diversity among school leadership in diverse communities. It is my understanding that using their mutual experiences and past teaching struggles as a vital asset, these leaders can fully understand, support, and treat BIPOC teachers with the fairness and equity that they need in order to be successful in their career path. When it comes to promoting diverse learning communities, BIPOC leaders, particularly Black administrative leaders, are unequivocally in a strong position to help facilitate such endeavors both individually and on a structural level.

Given the ongoing achievement gap in diverse learning communities, more educators and policymakers appear committed to creating educational policies that tackle the inherent intertwinement between Black learners, Black teachers, and Black schools' administrators. This constitutes a critical aspect for the success of creating more inclusive and equitable school system initiatives. For example, Irvine (1998) argued that:

The problems and solutions associated with educating Black children and with increasing the number of Black teachers are closely related to the principalship. Since the job requirements for school principals often include prior teaching experience, it is clear that as the number of Black teachers declines so will the pool of Black persons eligible to become principals and other administrators. (p. 101)

By focusing on Black leaders in urban schools, this study intends to be part of a series of scholarly initiatives aiming at addressing the leadership inequity that persists in so many urban schools.

As the urbanization of the country expands in conjunction with the BIPOC populations of learners in urban school districts, in a pluralistic democratic society it is best practice to expect fair and equitable leadership representation at all levels of those learning organizations as well. Therefore, this study will seek to explore how the empowerment of Black leaders will foster a more equitable and inclusive school system that will better serve its BIPOC communities, particularly Black learners. This scholarly initiative will also—through a prism of equal opportunity—aim at finding ways, from the perspectives of Black school leaders, that BIPOC, particularly Black students, can benefit from those insights.

Benefits to Learners of Interactions With BIPOC School Leaders and Teachers

Johns Hopkins University (2021) supported the importance of representation of Black teachers and administrators in student outcomes, reporting that Black students are 13% more likely to enter college if they had at least one Black teacher by the third grade. The likelihood of college enrollment more than doubles (32%) for Black students with at

least two Black teachers in elementary school, according to the study. The advantages for Black learners when they are taught by Black teachers are significant and increasingly important in more diverse learning communities like in urban settings. Other research (Gershenson et al., 2021) also supports the benefits of same-race teachers for underrepresented minority students.

Gershenson et al. (2021) stated that "there are mounting evidence that same-race teachers are beneficial to underrepresented minority students on a number of contemporaneous dimensions, such as test scores, attendance, course grades, disciplinary outcomes, and expectations in a variety of educational settings" (p. 3). A diverse and inclusive teaching force improves student achievement at all levels. This study also reaffirmed and legitimized the ongoing cry coming from communities of color and their partners in the nation to make classrooms more representative of the learners that form them. This research study also reaffirmed the significance of representation as a critical factor that might lead to closing the racial achievement gap.

Given the research of Gershenson et al. (2021) and the recognition by the Minnesota House of Representatives (2021) that "most recent data suggests students of color and Indigenous students comprise 35% of learners, compared to 5.6% teachers of color or American Indian" (para. 3), the Minnesota House passed the Minnesota BIPOC Act in 2021. The passing of this act is one way of addressing these increasing numbers of diverse learners in this upper Midwest state and this issue of racial mismatch among learners and teachers. As I explore the issue of diversity, equity, and inclusion within the school system, it led me to dive deeper into the genesis of my interests in breaking the status quo.

My Latin American Experience and Its Influence on My Views of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The genesis of my commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion started in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti, where I was born and grew up. It took an unexpected turn in the late 1990s during my time studying Dominican culture in the Dominican Republic. This commitment would turn into a lifetime vocation during my current life in the U.S, which led me to initiate an in-depth analysis of the education system, my role in it, and that of other pre–K12 Black leaders.

I come from the Caribbean Island of Haiti, a place where being Black is a defining part of your humanity, a major piece of your history, and a source of national pride. For example, in Haitian-Creole the word Nég (negro/Black) means man. I grew up believing in the beauty and the ingenuity of Black people in my home country and from all over the world. However, in 2000, I traveled to the east side of the island of Hispañola, the Dominican Republic (D.R.), to study the Spanish language and Dominican culture. There, I learned about a new social construct regarding Blackness that deeply unsettled me.

This definition of being Black (negritude), which marked my childhood in Port-au-Prince, could not be any more different on the Spanish-speaking side of the island. Contrary to the west side of the island (Haiti) where Blackness is associated with excellence and endless possibilities, for the east side (the D.R.), being Black was just a sociobiological liability to run away from and even to conceal as much as possible. My island neighbors' predominant view on my "race" was the opposite of everything I was taught about myself as a Black child. I noticed that despite its significant Black

population, the Dominican society predominantly sees Blackness as a deficit. For them, being Black was a damaging trait, a social and economic liability to avoid at all costs. As a result, many Dominicans know very little about their African heritage and the socioeconomic ramifications generated by their anti-Black national sentiment.

On the other hand, the Spanish side of the island revered anything associated with Whiteness, hence the constant veneration of their Spanish heritage. Over there, Dominicans frequently refer to Spain as "la madre patria" (the motherland). Such a cultural reference continuously denies the very existence of the first people of the island, the Indigenous Taínos, and the Africans whom Spain enslaved and transported to the island to be subjected to the atrocity of slavery. There, I sadly witnessed how the mainstream Dominican culture put their Spanish colonial heritage on a pedestal. For the majority of the Dominican people, this part of their heritage was a superior national characteristic that needed to be showcased and revered at all levels of society.

Later, I traveled to other parts of Latin America and got a broader picture of the rich cultures of the region. I was even more disappointed to learn that this degrading view of Blackness while idolizing Whiteness was not just a Dominican phenomenon. Anti-Black racism has spread all over Latin America. It became clear to me that Haiti, with its strong embrace of Africa and its people, was an outlier in that region. I learned that the dominant, positive self-view of the people of Haiti, the first Black republic in modern history, was not only an exception, but that Blackness in general, as a culture, has been vigorously contested throughout the very racially diverse Latin American nations.

As I pondered my deep disappointment, I could not stop wondering what type of education could bring a whole nation, let alone an entire region, to internalize on such a

massive scale, self-dehumanization and self-loathing based on skin color and racial identity. I wanted answers. For me, schools were the only place where I could find some sort of satisfying understanding of this pervasive phenomenon, and eventually the skills to contribute to changing that damaging culture.

As a result of this experience, I was inspired to dig deeper into the world of social justice. I have become committed to understanding and working toward promoting a national and global culture that fully embraces diversity, and social and economic justice for all people. Such a commitment only got stronger as I became an educator in my new home in the United States.

United States on My View on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The topic of diversity, equity, and inclusion in education has been one of my major interests since the beginning of my educational career in the U.S. in 2004. As a Black educator, the inspiration to work toward finding a better understanding of the role of PreK–12 Black leaders in urban school districts in a large metropolitan area in the upper Midwest comes primarily from a place of individual identity and personal experience.

In 2004, in my mid-twenties, I arrived in the United States to join the rest of my family and pursue graduate studies. My view on race, particularly on what it means to be Black, was once again profoundly challenged. Just by being a Black man, I, by default, became part of a long legacy of a social underclass that is constantly forced to fight for the recognition of its humanity. But the awareness of my new social and cultural reality also got re-energized by my desire to find answers to questions about the relationship between racism and education. As I learned more about the history of the U.S. and

experienced racism on a much deeper and personal level in interactions with everyday people and law enforcement, it became obvious to me that my newly adopted country is systemically anti-Black.

In 2011, in the process of becoming a licensed K-12 Spanish teacher, once again, I found myself confronting a similar problem on race and education. But this time, I was determined to explore this systemic dilemma by asking what type of educational leaders it will take to drive the most populous nation in the Americas out of systemic anti-Black racism? I wanted to know how educators, particularly BIPOC leaders, could break the century-old vicious circle of this race-based American caste system.

> Wilkerson (2020) argued that
>
> Before there was a United States of America, there was a caste system . . ..
> indigenous people, and then, Africans, to the lowest rung of the emerging
> hierarchy before the concept of race had congealed to justify their eventual and
> total debasement. (pp. 41-42)

In essence, this quote highlights a systemic racial hierarchy built into the fabric of U.S. society, that then often reflects on what we see with lack of access and poor achievements among BIPOC and particularly Black students. Bringing my experience of Black intellectual and social flourishing and looking at the society of United States schooling through this understanding of a racial bias lens, I have become more informed and knowledgeable of the influence of the journey of Black educators in public school in diverse communities.

I have learned to appreciate the complexity of race and the role that educators play in this paradigm. I also came to the realization that the responses to these questions

vary in time and conform to a range of values and sociopolitical circumstances. Understanding the complexity and significance of an increasingly racially diverse society that is dominated by a Eurocentric educational system requires persistence and scholarship. So, too, does tackling the structural ramifications of the policies produced by such systems of educational inequality. As I dove deeper into my quest for answers, my initiatives focused on those who are the most detrimentally affected by the current education system, BIPOC learners. These students, particularly Black learners in urban settings, became the forefront of my inquiry. Such efforts, by their nature and in principle, eventually led me to my commitment to further explore leaders that share those pupils' backgrounds and common interests.

My experience as a former Black Spanish high school teacher represented a vivid example of the importance for BIPOC students to have teachers that share their background. As I think about teaching the Spanish language and about the cultures that share it, I often found myself addressing topics that go beyond the typical district-provided curriculum. My teaching practice was mainly exercised through a lens of equity and social justice.

Using an equity/social justice lens, it was clear to me that the need to build relationships with students, especially with those who are historically underrepresented, was critical to an inclusive classroom community where every learner can see and show their authentic selves with pride. For instance, one of my continuous efforts was to always include Afro-Latino cultural heritage and achievements in my lessons. Black Spanish-speaking artists such as Celia Cruz, Concha Buika, Oscar D'León, Carlos Acosta, Eva Ayllón, and others were repeatedly introduced and studied as an integral part

of my daily lessons.

This professional experience as a Spanish teacher in diverse public schools also came into play in regard to my experiences with my building administrators who were generally White. As a Black teacher, I struggled enormously to understand their expectations of me and my teaching. This often resulted in a series of misunderstandings and miscommunications between those leaders and me. As part of seeking professional and moral support from other teachers of color, I joined different affinity groups in the urban areas and quickly learned that my experience was not an isolated one.

In these affinity groups many BIPOC teachers expressed that they often feel misunderstood or mistreated by their school administrators. These diverse educators expressed that their treatment by their building supervisors were different from that of their White colleagues. Black teachers in these affinity groups expressed that they often experience continuous high anxiety and discomfort at work, based on their unequal and unfair treatment by their White administrators. For many of those Black educators that I talked to, those negative experiences with their White supervisors significantly affected their teaching as they tried to create a classroom culture that met the expectation of their leadership. In the process, those BIPOC teachers are frequently denied the opportunity to present themselves in their classrooms and the rest of their work community. As a result, a number of very qualified Black teachers were either denied tenure or continuing contract or left public school teaching altogether. Despite my direct experiences with racism and xenophobia among those who led my learning organizations, my decision was to stay the course. I turned my challenges as a Black immigrant teacher speaking with a foreign accent into an inspiration for capacity building.

In reference to how to build capacity among individuals and communities, Block (2018) argued that "instead of being problems to solve, [problems] become a source of vitality, a gift . . .. we become owners, with the free will capable of creating the world we want to inhabit" (p. 65). To put it differently, our challenges have the potential to become our sources of strengths. Following Block's (2018) advice led to my taking ownership of problems experienced in my teaching career by focusing on my capacity and using my diverse experiences from places and people to create a pre-K-12 world I wanted students to inhabit. As a Black educator, my vitality and gift were to offer the benefits of my experiences to my students, to the communities where they come from, and to my peers of all races and ethnicities.

A result of my teaching and my relationship with staff, I was approached and encouraged by a White administrator at the district level to consider becoming a school principal, so I decided to give it a serious thought. Three years later, in 2018, I became a licensed K–12 Dean of Students at a public charter school, then an Associate Principal at a traditional public school in an urban setting. Having been in those school administration roles for the last four years, I have tried to understand the implications of my professional influence on teaching and learning and that of other Black educational leaders in a larger social context.

Black Educational Leaders and the Society at Large

My previous experiences in diverse classrooms motivated me to explore the role of Black PreK–12 leaders in an urban district in the upper Midwest. During my experience, even in the most diverse schools, I often found myself as either the only staff of color in the world language department or the only Black teacher of the entire school

faculty. Such a situation was as concerning as it was puzzling to me. In those days, I always asked myself and some educators in my professional network: Why is there so little being done about creating a more racially inclusive teaching force in urban settings? Despite my concerns about the underrepresentation of Black teachers, as I looked around in the rooms where decisions are made, I could not help wondering about the underrepresentation at the leadership level as well.

As a public-school administrator since 2019, and currently as an assistant principal at a major urban school district, my experience mirrors that of many Black school administrators in urban school districts in the upper Midwest. Oftentimes, I find myself among a handful of BIPOC in organizational or district leadership meetings and professional development sessions (PD). While with so few BIPOC present, ironically a great number of those meetings and trainings frequently focus on issues related to diverse populations of learners. As I witnessed the enormous under-representation of diverse learners among the leaders in the room, I often found myself asking the following question: Is it possible for urban public schools to change the student racial achievement gap status quo without addressing the leadership opportunity gap? The more I ponder this question, the more I realize the intricacy and multifaceted Ness of the issue in question. This also reinforced my understanding of the need for a structural empowerment of Black school leaders.

Black Educational Leader Empowerment

It is my experience that empowering Black educational leaders is as critical as promoting Black teachers in diverse learning organizations. Khalifa et al. (2016), reasoned having increased numbers of BIPOC leaders gives students the opportunity to

imagine themselves in leadership roles as well. Leading diverse students also empowered Black administrators with the rewarding sentiment that their leadership is making a difference within their community. My experience as a teacher, and an administrator in urban public education, supported by the story of other Black administrators, has been critical to this scholarly initiative. However, I am also aware that my proximity and professional interest in this topic might also be a source of unconscious biases that could affect the validity of my research.

My sense was that in order to effectively address the critical issue of inclusion for students required a tremendous commitment and determination among policymakers and school and district leaders. I also know that BIPOC, particularly Black, leadership has to play a key role in any meaningful initiative aiming at promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in urban schools.

As a social construct, it is clear that anti-Black racism has affected the most fundamental aspect of the American education system to a point that even the groundbreaking federal laws could not escape. This has directly impacted Black leadership success and Black leadership presence in school staffs and contributed to systemic inequities felt acutely by members of that group. Referring to Chief Justice Warren and the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, Kendi (2017) argued that "for Justice Warren, this decision was about the psychological impact of separate schools on Black children" (p. 361). Kendi (2017) further argued that "to both assimilationists and segregationists, the majority-Black schools could never be equal to majority-White schools" (p. 363). Throughout the years, the discriminatory and anti-Black practices within learning institutions have come to be seen, by their oppressive

nature, as the extension of a broader societal phenomenon that discriminates against Black educational leaders. This issue has also been reflected at the heart of the achievement gap that has mainly inspired this research.

My view of the American education system, especially in urban school districts has become more and more perplexed as I try to untangle its different fundamental and detrimental aspects and understand the nature of its actors from the least powerful to the most powerful. However, seeking to understand Black educational leaders who, like me, have struggled to find and understand their role in the current organizational structure, constitutes a fundamental aspect of this scholarly work. My goal is to seek the perspectives of my participants, analyze them, and use my analyses in support of dismantling the status quo in preK-12 urban education as a means of creating equitable learning organizations.

In schools that constantly ask learners of diverse backgrounds to leave their cultural selves at home and force them to code switch for a better chance to succeed academically, teachers and educational leaders from similar communities often feel and express the same pressure. Mahamud Webster (2022) stated that, "another problem, researchers report, is that teachers of color often have negative experiences with a school's culture — causing them to leave" (p. 1). As Black leaders try to fit in and make sense of their workplace, students of color often find themselves trapped in and overpowered by a school system that constantly grades and degrades their performance and existence to preserve the racial status quo. hooks (2003) cautioned, "When you have people who talk about diversity who are unwilling to do something about it, nothing changes" (p. 190). My research addresses what I perceive to be mere lip service of

organization-level diversity, equity, and inclusion statements and promises. I also understand that for actions to be meaningful and impactful, it requires the discipline to set aside my preconceived view on urban schools in favor of finding the facts, analyzing them, and utilizing my findings as a tool to inspire a new vision and set of actions that will lead to outcomes for a better system of learning.

Freire (1970) argued that "education. . . . is the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of the world" (p. 16). Education is about freedom and self-empowerment through fair access to learning, teaching, and leading. That is why I want to approach this research with a commitment to open-mindedness and self-criticism with questions that will both challenge and help fix this unequitable system. In this project, my fundamental commitment is to find a level of self-discovery that will allow me to better navigate the science of education in a diverse setting. This endeavor will be an academic attempt to provide a level of revelation that could move the needle of discrimination towards a more fair and effective system. My long-term goal is to use research findings to support creating a preK-12 system that will significantly reduce inequity in learning environments. This can only take place through structural changes that build leadership capacities among all its members regardless of race, ethnicity, and linguistic differences.

Finally, using a racial equity framework, I am interested in hearing what other Black leaders have experienced and what they have to say about it within the paradigm of the school system. I will be committed to listening to the personal and professional insights that might come from the experiences and engagement of those diverse leaders.

My objective for this research is to open a window to meaningful and structural policy changes. Developing a deep understanding of the study participants could support fundamental reforms and help foster equity while increasing the level of diversity and inclusion among teachers and other licensed staff in the process. Ultimately, my scholarship could support higher levels of diversity in administration and teaching staff, and research indicates that doing so can contribute to closing the chronic racial achievement so detrimental to learners of diverse backgrounds, particularly to Black children.

On a brighter side, I have simultaneously learned that many Americans, of all races and ethnicities, for generations, have stood up against this oppressive and racist system to fight for a fair, more inclusive, and more equitable society. Throughout the years, countless Black, White, Hispanic, Native, and Asian activists, intellectuals, militants, artists, and simple citizens used all the means at their disposal to change this racial inequity. Changing the education system has been in the center of the ongoing fight for a more just society. This research will aim to be a part of this long legacy and to provide a contribution to the learning communities to which I belong.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the significance of BIPOC leadership in fostering a culture of equity diversity, and inclusion in urban public schools. This section also addressed an inherent issue, the underrepresentation of BIPOC teachers and leaders, both nationally and in the upper Midwest states such as Minnesota. This section of the research put in the forefront the quasi-absent but meaningful conversation of the underrepresented Black PreK–12 leaders. Chapter Two will present the literature review of the issue of

underrepresentation of Black leadership in urban schools. It will showcase previous and current studies reporting the triangular connections between student achievement gaps, equitable teacher representation, and the benefits of Black leadership at the district and building level. Chapter Two will focus on findings that demonstrate how diverse leadership can help build and implement policies aiming at breaking the cycle of systemic inequity in our education system.

Chapter III focused on presenting this research paradigm and design using a qualitative approach through a racial equity lens. Chapter IV presented the data findings and analysis from the background survey of the research participants. It also showcased the emerging themes of the interviews. Chapter V revisited the literature review of chapter II, made relevant connections between Chapter II and Chapter V, followed by recommendations from the interviewees. This section also described the plan for communicating the research findings and concluded this project with critical remarks and insights that captured the essence of the dissertation.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

Introduction

This study centers on Black pre-K12 Administrators' narratives about working in an urban school setting. The public school system in the United States struggles to create a welcoming, inclusive, and equitable learning environment that meets the needs of its growing diverse student populations. Tapping into the professional expertise and personal experiences of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) — especially Black educational leaders— could play a critical role in shaping a more equitable and successful communities of urban learners. The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the experience of a small group of Black administrators in an urban school district. This research seeks to understand what inspires and motivates those leaders to join, stay, and thrive in public education, and how they can help bring transformative changes for the better and to address the following research questions.

How do Black PreK–12 leaders describe the influences on their journey to leadership in urban settings and what it took for them to remain in that position? The secondary questions are as follows:

a) What do Black PreK–12 administrators identify as factors that supported them in becoming a leader and those that were roadblocks to overcome?

b) What factors inspire Black administrators to remain in PreK–12 leadership in urban schools instead of leaving for more affluent communities?

c) What recommendations do PreK–12 administrators suggest as necessary for

increasing the percentage of Black or African American administrators working at

the building or district level?

This dissertation aims to put in the forefront the perspectives of one of the most under-represented groups as they envision a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable public school system at the leadership level.

This literature review focuses on academic and organizational findings that document how PreK–12 Black leaders have contributed to shaping diverse learning organizations in urban settings. The research showcases the historical roles that Black leadership has played in promoting a learning organization culture that promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion among faculty and staff. From a social justice lens, the authors and organizations included in this review of the research literature will be foundational in creating a framework that enables constructive and beneficial discussions. These arguments will aim to find an in-depth understanding of system change through diverse, particularly Black, leadership.

Another feature of this research literature is to unpack the topic of public education and the opportunity gaps in the United States and in the upper Midwest. In unpacking opportunity gaps, there was strong documentation of the issue of racial mismatch between students, teachers, and educational leaders. Another aspect of this section is the issue of racial professional opportunity gaps, and the importance of diverse leaders in PreK–12 schools. Also included is a review of research related to the intersection of children's social-emotional connections and the learning environment. Finally, this study will investigate how to break the status quo by increasing the number of Black leaders to create a cultural change and system that values trust, diversity, and

equity. This section of the literature review will examine the following themes:

- Role of Black administrators in changing school systems and culture

- Lack of representation of preK-12 BIPOC administrators and teachers

- Creating a hiring pipeline for Black administrators

Role of Black Administrators in Changing School Systems and Culture

This section focuses on the significance of leadership in shaping organizational structures and culture. Leaders play a critical role in creating a learning environment that benefits all students, particularly those from historically disadvantaged communities. In light of the persisting achievement gap among public schools and students, this section seeks to understand the status quo, its causes, and what it takes to change the current system for a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive one. This segment addresses the homogeneity of a teaching and administration force, both nationally and in the upper Midwest, and the limited plans in place to increase diversity. Finally, given the failure of the status quo to effectively narrow the achievement gap, this segment explores literature documenting how BIPOC, particularly Black administrators, have influenced change in the past and how they could continue to change the system and school culture for a more equitable one.

Louis et al. (2010) argued that leaders at the national, state, and local level eventually influence teaching and learning in schools. These authors argued that leadership matters. Leaders at the national, state, and local level have tremendous power to shape school systems. For example, Louis et al. (2010) described how leaders' representation constitutes the reflection of a pluralistic democracy as it displays the level of involvement of every community in leading the education system. Additionally,

Bartanen and Grissom (2019) argued that diverse school administrators help students successfully navigate their school culture and environment. Such support is critical to foster a positive school environment in which all students feel accepted and can achieve. Bartanen and Grissom (2019) added that BIPOC leaders have the potential to increase diversity among teachers and positively influence student achievement and growth in diverse communities. In essence, given the influence of leadership in school, ensuring fair representation among those who lead urban learning organizations, diverse teachers, particularly Black educators, benefit from that effort. This, in return, produces positive results among learners of color.

Tillman (2008) found that "during the pre-Brown era, Black principals provided hope, stability in the Black community, resiliency, as well as provided extraordinary services and resources to the black community" (p. 175). The pre-Brown era mirrored the tremendous impact Black school leaders had on Black students' growth when given the opportunity.

Through their work, Tillman (2004a) also described how Black teachers in the pre-Brown era played a vital role in educating Black students. Tilman (2004a) further made the case that, together, Black principals and Black teachers have always played a critical role in shaping the culture of public schools with a determination to care and to create system change beneficial to their community.

While Tilman (2004a) describes the long history of Black principals in American education, Pollard (1997) noted that most of the sparse literature regarding Black principals wrongly assumes that they are new to this role. Since the period ending slavery, Black principals have played a pivotal role in leading and running schools for

Black children. Tillman (2006) reported that in Rougemont, an all-Black school in a small Southern town, the school reinforced community values and served as the community's ultimate cultural symbol. In other terms, Black principals were critical in promoting critical best practices and values throughout the pivotal era of *Brown v. Board of Education.* The author underscored the long tradition of Black public school administrators of successfully leading excellent public schools that greatly benefited Black learners.

In the 1954 case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court prohibited racially segregated schools in the United States of America. Following this decision, Black and Brown communities amplified their voices in demanding a more inclusive and equitable public education system. This Supreme Court ruling prompted public schools to become the new battleground for equity, racial equality, and social justice. As the nation has changed demographically to become more diverse, the debates about using the public education system as a social and economic equalizer have increased. Hill and Jerell (2021) argued that "there is ongoing debate about public education not as a private commodity but as a public good that must be made available on equal terms" (p. 1). Like many nationwide conversations on public education, this one focuses on students having equal access to education. And due to their diverse setting, urban public schools across the nation have found themselves in the center of that debate. In addition to equal access to education, research (Bass, 2020; Assari et al.; 2021) supported that Black Administrators can play a major role in changing school culture, which then results in the closing of the student achievement gap. This is reviewed in the next section.

The Role of BIPOC/Black Principals in Closing the Student Achievement Gap

Bass (2020), citing Vaught and Castagno (2008) and White et al., (2003), stated that:

African Americans and other marginalized populations have been misidentified as "at-risk" groups within the context of discussions on student achievement in U.S. schools. This assignment to an "at-risk" category is mostly because of the gaps in achievement between African American students and their peers. (p. 358)

In the face of systemic biases, BIPOC, particularly Black learners, not only underperform on standardized tests, but they also have to grapple with the stigmas of their underachievement. The notable learning disparity between Black students and their White peers has been the subject of numerous public debates and educational policies aiming to narrow the gaps. However, according to Delpit et al. (1994) as cited in Bass, 2020), the voice and perspective of leaders from this affected community is often placed in the margin of those conversations and the consequential decisions they produce. Using the work of these authors, Bass (2020) made the following argument:

Interestingly, however, the inequitable policies, systems, and structures that predicted the conditions currently witnessed in our schools are rarely part of the conversation. Reform efforts have not addressed the root causes of the issue, but, rather, tend to chip away at symptoms of the problem. (p. 350)

Any efforts that aim to bring durable and equitable education at the center of this nation's school system have to be structural from the start. Bass (2020) further argued that "theory espoused by care ethicists suggests that care in teaching and school leadership may be a missing piece in unsuccessful reform efforts which previously sought to close persistent gaps in student achievement" (p. 358). In sum, caring for students constitutes a

fundamental part of providing an equitable education that fosters successful academic outcomes for all students, especially for the historically marginalized ones. The idea of caring for students is central to the practice of promoting academic and socioemotional growth in urban schools, particularly among Black and other diverse learners, and has been a focal point of Black administrators. Through their guidance, BIPOC students have proven experiences showing a level of cultural and emotional safety that they do not enjoy otherwise.

Referring to Black principals' effective leadership among Black learners, Bass (2020) stated that "to meet the needs of all their students, these leaders address structural inequality by enacting equity-minded initiatives that reduce opportunity gaps and manifest as caring practices" (p. 358). Having leaders from marginalized communities constitutes a critical asset to the successful implementation of equitable learning in diverse settings. Bass further argued that Black leaders not only have the foundational knowledge of public education, but they also possess the know-how of their common experiences with marginalized learners to effectively tackle the numerous and complex issues facing diverse learning organizations. This, in the end, benefits marginalized students and the rest of the community at large. In other words, Black leaders have played and can continue to play a key role in changing systemic organizational inequity in a way that White leaders have often failed to do. This approach to increase Black leadership as one of the components aiming to foster Black student achievement mirrors the reflections of numerous educators and leaders of that community.

Assari et al. (2021) reported that "previous research has shown persistent and large racial inequalities of academic achievement in the United States school system,

which is in part due to the low quality of education at urban schools . . . Black-White

achievement gap, however, remains significant" (p. 2). This ongoing racial achievement

gap has been a major landmark of the preK–12 education system across the United

States. Urban schools are particularly affected by this learning disparity. Despite ranking

among the top academically performing states, a key state representative of other states in

the upper Midwest has not escaped this national phenomenon.

     In 2016, Minnesota ranked among the highest in the achievement gaps between

White and Black students. Camera (2016) reported:

> The achievement gap between white students and Black students has barely
>
> narrowed over the last 50 years, despite nearly a half century of supposed
>
> progress in race relations and an increased emphasis on closing such academic
>
> discrepancies between groups of students. As of 2021, this racial inequity among
>
> Minnesota learners, particularly in urban settings, remains quasi unchanged.
>
> (para. 2)

The persistence of the achievement gap between White and Black students for fifty years

in Minnesota (Camera, 2016) is mirrored in other states and has led to a number of

national initiatives to narrow the learning gap. However, many of these initiatives,

instead of solving it, have at best succeeded in showing the gravity of this issue and at

worst have perpetuated the stigma about Black achievement. For instance, the No Child

Left Behind (NCLB) legislation (Simpson et al., 2004), required school districts to

develop curricula to close student achievement gaps. However, according to Simpson et

al. (2004), NCLB has mainly impacted school systems, particularly schools in urban

settings, by documenting learning gaps between schools and students while the causes

leading to the opportunity discrepancy have exacerbated. In other terms, despite the achievement of some level of transparency regarding racial achievement gaps among students, that law has failed to produce a meaningful system change that could benefit the targeted groups. Simpson et al. (2004) concluded that while the NCLB legislation has done little to reduce the achievement gap, neither has the Eurocentric culture in which it operates. When the system at large is exclusionary to the achievement of some groups of learners, a broader inclusionary approach needs to be taken in a structural way to bring positive change such as increasing the number of leaders of color.

Jones (2002) reported on three positive outcomes of having leaders of color in urban settings. First, leaders of color were crucial in creating an inclusive school among groups of ethnically diverse groups of teachers and other licensed staff. A second positive outcome of having a Black principal may also mitigate low expectations and deficit-based thinking that negatively affect students of color. Lastly, the author argued that on top of their leadership skills, thanks to their racial backgrounds, BIPOC leaders played a critical role in recruiting and retaining teachers of color. Jones (2002) found that through their dominant collectivist and inclusive leadership style, these leaders succeed in openly or overtly communicating to students and their diverse staff, particularly teachers, that they are seen and that their worldview matters. The positive benefits of Black administrators and teachers has also been reported in the area of discipline.

Skiba et al. (2002) stated that Black students are 3.5 times more likely to be suspended than their White peers. As a result of those suspensions and their feeling of alienation from the school system, those learners disproportionately become high school dropouts. In other words, the disciplinary nature of the school system forces Black

students out of the learning community. Arguing how Black principals can make a difference when it comes to disciplinary school policies, Skiba et al. (2002) further stated that Black principals are more likely to be understanding of Black students' experiences; thus, they will seek alternative routes to consequences and discipline. For example, Black principals often are a force for adopting a restorative practice to discipline over the traditional punitive approach currently in place in most schools. In essence, as opposed to imposing systematic consequences on students, Black administrators work to create an accepting, restorative, and inclusive school culture. Such an environment often positively affects system change and significantly benefits BIPOC, particularly Black students in the process. This restorative approach to leadership plays a fundamental role in defining the equitable focus of Black leadership.

Ladson-Billings (2012) highlighted how principals not only play a key role in classroom instruction, but they also shape the culture and the climate of the school by building authentic relationships with students and parents. Having educational leaders with similar backgrounds with learners can potentially increase socioemotional development and academic achievement, particularly among historically disenfranchised groups. Porter et al. (2010) argued that "leadership is the central ingredient in school success defined in terms of value added to student achievement" (p. 282). In other words, leadership can play a defining role as to whether to keep or change the status quo within public schools.

Reeves (2009) argued that the "principal has an important impact on student success by shaping the climate and making changes on the campus that affect not only the students, but the teachers as well" (p. 89). Leadership matters, and its impacts on

learning communities are profound and transformative. Bulris (2010) argued that "principals are often the first to be held accountable for a school that fails to meet state and/or federal accountability standards and find themselves at the center of the accountability movement" (p. 1). As educational research and policy makers seek to find effective ways to combat the achievement gaps, focusing on empowering principals with the qualifications and backgrounds that enable them to close the achievement gap would be a vital strategy to systematically develop and invest in.

Ladson-Billings et al. (2012) reported that principals produce organizational changes leading to student achievement and growth. Equitable leadership is fundamental to equitable student growth. Highlighting the power of the principal, Ladson-Billings et al. (2012) argued that "principals' impacts on hiring and maintaining effective teachers, building and implementing strong staff development plans that maintain successful teachers on campus, and creating a culture of excellence on campus" (p. 87). Such a responsibility spans every facet of learning in school, including equitable learning and hiring. Having principals that are professionally, as well as personally, invested in creating excellence in an inclusive, equitable, and diverse learning environment constitute a critical asset for a school culture that puts equity among students and staff in the center of its values and practices.

Senge et al., (2012) argued that "If you want to improve a school system, before you change the rules, you must look first to the ways that people think and interact together" (p. 25). School leaders play a critical role in shaping school vision and practice as they influence the rules that affect staff, students, and parents in the way they coexist and grow as a community. Changing a White-centered school system to one that is led to

empower students of all backgrounds so they can transform their community and the world is fundamental to an equitable education. If empowerment for all students is missing, then Myers et al. (2004) described how poverty can be seen as the root cause of the achievement gap.

Myers et al. reported that "the impact of school poverty on Black students' test scores is miniscule and that much of the Black-white test score gap can be attributed to racial differences in treatment" (p. 84). Considering this study, having a school environment that treats students equitably so that all students feel they belong is fundamental to achievement and growth among BIPOC students.

Bass (2020) argued that Black students' achievement can meaningfully increase by referencing the successful, Black-run learning communities before *Brown v. Board of Education*. Bass argued that:

> Black teachers and administrators were successful because they were part of the close-knit, dynamic communities they helped build, and schools were the central structures of these communities. Additionally, they strove to meet the needs of their students and were personally vested in their students' futures, so they created schools that comprehensively nurtured and supported students. (p. 257)

Black teachers and administrators have a proven track record of fostering social, emotional, and academic growth among Black students. They created schools that valued Black learners in ways that empowered them to thrive. As Bass (2020) suggested, school leaders shape the school system at large and the learning outcomes it produces. Therefore, leaders who prioritize working to find comprehensive solutions to the achievement gaps must be at the forefront of urban leadership.

In seeking comprehensive solutions to the achievement gaps within schools, special attention should be paid to the over representation of African American students in special education. Skiba et al. (2008) reported that while African American students account for 17 percent in the school age population, 33 percent of them are identified by their school as mentally retarded (now called intellectually disabled/intellectual disability (ID). Black students are more than two times more likely to be placed in the ID category than White students. Given the high percentage of African American students categorized as special education students, Skiba et al. highlighted this phenomenon as a strong justification for having Black administrators in those diverse educational settings. For these authors, Black administrators are well positioned to influence almost every aspect of special education.

Furthermore, Skiba et al. (2008) stated that "African American children were more likely than their peers with the same disability to be overrepresented in more restrictive settings or underrepresented in the general education setting. This is likely due to factors other than severity of disability" (p. 6). In other words, institutional biases that are likely influenced by the racial background of the decision makers –largely non–African American–might play a meaningful role in the overdiagnosis of that student population. In reference to such a statement, one can argue that increasing Black leadership in that setting could be critical for a more fair and equitable diagnosis system in special education.

In addition to Black administrators' positive impact on the SPED populations, their influence on equity and equal opportunity in the school system reaffirms the significance of leadership as a critical pillar for teaching and learning. Louis et al. (2010)

stated, "Leadership at the school, district, and state levels eventually influences teaching and learning in schools" (p. 321). Leaders play a significant role in shaping the mission and quality of public education at all levels of the school system. They broadly determine the dimension of commitment to equitable learning and growth to learners and staff. These decision-makers influence budgeting, curricula, hiring, retaining, and promoting personnel in district offices as well as in school buildings. Those administrators use their personal, cultural, and professional values as an indivisible triangle to run schools and districts. These values have proven to shape strategies and hence outcomes that will directly affect students as well as staff. Black principals increasingly find themselves in a position to bring those fundamental qualities in a growingly urbanized school system.

Bass (2014) reported that Black administrators have constantly shown care and profound commitment to serving the under-represented and students from low socioeconomic status communities. This legacy of advocacy and care largely defines Black leadership, and BIPOC, as well as other marginalized groups, have benefited in their achievement in the school community. Bass (2014) further argued that these leaders succeeded in helping close the learning gaps in those learning organizations by promoting a positive culture that respects differences and the individuality of all learners. Leaders have the power to change organizational culture and to create structural access that enables every individual learner to succeed. Milner (2014) described the work of Black leaders as "nurture school cultures, do provide for the needs of their students, they do provide student academic support, they support teachers who work directly with students daily, and they do perform the necessary work with their faculties to obtain results" (p. 358). There is a culture of Black leaders championing equity among learners of color,

particularly Black students. Those leaders also empower BIPOC faculty and staff to become successful in their role in the classroom as the primary component for student achievement and school success.

Fostering diverse leaders plays a fundamental role in the efforts to promote racially equitable school systems where all students and staff feel represented, seen, cared for, and empowered. Black leaders have been in the vanguard of inspiring and implementing system changes that are beneficial to BIPOC students and learners in general. This educational cultural asset not only benefits Black students, it also creates a more inclusive learning environment from which all learners can experience academic growth and socioemotional capacity building. Such a success also applies to all staff, especially BIPOC licensed educators. In my professional experience Black leaders in urban schools in the upper Midwest have the knowledge and skills to envision and implement an organizational learning system that prioritizes the success of all, especially for the most vulnerable groups of students and educators.

Referring to schools with high concentrations of Black students, Walker (2000) stated that "the roles played by Black principals in segregated schools and communities were crucial. Within the school, . . . the principal held the authority to hire teachers in line with his vision and fire those who did not conform" (p. 275). In other words, as they promote an environment that lives up to the values of diversity and equity among staff and learners, Black leadership plays a quintessential role of creating a culture of socioemotional wellness. Green (2018) reported that:

Many principals of color expressed advancing into administration provided them.

with more influence in the public education system and the community

compared to being a classroom teacher . . . Principal's actions to support urban

school reform and community improvement included the following: positioned

the school as a social broker in the community, linked school culture to

community revitalization projects, and connected instruction to community

realities. (p. 111)

In other words, Green (2018) highlights how These diverse leaders use their experiences

and knowledge to effectively respond to the needs of students from under-represented

communities, particularly in often segregated urban schools. Finally, my professional

experience aligns with Green (2018) in that I see how Black school administrators

constitute a constructive force for change as they skillfully facilitate hard conversations

on race, class, and school culture. Such fundamental best practices among Black

principals have been particularly critical in urban schools, even in the midst of persisting

BIPOC leadership underrepresentation.

Lack of Representation of PreK-12 BIPOC Administrators/Teachers and

Ramifications

This section will focus on the persistent underrepresentation of BIPOC teachers

and administrators. Fischens (2020) reported that "during the 2018-19 school year, nearly

half Minnesota's public-school districts didn't employ any teachers of color" (para. 5).

Fischens further highlighted that, although St. Paul Public Schools had the most diverse

teaching force in Minnesota, the racial makeup of its staffing strongly underrepresented

its diverse student population. While nearly 80 percent of the district's learners are

students of color, only 20 percent of its teachers identify as BIPOC. In their report, Bailes

and Guthery (2020) stated that "only 20 percent of all principals nationwide are nonwhite, . . . there is a distinct mismatch between the demography of school leaders and that of teachers, the largest pool of principals. There are major inequalities within the country's school leadership hierarchies" (para 4). This lack of representation particularly underscores the needs for systemic change aiming at narrowing both the leadership opportunity gap and student achievement gap.

This section of the literature review provides support for the low percentage of BIPOC licensed staff, especially of school administrators working in the public school's system. However, even given the low percentage of BIPOC, Bartanen and Grissom (2019) report that when these diverse leaders have made it to urban schools' buildings and districts that they have become critical to the process of creating a more equitable, more diverse, and more inclusive school system. These authors describe how "These leaders highlighted seeming struggles and tensions with their efforts (ministry) to get all sections of the school community on board with driven change and the proactive development and learning that they seek to promote" (p. 41). One critical aspect of the tension Black leadership experience as they promote a student-centered inclusive learning environment is the pushback they receive from the larger White dominated community. According to Tillman (2004), these Black administrators also struggle in their commitment to create and advocate for a more inclusive learning and teaching environment as some of them fear retribution from White supervisors and even from most school licensed staff. Lastly, this section presents a picture of a cultural and demographic mismatched between school leaders and the diverse student populations that they serve. Such a situation created an unbalanced, Eurocentric school culture that

required a meaningful increase of BIPOC in order to find an effective solution to narrow the learning gap. Specific evidence was found in creating this literature review on the positive impact of BIPOC, particularly school administrators, on all learners. For example, Supervillle (2021) reported that:

> Research continues to show the benefits of educators of color on all students and the positive effects of same-race principals on students and teachers of color— more Black students in advanced courses, higher math scores, and the hiring of more Black teachers. (para. 2)

The efforts to create a learning environment lead by leaders that are culturally competent and racially representative of the populations that they serve produce enormous benefits across the board. However, despite support for increasing BIPOC leaders, the research documents leadership opportunity gaps that hinder progress.

Leadership Opportunity Gaps

Numerous data demonstrated that the opportunity gap is not limited to just between Black and White learners. The opportunity gaps exist among American school leadership as well. The National Center For Education Statistics (NCES) reported that "in 2017–18, about 78 percent of public school principals were White, 11 percent were Black, and 9 percent were Hispanic" (2022, para. 2). Such a lack of representation is even stronger in upper Midwest states, like Minnesota. The National Teacher and Principal Survey (2017-18) reported that 94.1 percent principals in Minnesota are White while only 3.5 percent are Black. This data demonstrates that an overwhelming majority of principals in Minnesota are White despite the rapid increase of the BIPOC student populations. In this era of social justice awakening across the nation, as of now, the

opportunity outcomes for BIPOC PreK–12 school administrators have recorded only limited changes or goals aiming to extend the pipeline. Cecelski (as cited in Tilman, 2004) identified some modest increase in the number of Black principals since the early 1970s. But Cecelski (1994) as cited in Tilman (2004 a), reported that the underrepresentation continued for the decades that followed despite the rapid growth in the number of Black students. The high lack of diversity between those in the role of school leaders and students has continued to be in the center of conversations on equity and achievement gaps.

Karpinski (2004) argued that the systematic displacement of Black Principals following *Brown v. Board of Education* detrimentally affected those critical leaders and the Black student population that they served. These patterns of displacement of Black principals also negatively affected the pool of Black teachers. The negative impact for Black principals described by Karpinski was that for those few Black teachers who managed to remain, there was an absence of a mentorship program at their school district that could help them benefit so they could move into principal roles. The massive displacement of Black educators following *Brown v. Board of Education* also negatively affected the recruitment, hiring, and promotions of Black to the principal role. The displacement that occurred after *Brown* caused long-term harm that can still be seen today in the lack of representation of Black principals.

According to a Department of Education report (2011-12), 49 percent of all elementary and secondary public-school students identified as BIPOC, 29 percent were Black, but 82 percent of teachers were White, and only 7 percent of teachers identified as Black. This report highlighted the dominant representation of White teachers in the

classrooms and the disproportionate demographic overrepresentation of BIPOC students. This racial mismatch between teachers and students translated into a similar gap between BIPOC learners and leaders, even in diverse urban school districts in the country. The NCES (2022) documented that:

> Nearly all principals in the US in the 1990-91 school year reported that they were teachers before becoming principals (table 1). Those who taught averaged about 10 1/2 years of teaching. Even the younger principals (under 40) averaged a substantial number of years of teaching (8 years) before becoming principals. (p. 1)

In other words, although not absolute, there is often a direct correlation between teaching and principalship. The dominant correlation between teaching and principalship is also true for BIPOC teacher underrepresentation in the school system.

When the overwhelming majority of the teaching force is White, even in mostly minority urban school's populations, White leaders are often over-represented. This over-representation of White leaders is also supported by the findings of the NCES (2006) showing that Black principals make up just 7.7 percent of the principals nationwide. This research essentially demonstrated how restrictive the current system is to Black administrators as the low percentage has only moderately increased since the publication of this study. The NCES (2022) reported that in 2019, public schools' Black students' population has decreased from 17 percent to 15 percent. However, according to ZIPPIA (2021) Black or African American constituted 10 percent of all principals nationwide while their White counterparts represented 69.3 percent of all public schools. Although this leadership discrepancy is not exclusive to the field of education, it is the

representation of the gap between the equal opportunity philosophy or vision of public school in their current reality across the nation. Such phenomenon also highlighted the cultural and racial mismatch between public school leaders and the student populations that they serve. Minnesota is a case study of this cultural and racial mismatch.

Mismatching of Leadership with Students

The Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standard Board (2019) reported that while 34 percent of students identify as students of color or Native American, only five percent of the state's teacher workforce identifies as Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). According to the same report, only 1.4 % of the Minnesota public education system is Black. These reports highlighted the stagnant proportion of BIPOC teachers in Minnesota in the last decades. They also underscored the racial and cultural mismatch between the classroom leaders and the student population. More importantly, given that teaching has been the main pathway to school administration, this research underscored one of the key issues of BIPOC pipelines in Minnesota.

Mitchell (as cited in Tyler et al., 2004), referring to BIPOC licensed educators, stated that when these leaders can successfully navigate in a professional setting between their culture and identity, they become role models to BIPOC students as a vivid demonstration of what is possible and what is taking place within the system. Diverse teachers and leadership play a key role in the success of students from diverse backgrounds. It is essential to students' academic and social emotional success. Mitchell continued to say that teachers may act as "liaisons," "mediators," or "cultural translators" for parents, students, staff, and the rest of the school community (1998, as

cited in Tyler et al., 2004, p. 7). Having schools where teachers and school leaders are racially representative of the community that they serve constitutes a fundamental asset to the students from traditionally underrepresented students. However, the racial opportunity gaps between students and licensed educators perpetuates the Eurocentric domination over an increasingly diverse population of learners.

The racial discrepancy is even wider among PreK–12 school administrators, particularly Black school leaders. While, as of 2022, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) has not released data concerning employment among Black or BIPOC administrators in Minnesota public schools, so far there is no indication showing a higher percentage of these leaders than that of teachers of similar racial backgrounds.

In its mission statement, the MDE (2022) used equity, social justice, and diversity as the framework of its mission statement. The MDE promoted those values as the driving force of their service to teachers, staff, parents, and other members of the community at large. On one hand, MDE's mission statement reaffirmed the significance of equity and inclusiveness for a successful learning organization. On the other hand, the continued racial disparity between teachers and leaders and their Black students unequivocally underscored this area for growth of the philosophy commonly promoted in educational settings in the midwestern state.

Partelow et al. (2017) argued that having BIPOC leaders constitutes one of the most powerful tools to support BIPOC students. In other words, leaders of color, particularly Black leaders, are beneficial to both the academic and social emotional achievement of learners of diverse origins. Gardiner and Enomoto (2006) and Stanovich and Jordan (1998) stated that principals have a significant impact on the responsiveness

of their schools vis-a-vis students from traditionally disadvantaged groups. Such a responsibility of Black principals often translates into a more inclusive and welcoming school environment for students of diverse backgrounds. Those diverse learners feel seen and valued, as they understand their shared worldview with those in charge of their school.

One way Black principals can create an inclusive and welcoming school environment is reported by Superville (2020) who stated that:

Research continues to show the benefits of educators of color on all students and the positive effects of same-race principals on students and teachers of color— more Black students in advanced courses, higher math scores, and the hiring of more Black teachers. (para. 1)

Supporting Superville's idea of the importance of Black principals in creating a welcoming school environment is Zentella (2005), who reported that "the majority of students in today's urban schools are Black or Latinos native-born and foreign born-youth" (pp. 13-30). Unfortunately, urban schools have failed in providing these students with leaders who share their experiences and background. The lack of such leaders often weakens even the most progressive reforms or policies due to cultural dissociation.

While same-race principals can play a critical role in fostering Black student achievement, they also can make schools inclusive and welcoming by increasing opportunities for Black teachers. Given the significance of Black leadership in the success of building more equitable schools for diverse student populations, making sure that school administrators bring their unique cultural and racial experiences to their learning community is fundamental. Only increasing the percentage of BIPOC educators

can US schools overcome the negative impact of post -*Brown v. Board of Education* documented by Karpinski (2004).

Referring to the impact of post-*Brown v. Board of Education*, Karpinski (2004) underlined how in racially charged communities, the removal of Black principals from the public school system has prevented them from having any authority over policy-making and instructional leadership. Following the removal of Black principals Karpinski added the overwhelming challenge facing students, parents, and other members of the learning community was to successfully navigate the White-centric power structure. One extension of Karpinski's ideas is that, in essence, when diverse communities are deprived of diverse leaders, especially Black principals, BIPOC learners and parents and the community members suffer. These diverse groups experience the direct consequences of leadership underrepresentation, hence their unequal and inequitable outcomes shown through the learning and opportunity gaps among students and teachers.

Khan (2016) further argued that the few African American principals who are hired, when speaking up about race and racism, particularly in racially diverse spaces, do it at their own risk. In other words, Black leaders, even in diverse settings, take a meaningful level of professional and personal risk as they address topics of race and racism in the society at large and in the educational system. When Black school leaders, whether implicitly or explicitly, feel threatened by the school system to meaningfully address anti Black racism in the work setting, this directly impacts educational outcomes for the historically disenfranchised groups in detrimental ways. Ladson-Billings (2004) stated that schools owe an educational debt to minoritized children, having

systematically denied Black, Latino, and Indigenous youth the right to an adequate education. Giving BIPOC leaders as role-models to those learners represents a fundamental part of that educational debt. Referring to how societal practices have systematically degraded the condition of Black youth and Black families, Wilderson (2017) urged educational leaders to confront any practice or educational reform effort that seeks to maintain rather than disrupt and abolish this status quo. The lack of Black educational leaders to confront the status quo by using their own personal and professional experiences to lead courageous conversations on racism constitutes a loss for the school community, especially for Black students and staff. The lack of Black educational leaders to confront the status quote is exacerbated because many principal preparation programs also do not prepare White principals to lead these critical conversations.

Brooks (2012) highlighted the failure of most principal preparation programs to develop structures and norms resulting in critical conversations pertaining to race and racial equities. When the institutions in charge of training school leaders fail to equip their graduates with one of the most fundamental tools to address inequity and discuss change, it is incumbent upon diverse schools and districts to take the lead in that regard. This is fundamental for the creation of a sustainable pipeline for Black administrators who, in turn, become key change agents for the success of any school or district initiative aiming to increase the percentage of Black school administrators in the school and district, particularly in the most diverse or urban settings. The next section will address the issue of the limited leadership pipeline for BIPOC, particularly Black administrators.

Creating a Hiring Pipeline for Black Administrators

This section summarizes important efforts identified in the review of the research related to changing the status quo and the overwhelming Whiteness of principals in the United States. The final topic addressed in this section relates to ideas in the review of the research regarding the diversification of public education at the leadership level and how it is directly connected to the diversification of licensed staff, particularly teachers. The pipeline leading to educating, hiring, retaining, and promoting Black leaders in urban schools is critical in addressing the issue of the learning and the opportunity gaps that are detrimental to learners and school professionals of diverse backgrounds. By creating a structural leadership pipeline, the benefits for the affected communities are expected to be enormously rewarding in terms of building a school culture based on the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Closing the Leadership Opportunity Gaps and the Racial Mismatch

The student achievement gap, as previously reported, has raised legitimate concerns among different sectors in this nation. This situation has inspired the detrimentally affected populations to agree on the need for advocacy for a new type of national, state, and local educational leadership. Mitchell (1998, as cited in Tyler et al., 2004) advocated for BIPOC educators who can navigate successfully between their identity and culture in a professional setting and who can offer a model for students who need to see it being not only possible but being done. Paving the way for BIPOC educators to lead is critical to a fully integrated urban school system. Bonilla-Silva (2002, as cited in Mills, 2011) highlighted how leading conversations related to race and racism can be a challenging initiative for school leaders, especially in a sociopolitical context that continually negates how institutional racism continues to affect the everyday

life of individuals and institutions. To combat this hysterical amnesia, it is important that increasing school leadership opportunities play an important role in addressing the systemic inequity dominating diverse learning communities.

Kozol (2012), Loewen (2008), and Skiba and Peterson (1999) underscored evidence on how race and racism inform every aspect of American life for K–12 students. This is true for the funding of public schools, the disproportionate disciplinary infractions meted out to Black children, the Eurocentric textbooks and curriculum found in classrooms, and poor access to modern facilities. These under-resourced schools are the results of institutional racism. The leadership gap leading to the present racial mismatch also falls into the category of the limited access to leaders from those diverse communities as well.

Senge et al. (2012) also noted the connection between school systems and society as he argued "the school system became far more tightly embedded in larger social systems" (p. 39). In other words, learning organizations mirror the society at large. That is why the effort of creating systemic change for a more equitable and inclusive school leadership must represent the values of the communities they serve starting by representation among leaders. Many of the BIPOC leaders have experienced meaningful societal inequities, including in their role as school administrators. Biles and Guthery (2020) reported that "qualified leaders may be removed from the pipeline early in the process because of their race or gender. At every opportunity for promotion, the hierarchy of school and district leadership gets increasingly homogeneous" (para. 9). The experiences of discrimination among Black leaders constitute an ongoing roadblock to Black leaders as they try to navigate a White-centered power system which their

professional success is heavily dependent on. Biles and Guthery (2020) further stated that "despite equivalent qualifications and more experience on average, . . . Black assistant principals were systematically delayed and denied promotions to principal, when compared with their male or white counterparts" (para. 11). Black leaders continuously face institutional roadblocks despite the racial mismatch that still dominates diverse learning institutions. The limited literature on Black school administrators represents a detrimental factor in terms of promoting Black leaders.

Tillman (2004) noted that the literature on the impact of Black principals is not as researched as that on Black teachers. Same for data on the employment status of Black principals as it is often embedded into larger studies of Black educators or leaders in general. In fact, as opposed to BIPOC or Black teachers, the limited research on Black principals has made it challenging to ignite the conversation needed to change the status quo at the leadership level in public schools. Ethridge (1997), as cited in Tillman (2004) found that "the employment status of Black educators after the implementation of desegregation focused on teachers, principals, supervisors, and central office personnel. Records on the displacement of Black principals were poorly kept" (p. 111). All this lack of data on the employment status of Black principals illustrated the inequity that dominated the public school system for generations. This also reinforced a structurally de facto Eurocentric school system to which students and staff from the BIPOC populations constantly must adapt to succeed academically.

To prevent BIPOC populations having to adapt, Darling-Hammond et al. (2018) highlighted that BIPOC teachers and leaders constitute one of the most powerful tools a school can provide a student of color. Having those educators helps increase attendance

and standardized test scores, decreases suspensions for students of color, and increases graduation rates and aspirations for attending college for BIPOC learners. In sum, these diverse leaders help make the school environment more relatable and effective for diverse learners. Failing to diversify school leadership forces diverse students to constantly adjust their home culture to a White-dominated, homogenous school leadership. This often leads to academic and social-emotional struggles in those underserved communities. In the meantime, BIPOC staff, particularly Black school administrators, struggle to get certified, hired, retained, and promoted.

Haynes (2017) advocated for the need to pay attention to the diversity of school leaders for the benefit of BIPOC students. To put it differently, leadership representation is critical for diverse learners. Hattie and Zierer (2019) underscored the importance of prioritizing the development, recruitment, and retention of BIPOC school administrators for all school districts across the country. There must be structural policies and mechanisms that facilitate diverse leadership at all levels of PreK–12 public education. Carver-Thomas (2018) and Darling-Hammond (2017) highlighted how limiting the racist power dynamics are for BIPOC individuals; however, when these leaders are eventually placed in public education, their representation makes a significant difference. But obtaining positions is not sufficient, and BIPOC leaders must also have increased support for these roles.

Carver-Thomas's (2018) and Darling-Hammond's (2017) studies indicated that Black teachers were one-tenth as likely as other educators to receive multiple supports such as comprehensive mentoring, peer-to-peer professional development, and an effective induction program in their first year of teaching. When, for lack of support,

those teachers feel forced to leave the profession altogether, this has a direct implication on recruiting Black administrators as well. In essence, supporting Black teachers in a way that allows them to succeed constitutes a solid vehicle in the process of building a successful Black principalship pipeline. Another issue negatively impacting the BIPOC administrative pipeline is identified by Carver-Thomas (2018) and Darling-Hammond (2017) are the poor working conditions for Black women.

According to Carver-Thomas (2018) and Darling-Hammond (2017), the poor working conditions for Black women in K–12 contributed to their high attrition and turn over from the public school system. In other words, racist school settings caused Black female teachers to walk away from the profession. For instance, in my numerous conversations with Black female educators, while working as a teacher, then as a school administrator, those Black professionals have reported to me several issues that they believe are correlated to their racial background. Two of those issues are a) lack of camaraderie with their colleagues who are overwhelmingly White and b) over-scrutiny by their White peers and White administrators. These phenomena created negative dynamics between these groups, which detrimentally affects the Black administrator pipeline. Supporting Black teachers and helping them to become school leaders is fundamental to create sustainable ways to increase Black school leadership. Initiatives created by the state of Minnesota can also provide a framework for how to improve the BIPOC principal pipeline.

The last decade has seen a series of initiatives from the academic and political sectors to increase the number of teachers of color in the state of Minnesota. The most recent bill passed in that regard by the Minnesota Legislature (2021) was *The Increase of*

Teachers of Color Act of 2021. Passing this legislation was the result of constant conversations and research on the topic of diversity, equity, and inclusion and what they mean in diverse communities of learners. This 2021 law promoted a state goal to increase the percentage of teachers of color and American Indian teachers each year by 2%; and $6 million grants for mentoring and retention incentive programs for teachers of color. Although more needs to be done, such an initiative to diversify the teaching force has been received among advocacy and affinity groups for BIPOC teachers as a step forward in creating an equitable school system in Minnesota. Furthermore, there has been limited evidence that these efforts to diversify the teaching population also target the diversification of, particularly the increase in numbers and influence of Black administrators. In light of these findings, by creating a school system that fosters diverse leadership, school districts empower diverse learning communities to fully grow and develop for the benefit of all learners.

The Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, and Wahlstrom Foundation (2019) argued that promoting diversity and inclusion in school leadership is one way of creating effective leadership that leads to student achievement and growth. The foundation supports *The Increase of Teachers of Color Act of 2021* as one way of realizing the diversification of school leadership, which is a new effort to address the learning disparity among students in Minnesota. In essence, policymakers and school leaders have to use the urgency of equitable education as a vector to setting organizational change for fair and inclusive leadership.

Covering the issue of gender and race disparities within the principal workforce, Bailes and Guthery (2020) reported different ways that qualified leaders may be removed

from the pipeline early in the process because of their race or gender and its detriment on school diversity and equity. These findings imply that in order to increase the percentage of BIPOC school leaders, school leadership has to take into account the multiple roadblocks associated with the race and gender of potential administrators. Bailes and Guthery (2020) went on to describe that "at every opportunity for promotion, the hierarchy of school and district leadership gets increasingly homogeneous" (para. 9). This study underscored the unequal treatment of school administrators and the genesis of the systemic racial homogeneity resulting from it in schools and in district buildings. It is incumbent upon district leaders to be intentional in order to break the cycle of the discriminatory practices that lead racist selection of school leaders in favor of a more fair and racially inclusive leadership community.

As these efforts to increase BIPOC teachers in Minnesota continue, given the direct connection between teaching and school administration, many educational researchers have echoed the need to create policies to systematically address the issue of underrepresentation of BIPOC, especially of Black administrators. However, for such an initiative to be successful, it requires having a better understanding of the daily professional experiences of those at the heart of this study, Black principals.

Black Principals

Cornileus (2012) denounced the fact that when researchers have focused on Blacks, they tend to treat them as a monolith as opposed to the diverse group that they are. For example, there are meaningful distinctions between the role and experiences of immigrant Black administrators as opposed to Indigenous African American administrators. However, despite those differences, it is evident that being identified or

perceived as Black constitutes a straightforward social and ethnic identity that all individuals in this category share. Such a common identity plays a significant role in shaping the perception of Black leaders, including their experiences and the narratives emanating from it. Focusing on the intersectionality of race and gender and how they differently impact Black principals, Brown (2013) underscored how African American male principals can be complex and even controversial. Those leaders, according to Brown (2013), experience racism in different forms such as isolation, microaggression, and unusual scrutiny. As Cornileus (2012) and Brown (2013) highlighted in their research, unlike their White peers, the African American school administrator is a complex entity with experience that can vary based on different social and cultural factors. Some of those factors include classism and political affiliation or view. In essence, as one learns about Black schools and leaders, it is important to remember that despite their common ancestral heritage, they are not a monolith. African American leaders can be a distinctly diverse group.

Peters (2012) found that Black female principals also experienced challenges related to their race. Many of their struggles are also connected to their gender, age, and positionality. These hardships are also experienced in harnessing district support to implement school reform with integrity and the necessary commitment from the higher-ups. Peters (2012) further argued that "racism impacts the lives of Black principals, no matter if in Massachusetts or in Texas, for as Black male principals they experienced the same sentiment of how others perceive them as African American men, not principals" (p. 146). Peters (2012) further added that the experiences of racism and genderism against Black principals in different school settings constitutes the strongest indicators of

the perception of their leadership. In other terms, these Black leaders face a range of targeted roadblocks throughout their journey to leadership in response to their way of leading, which is the product of who they are. The awareness of the complexity and diversity among Black leaders of all genders helps education researchers better understand how these rich identities might affect the professional experiences of those Black administrators in the school setting. That is why initiatives aiming to improve representation among that group need to consider the intersectionality of their background, including their genders and ethnicities, and the strong assets they can be.

The United States Department of Education (2011-2) found that racial demographics of principals were largely homogenous: 80 percent were White, 10 percent were Black, and 7% were Hispanic. The same report highlighted that this under-representation among leaders of color has barely changed since 2003-2004, where White principals were 82 percent, and 11 percent were Black, and 5 percent were Hispanic. The report continued to point out that although the number of students who major in and complete bachelor's degrees in education is becoming more racially diverse, in 2012-13, 73 percent of students majoring in education were White. The report concluded that because the vast majority of those who pursue a career in the field remain, the educators' pipeline to school administration has been directly impacted by the racial homogeneity as well. Given the critical role played by BIPOC leaders in the process of implementing a equitable and inclusive urban school system, their continuing underrepresentation is central in highlighting the opportunity gaps in the United States.

Increase Black Leadership Representation for Student Achievement

Gershenson et al. (2021) stated that "Black students randomly assigned to at least

one Black teacher in grades K-3 are 9 percentage points (13 percent) more likely to graduate from high school and 6 percentage points (19 percent) more likely to enroll in college than their same-school, same-race peers" (p. 1). This research supported how classroom representation and cultural connection among licensed educators and students bring positive outcomes for diverse learners. Although this research was focused on classroom representation for K–3 students, given the natural progression of the different levels of public education, it is reasonable to assume that these benefits can easily apply across all levels of PreK–12 public education as well. This data also reinforced the argument supported by those who believe that the *Increase of Teachers of Color Act of 2021* is paramount in the efforts to create a more inclusive system that would significantly contribute to closing the racial achievement gaps in Minnesota.

The efforts to narrow those gaps require a clear understanding and implementation of the pipelines needed for a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive school system, particularly in urban settings. Given the narrow path to school leadership facing Black administrators, there is urgency to change the status quo to an equitable and inclusive public institution. Such a change requires systematic efforts at the district and state levels to create pathways to leadership for the underrepresented licensed educators. Only if there is a diversification of leadership in K-12 can the benefits described by The Association of Teacher Educators (2008) be achieved for the majority of public school students. It stated:

> that racial pairing of teachers and students significantly increased the reading and mathematics achievement scores of both African American and White students by approximately three to four percentage points. The Association of Teacher

Educators (2008) also found that racial pairing had cumulative effects on student

learning, with students gaining two to four percentile points in both mathematics

and reading for each additional year of exposure to a same-race teacher. In other

terms, same race-teachers help improve achievement and growth among BIPOC

students. The association concluded that the race effects were particularly strong

among poor African American children attending segregated schools. (p. 585)

This correlation between student achievement and equal representation among classroom

teachers constitutes a solid component of closing the achievement gap. Such a finding led

to the efforts to not only increase the percentage of BIPOC teachers but also that of

administrators of similar backgrounds. The efforts to close the opportunity gap among

licensed teachers is key to narrowing the racial gap among school administrators.

Referring to principals of all races and their influence in highly diverse schools,

Milner (2012) stated:

It has been found that principals who are successful at leading schools with high

concentrations of poverty and students of color, schools where students succeed,

have been found to create positive, nurturing school cultures which honor the

individuality and experiences of students and meet students' needs. (p. 693)

In essence, principals who succeeded in creating an inclusive school environment,

particularly for students of diverse backgrounds, have demonstrated the best practices

based on a culture of equity where every learner can thrive. In this context of leadership

excellence and BIPOC leaders, Andrews et al. (2019) added that on top of achievement,

by having leaders they can relate to, students of color can see themselves in leadership

positions and get inspired to lead. In other words, Black administrators not only foster the

best practices that lead to academic and emotional growth among BIPOC learners, they are also a precious source of inspiration to those learners.

For this review of the research literature, it can be a daunting task to find research articles on how school districts or schools across the country have created or tried to implement clear and comprehensive policies and plans to increase the number of BIPOC school administrators. However, Superville (2021), reporting on the issue of scarcity among principals of color, highlighted what some school districts have decided to do about it. The report added that some districts have gone beyond just naming the problem but want to fix it. When it comes to systemic change, it is fundamental for districts to move from theories to practices that lead to the increase of diversity among leadership. Two of the districts noted by Superville (2021) are Winston-Salem/Forsyth County in North Carolina and Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, KY.

Superville (2021) underscored that Jefferson County Public Schools planned to adopt, in 2019, an equity plan committed to increasing the percentage of teachers of color from 16 percent in 2018 to 18 percent by 2020 and increasing the administrators of color from 31 percent in 2018 to 36 percent in 2020. This plan focused on nine specific equity goals and strategies aiming at recruiting and retaining diverse workforce, particularly BIPOC leaders. With these clear goals and strategies for implementations, Jefferson County Public Schools demonstrated a critical difference between what urban districts across the country say and what can be done to address the issue of under-representation of BIPOC leaders.

Some of the Jefferson County Public Schools major strategies are as follows:

- Tap talented teachers to take a next step in their career

- Develop and support assistant principals of color

- Create alliances with higher education institutions that can help

- Create a targeted recruitment strategy

- Build on your internal network for recruitment

- Listen to the needs and concerns of your employees of color

- Trumpet the profession and your district's commitment to equity

- Don't make the job harder

In order to support these strategies, the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County and Jefferson County districts both used a portion of an estimated $8.2 million in grant money they are each receiving from the Wallace Foundation.

They used these funds to collaborate with Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs) in their regions to develop a pipeline of leaders of color and provide professional development for current leaders. In essence, these are models of districts that demonstrated their commitment to narrowing the leadership opportunity in public schools. These models reaffirmed the significance of the implementation of clear strategies based on collaboration and comprehensible funding. Other researchers such as Superville (2021) highlighted the need for additional research to increase understanding of the challenges experienced by BIPOC leadership and what structures can be put in place so they can succeed. Given how critical they are, these structures need to be created and maintained in ways that not only challenge the racial status but also become the model for equal access in 21st century modern education in urban settings. Diarese George, executive director of the Tennessee Educators of Color Alliance, stated he believes that the school system has not done its due diligence of listening to leaders of

color to see what challenges they are facing (Superville, 2021). Such a feeling of neglect by the broader school system is significant among BIPOC leaders, especially Black administrators, even in the face of some apparent progress.

Hattie and Zierer (2019) argued the need for all school districts across the country to develop, recruit, and retain BIPOC school administrators as a priority of their strategies. The importance of having clear strategies for a solid school administrator's pipeline is critical for schools. The Broad Center and The Wallace Foundation (2020) have also developed programs that focus on recruiting, training, and supporting leadership talent to create transformative changes in urban school districts. The foundation used these evidence-based initiatives to create an important leadership pipeline aiming to foster diversity, equity, and inclusion in the public school system, particularly in urban settings.

Dantley (2009) argued that:

African American leaders have had to work to achieve the objectives and goals of the school and district . . . they have had to contextualize that work in a commitment to uncovering and transforming perceptions and behaviors of injustice, discrimination, and marginalization. (p. 53)

In sum, the injustice of marginalizing Black leaders forced them to commit to fight against discriminatory practices in a way that is particular to them. Having a pipeline that focuses on systematically addressing that situation can potentially reverse the outcomes of traditionally underrepresented school leaders.

Improving Students' Learning Environment Through Black Leaders

As cited in Enloe (2019), Piaget (1973) stated that "education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups" (p. 41). This argument highlighted the dimension of a school system that enables stakeholders to operate within the framework of equitable representation as a hallmark for human rights as well as racial, religious, and gender inclusion. These values constitute the catalyst for equal and equitable learning and leadership opportunities.

Foster and Tillman (2009) noted that "African American school leadership is complex and multilayered, taking into account the historical and community contexts, all while addressing the holistic needs of the student" (p. 2). Meeting the needs of students requires more than the knowledge acquired in the academic setting. For leaders to rise to be effective at promoting learning that sets students up for success, they need to understand the community context of the school setting. Black leaders have historically and continuously demonstrated their ability to promote learning environments that are conducive to the full development of Black learners in ways that put equitable learning and growth at the center of their role. This holistic approach to organizational leadership has greatly benefited urban learners as they experience positive role modeling and representation as an essential part of their everyday school schooling.

Bass (2019) noted that there is a strong relationship between effective leadership of caring principals, particularly leaders working with disadvantaged students. In sum, the culture of collective responsibility as demonstrated through caring leadership has strong potential to increase student achievement through student academic support. The

commitment to promote and implement caring and inclusive leading and teaching best practices leads to equitable learning. This educational strategy has played a major role in fostering positive school culture and closing the racial opportunity gaps in diverse learning communities.

Breaking the Status Quo Through Black Leaders

As hooks (2003) argued, "when you have people who talk about diversity who are unwilling to do something about it, nothing changes" (p. 190). The racial status quo has to change. It is not enough to just talk about it, but words should be followed by concrete actions that bring results that work for diverse learners and staff. In other words, the talking points surrounding the concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion must be used in tandem with their implementation at all levels of the learning organization. This racial framework particularly applies to those who lead diverse public schools, especially Black school administrators.

Speaking on his experience as a Black educational leader, Truss (2019) stated "after years of surviving and navigating an oppressive system, I am committed to changing it. Because of my personal experience, I feel less attached to the idea of preserving tradition, especially one informed by white supremacy culture" (p. 1). In other terms, this BIPOC leader is committed to working towards system change. It is one that aims to dismantle the Eurocentric, White supremacist educational system for a more inclusive and more equitable one.

Ethridge (1979) explained how the years post-*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954 through 1965, were the most devastating for Black principals in terms of loss and influence in Black learning communities in the South. The author continued to support

that such a loss due to a segregated system has never been fully recovered. This opportunity gap has fundamentally shifted the school leadership to a structure of a homogenous and anti-Black leadership environment. It is fundamental to note that an aggregated system was planned and willfully manufactured by states and local governments. The opposite of that organized effort to marginalize Black principals should be systematically inverse to create a truly equitable learning environment for its leaders, licensed staff, and student populations.

Creating a System That Values Trust and Diversity

Way et al. (2018) argued that "if trust and education can be used as resources to stop the spread of a deadly disease . . . similar strategies [can] be developed to solve other depressing problems" (p. 160). To put it in the context of this research, trust and education can be used to create a racially representative leadership in the school system. This can potentially help the development of K-12 schools as anti-racist learning organizations and be an additional powerful way to solve a depressing problem (Way et al., 2018).

For the purpose of this review of the literature, a learning organization as defined by Senge (2011) is "a group of people working together collectively to enhance their capacities to create results they really care about" (p. 3). A group in which all members feel valued and trusted enables its members to bring their whole selves with no fear of judgment or retaliation. Such a community, as Block (2018) argued, restores our faith in leadership. To create this community described by Senge (2011), it is necessary for BIPOC leaders to be in positions to address bigotry. Briscoe and Khalifa (2015) stated that "if school leaders find systemic racial bigotry, then they must challenge it or they

will—intentionally or not—reproduce it" (p. 501). Fair representation, especially at the leadership level, challenges the racial status quo. Such a challenge constitutes a foundational indicator for equitable and trusting learning organizations favorable to a culture that works for all learners, particularly for those from non-dominant backgrounds.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on reviewing the literature on how Black PreK–12 school administrators constitute a solid asset on promoting the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion in urban schools. Numerous findings from the authors cited throughout this research demonstrated the significance of having BIPOC, particularly Black administrators, to lead diverse schools. These BIPOC leaders represent a potential fundamental pillar of systemic change that will meaningfully contribute in helping to close the learning gaps among students.

This literature also highlighted scholars supporting the need to increase representation among Black preK-12 administrators as an effective way to narrow the opportunity gaps among school licensed professionals such as BIPOC teachers and counselors. These researchers also portrayed the growth in percentage of diverse leaders as a crucial indicator for a positive school culture that values and fosters its increasing BIPOC populations of learners. This section of the study concluded with major research on the necessity to create a structural pipeline for BIPOC school administrators. Such a systemic initiative is addressed as paramount to overcoming the societal barriers of race and gender facing Black leaders. From teaching to school administration programs, to hiring, to retaining, and promoting, having a pipeline to promote Black school leaders is critical to challenge the current status quo.

Finally, this research, as a foundational study, puts in the forefront the role of race, culture, and socioeconomic status in informing educational leaders. Using an equity framework, Chapter Three of this qualitative research will present the methods that will be used to meaningfully explore the narratives of Black leadership in an urban school environment. The framework of this inquisitive project will focus on the effective use of an inductive approach to research. Such a methodology will put in the forefront the personal and professional experiences of each interview participant as the fundamental source of data that will lead to incremental answers to the research questions. In other words, this approach will be participant centered as it essentially structures the narratives of those giving their voice to the interviews to produce valuable information.

Chapter Three will underscore the importance of facilitating among interview participants conversations that help construct meanings through reflection and analysis for a better understanding of their current work environment and systemic change. The timeline and protocols that will be followed throughout this scholarly project will also be explicitly laid out as fundamental components of the realization of this scholarly project.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

Following the literature review in which different sources supported the

fundamental impact of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), particularly

Black leaders in urban public schools' systems, this section focused on the methods used

to answer and analyze the following:

Primary Research Question

How do Black PreK–12 leaders describe the influences on their journey to

leadership in an urban setting and what it took for them to remain in that position?

Secondary Questions

a) What do Black PreK–12 administrators identify as factors that supported them in

becoming a leader and factors that served as roadblocks to overcome?

b) What factors inspire Black administrators to remain in PreK–12 leadership in

lesser-resourced urban schools instead of leaving for more affluent communities?

c) What recommendations do PreK–12 administrators describe as necessary for

increasing the percentage of Black or African-American administrators working

at the building or district level?

The following chapter described the different methods and means used in this

study to better understand the lived experiences of a group of ten Black leaders in the

Upper Midwest. Putting in the forefront the importance of BIPOC, especially Black

administrators as they foster a more diverse and inclusive learning organization, this

study aimed to deepen understanding on the role(s) and experiences of that small group

of leaders. This chapter described the research paradigm, the research design, and the research methodologies used in order to understand the role of Black preK-12 administrators in an urban public school.

Research Paradigm and Rationale

This dissertation is designed through a framework of a qualitative study. Creswell (2007) described a qualitative study as an approach for "exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). In essence, this method focused on exploring the complexity of human experiences by finding different ways to make meaning of individuals and groups based on their personal experiences and narratives. Referring to qualitative study, using an inductive approach to the accounts emanated from the interview responses, this method allowed the research to highlight meanings, establish a valid reliability to the research for a small and targeted generalization.

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) further explained that "analysis is done during data collection as well as after . . . [it] is an ongoing part of the study" (p. 367). In other words, qualitative study collects data as part of a continuous process of meaning finding. Such a process continued after data collection for the purpose of finding a wholesome understanding of the topic or participants in question. The choice to use a qualitative approach in this study corresponded to the research purpose. The objective of this study is to understand the experience of a small group of Black administrators in an urban school district. This research also aimed to promote the increase in the number of Black leaders as a critical means to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in diverse educational settings.

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined qualitative research as "methods based on interpretive/constructivist epistemology and numerical data" (p. 6). Using qualitative research allows researchers to go deeper into data findings, including into the use of numbers for interpreting the causes behind numerical differences. Such an approach is directly connected to this research, given that one of the central components of this study focused on the learning and opportunity gaps based on race. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) further defined the paradigm of the qualitative approach as maintaining multiple socially constructed realities that put less emphasis on numbers and more emphasis on values and context (p. 6). This approach dove into an educational phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants as they reflected on their leadership in their work environments. Using an introspective approach to questioning, this activity aimed to bring insights that can improve the learning environment in ways that will create a more racially representative community, at the leadership level.

Lastly, knowing that my proximity and professional interest in this topic might also be a source of conscious as well as unconscious biases that could be detrimental to the trustworthiness of my research, I took a series of preventive measures to avoid that situation. Therefore, I approached this topic with an open-mind guided by an inquiry mindset. This means that I was willing to put my assumptions to the test as I continuously questioned my prior understanding of the topic in the context of my research. I used all the scholarly and professional resources at my disposal to challenge my assumptions and bring the focus on my participants and the lessons that they learned from and shared about their educational journey through a qualitative approach.

Qualitative Approach and Understanding Structural Change

This research used a qualitative approach to understand the issue of lack of leadership representation in a diverse school district as part of a systemic phenomenon as described by the interview participants. As a Black school administrator, in my experience it can be an isolating experience to lead a school made of racially diverse student populations where the majority of the licensed faculty and staff identify as White. In other words, navigating the cultural gap between learners and staff can be a daunting task, for BIPOC, particularly for Black leaders.

Such a cultural gap often underscores the isolating damage caused by the leadership opportunity gap in urban schools. This phenomenon creates an organization dynamic that frequently fails students and staff from minority communities, hence the growth gap. This fact is at the heart of my research and the questions that it posed. Arguing the fundamental role of research participants in finding and narrating meanings of their experiences, Creswell (2007) described that the goal of constructivists approach to research design is to "rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied" (p. 8). Put differently, this research method put in the forefront the reality as described by each interviewee to construct meanings at the heart of their lived experiences.

Understanding the phenomenon of underrepresentation through the lens of those who are the most affected constituted a fundamental part of this research study. As a critical part of the process, this research used a race equity lens to understand the fundamental values of Black PreK–12 school leaders in diverse learning communities. This work intended to foster a better understanding of the reality and aspirations of BIPOC, specially Black administrators, as they navigate an urban school system

dominated by White leadership and licensed staff serving BIPOC, particularly Black

learners. Priesmeyer (2021) defined:

> a race equity lens as an essential tool for analyzing policies, power, relationships,
>
> outcomes, and solutions for building a race equity framework. It asked key
>
> questions centered on the realities and perspectives of those harmed by the current
>
> designs of our social systems and how those systems deliver services to them.

In sum, this approach considered the research phenomenon from the perspective of those

who are detrimentally affected by the system in place in order to find a deeper

understanding of their reality and produce better systemic outcomes.

In a racialized society, understanding the institutional implications of race in

achievement and growth constitutes a foundational knowledge for educational

researchers and for others interested in structural change in the public school system.

Studying a fundamental aspect of the American education system, particularly in the

most diverse learning communities such as urban school districts, requires a

comprehensive approach to exploring the dynamics between race and the role of

leadership in this equation. That is why the study targeted Black educational leaders as a

critical way to tackle the unequal opportunity to achieve success and growth in urban

setting communities by giving them the opportunity to assess their professional

experiences in an open-ended way. Such an initiative drew its foundations from the

primary and secondary questions of this academic project. It is likely that most of those

school administrators in this research, at some point, have experienced racial

discrimination and inequity in their personal or/and professional lives. Those experiences

would also grant those leaders a uniquely and more realistic view of the phenomenon of

education inequity. Hence, a deeper understanding of that reality should be a valuable

tool in the search for durable structural solutions to the issue.

Creswell (2015), Crotty (1998), Lincoln et al. (2011), Mertens (2010), and others

argued that "the goal of the researcher is to rely as much as possible on the participants'

view of the situation being studied" (p. 8). Participants give researchers the data they

need in order to base their research on facts, instead of personal opinions or hearsay. This

study placed participants in the center of the process at every level. This reliance on the

knowledge and experiences of the participants was key to the findings and data analysis

of this dissertation. Such an approach aimed to acquire first-hand information from those

who experience the issue in question, as different aspects of their lives play a major role

in shaping their perspectives.

The first-hand information or data collected from the interviews were analyzed

for the purpose of finding meanings and a better understanding of the experiences of the

participating Black leaders as they navigate the school system. Creswell (2015) further

elaborated that the researcher relies on the complexity of worldviews of the participants

to construct meanings of a situation through rich discussions and interactions with the

individuals at the center of the research in their natural environment. Qualitative

approach uses rich interactions with participants in their familiar settings to find relevant

information that brings meaning and relevance to the issue in question. This research

gave a central platform to Black leaders to voice their concerns and successes and share

their achievements in the role of leading diverse learning organizations. As a scholar and

researcher, it has been my understanding that bringing these voices together for the

purpose of finding ways to address the current racial inequity at the heart of the

educational system could contribute to helping foster the values and practices of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Addressing the perplexity of education and its power to influence communities in light of their values, Lagemann (2000) stated that:

> One might sometimes wish that scientific expertise could acquire the authority freely to govern in education, the fact is that education is about values and people appropriately disagree about values and should have the opportunities to voice and work for their value. (p. 237)

To put it differently, there is a need to create a space that allows individuals and communities to work towards the values that govern them through education. Increasing one's understanding of the core educational values of a group of Black leaders by listening to their narratives can also open the door to meaningful systemic change in urban schools. Such an endeavor could play a critical role in inspiring strong commitment among many educational scholars and policymakers to move forward in their efforts to narrow the leadership opportunity gaps for a more equitable and diverse learning environment.

Having education as a vector of values helps to understand the motives behind the work that individuals as well as organizations do to support policies that reflect their values. That is why this research gave ongoing opportunities to the participants to not only state their values but also to show how their efforts correspond to their stated values— how they walk the talk. Despite numerous studies conducted on the topic of the achievement gaps in public school systems in the United States, as a researcher, my view is that it is incumbent on the values promoted by leaders whose backgrounds are from the

underserved communities to assert and implement those values from their own perspectives in order to break the status quo and create system change. By focusing on understanding the reality of leaders from the underserved communities, this study centered on finding what works and does not work for those in question, from their own perspectives.

Participants and Setting

The participants were Black PreK–12 administrators (principals, assistant principals, and district employees who currently hold a PreK–12 Principal license) from urban public schools. They were recruited through a network of Black school administrators mostly from the same major urban school district. To gauge if potential participants were interested in the research study, I informally reached out to them face to face or via emails. Once a participant agreed to participate, a follow-up phone call or email was made to invite them to participate. Each of those invitations was followed by a phone call or email asking interviewees about meeting places that felt more natural and comfortable to them.

During the interview planning process, it was critical for me to ensure that the interviews would be conducted during a time that was convenient to each participant. Having a flexible schedule that could accommodate all participants was critical for my planning, including dates and locations. Once the interview dates and locations were chosen in concert with participants, an invitation, followed by a couple of reminders, were sent to them via Google Calendar and phone text messages. All ten interviews took place via Google Meet.

Data Collection: Methods

The main data collection method of this study was open-ended and in-depth interviews. Referring to the purpose of interviewing, Seidman (2013) explained that it is about taking "an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 9). Giving a platform to interview participants to freely share their lived experience is key to a meaningful understanding of their individual and professional experiences and the factors that shape them. Considering such an insight, a set of nine open-ended questions based on the primary and secondary questions were created by the researcher. I conducted these interviews alone. Although those questions were posed to participants in the same order, in the effort to keep the interviews consistent, apart from some occasional clarifications from the interviewer, there were no follow up questions.

Warren as cited by Kvale and Rubin (2001) "Qualitative interviewing is based in conversation with the emphasis on researchers asking questions and listening, and respondents answering" (p.17). Throughout this process, the interviewer facilitated a rich and engaging conversation which allowed the interviewees to become meaning makers by sharing a narrative based on their personal and professional experiences and world views.

Describing the interview process, Joyner et al. (2012) stated that "interviews conducted with individuals or groups ascertain their perceptions" (p. 78). The search for respondents' perceptions plays a critical role in interviews. Although interviewees' perceptions are paramount to the interviews, given the meaningful relationship of this study with the opportunity gap, it was important for the interviewer to bring in some data, as presented in the literature review, in those conversations. By doing so, both the

interviewer and the participants found a solid and common ground to find reliance in the perceptions and values expressed by the interviewees.

This educational research focused on tackling the issue of inequitable access to leadership at the pre-K12 level in education. Although my interview questions were mainly open-ended, I also used up-to-date data from the Education Resources Information Center (*ERIC*), Elton B. Stephens Company (EBSCO) to guide many of my questions. Such an approach aligned with my search to better capture the perceptions and insights of the participants.

As cited in Creswell (2015), Crotty (1998) argued that "human beings construct meanings as they engage with the world they are interpreting. Qualitative researchers tend to use open-ended questions so that the participants can use their views" (p. 8). Open-ended questions allow participants to express their views and values with limited restrictions. Therefore, as a data collection method, interviewing the participants using open-ended questions was a fundamental way of understanding the issue in question with the purpose of bringing new insights for potential solutions.

Once the interview protocol was developed, a pilot interview was conducted using a Black school administrator as the interviewee. Given that the pilot interview went well, with no unduly influential biases detected during the practice interview, no major change had taken place. The pilot interview data was not included in the data analysis.

This pilot interview and the real interviews included questions within five major categories:

- Personal journey to administration (perceptions/experiences) as Black leaders
- The structure of their school setting in regard to supporting Black leadership

- The influence of leadership in shaping diversity, equity, and inclusion

- The struggles and successes of the participants in their work environment

- The recommendations of the participants to change the systemic status quo.

The following list of ten interview questions was shared electronically to all the

participants prior to the interviews. They are verbatim the same questions that were asked

to them during the interview research. Although having authentic responses from the

interviewees was critical to my research, however, given the expected depth of the

responses, I wanted the interviewees to have enough time to process their responses. That

is why I chose to share the questions with the interviewees a week or so prior to the

interview.

Interview Questions

1) What were some of the major factors that inspired you to become a school

   administrator?

2) As opposed to other BIPOC administrators, what is unique about the Black

   administrator's professional experience?

3) When looking for a leadership role, did working at an urban school or district

   influence your choice? If so, why?

4) How do you describe your experience as a Black leader of an urban school or

   district?

5) In your path to becoming a school administrator, what were some of the major

   roadblocks that you came across and how did you overcome them?

6) Now that you are a school administrator in an urban setting, what are some of the

   factors that inspire you to remain in the leadership position instead of leaving for

a more affluent and less diverse school or school district?

7) In your own words, can you briefly tell me about your school's or district's vision regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion?

8) Do you feel like your school or district has achieved this vision in their treatment of Black administrators? Why or why not?

9) Would you advocate for more Black administrators to be hired? If so, what are some of the main reasons behind your advocacy?

10) What are some of your major recommendations for Black leaders for their journey in leadership?

In preparation for the interviews, a short-written survey through Google Form was conducted of each participant. Based on a pilot test of the survey with an educator not participating in the study, it is estimated it took participants between 1 to 2 minutes to complete. This form was presented in a closed-response format of four questions in which interviewees were asked about the following:

a) Their professional path to school administration

b) How long have they been a licensed educator before becoming an administrator?

c) How long have they been a school administrator?

d) And how long they have been in their current position?

See appendix C for complete dissertation qualitative survey.

Data Analysis

Maxwell (2013) explained that the fundamental principle of qualitative research is that "data analysis should be conducted simultaneously with data collections" (p. 236).

There is a fundamental connection between collecting data through interviews and analyzing them in the process. Proceeding to these activities could potentially help narrow the gap between the participants' expressed views and the researcher's understanding of those views. That is why during the interview process, the follow up questions were mainly based on the analysis of the participants' responses and responses of other participants, as well as the responses and some of the data collected pre-interview and/or during the interview.

The transcript was analyzed using primarily an inductive approach. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) defined "the inductive researcher as someone who works from the "bottom-up, using the participants' views to build broader themes and generate a theory interconnecting the themes" (p. 23). For qualitative research, the main type of analysis typically used is inductive because the experience of interview participants is best expressed through personal and lived experiences which can lead to a broader understanding of a given phenomenon. Trochim (2006) defined induction as moving from the specific to the general. My analysis focused on finding meaning from the narrative of each participant and bringing to the forefront the communality of the themes addressed by the group of interviewees. This process took place as follow:

First, each transcribed interview was analyzed separately in search of common emerging themes for meanings. Second, the common emerging themes of each interview were grouped to form a new category in which each major common theme was analyzed for meanings. Finally, those emerging themes were analyzed in search for meaning construction through the narratives of the interviewees.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Process Overview

Followed by the proposal meeting with the dissertation committee, the IRB application and consent forms were written and submitted to Hamline University's review board. Upon the required review, the interview consent was approved on October 12, 2022. This allowed the data collection process through interviews to begin as expected a week after.

Study Timeline

This study spanned from September 2022 to March 2023. This included data collection, data analysis, and a study final report. McMillan and Schumaker (2010) defined "qualitative research as . . . multiple realities are socially constructed through individual and collective perceptions or views of the same situation" (p. 12). The study analysis was conducted by starting from the individual point of view to form a more generalized or collective perception of the research topic. As I used this qualitative approach to create and conduct my interviews with participants, I understood that, in order to fully capture their perspectives, the reality of time will play a critical factor. That is why I thoughtfully adjusted my research timeline to make them align with the willingness and availability of my interviewees. Taking into account that these educational leaders often play very demanding and restricting roles in their organization, I continuously had to adjust my calendar to make it fit that of my respondents.

Conclusion

This qualitative research focused on answering the primary question of: *How do PreK–12 Black leaders describe the influences on their journey to leadership in an urban setting and remain in that position?* Schumacher (2001) argued that "qualitative research describes and analyzes people's individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts,

and perceptions. The researcher interprets phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 395). These interviews revealed different meanings and relevancies corresponding to the research focus of race and equity in leadership.

The aim of this dissertation was to seek a better understanding of the role of Black PreK–12 leaders in an urban school district through their own narratives. This study used the perspectives of those leaders to find more insights on how to address the phenomenon of the opportunity gaps in diverse learning organizations. Such an initiative has been led through a lens of racial equity from the perspective of leaders of one of the most affected and diverse communities.

The following chapter dove into the collection of data via the interviews with the ten participants that were interviewed for this research. The data was analyzed and duly interpreted through a series of coding techniques to find meaning and professional perspectives and recommendations from the respondents. The following chapter discussed the data collected during my interviews with the research participants. This section of the dissertation presented and analyzed the emerging themes of the interview with each participant. This process was followed with the categorization of the common emerging themes from all the interviews. The different categories presented in chapter Four allowed me, as the researcher, to use the data collected through the interviews to find and analyze meanings that led to a better understanding of the stories and experiences of the interviewed Black school administrators.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results and Data Analysis

Introduction

This chapter will focus on data presentation and analysis. These processes aim to interpret and understand the meanings of the findings from the survey and interview conducted among the interview participants. Chapter Four will also highlight the emerging themes of the interviews with each participant, followed by the common emerging themes of all the interviewees. These themes are based on the insights and commentaries shared by the research participants related to their personal and professional experiences in the urban school where they work as educational leaders. To better explore the insights of those educational leaders, the following questions were central to this research:

Primary Research Question

How do Black PreK–12 leaders describe the influences on their journey to leadership in an urban setting and what it took for them to remain in that position?

Secondary Questions

a) What do Black PreK–12 administrators identify as factors that supported them in becoming a leader and factors that served as roadblocks to overcome?

b) What factors inspire Black administrators to remain in PreK–12 leadership in lesser-resourced urban schools instead of leaving for more affluent communities?

a) What recommendations do PreK–12 administrators describe as necessary for increasing the percentage of Black or African American administrators working at the building or district level?

Survey Data Presentation and Analysis

To accurately document the backgrounds of the interview participants, prior to the interview, a qualitative survey was shared with all ten interviewees. The survey asked participants to answer the following four survey items: a) their professional path to administration, b) number of years of transition to administration, c) number of years as administrator, and c) how long they have been in their current position. Eight participants completed the survey, five men and three women. Their responses were as follows:

Professional Path to Administration

The first four questions of the survey gathered information from the respondents regarding their professional path to becoming administrators. Most of the respondents indicated that they moved into administration after being classroom teachers. Five of the eight participants (62.5 %) reported they entered administration after being a classroom teacher. One (2.5 %) of the respondents came from a counseling background. Another (12.5 %) respondent came from both a teaching and counseling background. And one (12.5 %) of the respondents went straight to school administration from other professional backgrounds.

Number of Years of Transition to Administration

From the survey respondents, three of the eight respondents (36%) spent 6 to 10 years to transition to their first administration role/job. Two respondents (25%) spent 0 to 5 years transitioning to their first administration role/job. Two of respondents (25%) spent 11 to 15 years to transition to their first administration role/job. And one respondent (14%) spent 16 years plus to transition to their first administration role/job.

Number of Years as Administrator

Three respondents (37.5%) have been a school administrator within the last 0 to 5 years. Another three (37.5%) have been school administrators for 16 years plus. One respondent (12.5%) has been a school administrator within the last 6 to 10 years. And another one (12.5%) has been a school administrator within the last 11 to 15 years.

How Long Participants Have Been in Their Current Position

Of the eight respondents, seven (87.5%) have been working in their current position within the last 0 to 5 years. And one respondent (12.5%) has been working in his/her position within the last 11 to 15 years.

Interview Analysis

To better understand the interviews and learn from the insights the participants convey, I did a thorough reading of the interview transcripts. Through a color-coded coding technique, I identified the emerging themes of each interview. Following the coding process, a second analysis of each interview transcript was conducted. In this second analysis each coded theme was numbered and counter to reveal the number of times they were noted in each interview transcript. Combined with the responses of the survey, the following Table 1 presents the number of emerging themes from each interview and their averaged frequency use from all the interviews combined.

Table 1. Frequency of Participants Experience as Administrators and in Current Position

Survey Questions	0-5 Years	6-10 Years	16+ Years	
Number of Years as Administrator	3	1	4	
Number of Years Current Position	6	2	0	

In reporting the analysis of the interview transcripts, the terms Interviewee and participants are interchangeably as a safer way to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Following the analysis of each interview a table was created of the number of times (frequency) a particular theme was noted in an individual interview transcript (Table 2).

Table 2. Frequency of Individual Themes in an Interview Transcript (I)

Interview Themes	I-1	I-2	I-3	I-4	I-5	I-6	I-7	I-8	I-9	I-10	Ave
Theme 1 - Racial Inequity among Black Students and Black Leaders.	22	9	14	28	15	19	5	7	8	8	13.5
Theme 2- Student-Centered and Racial Equity Representation, Access and Influence for Black Leaders	17	7	30	13	6	31	14	20	14	11	15.3
Theme 3-System Change, Growth	14	8	27	12	21	5	6	25	3	32	12.4
Theme 4-Out of Place, Under-representation, and Over-Scrutiny	2	12	12	12	9	14	18	10	27	30	11.9
Theme 5- Cultural Assimilation	2	7	2	2	0	1	3	5	4	3	2.9
Theme 6- Systemic White Supremacy	6	4	9	9	7	4	1	8	5	14	5.4
Theme 7- Black Excellence, Resilience, and Connection	13	22	14	30	16	53	20	17	6	22	19.3

Table 3 below showcased the interview themes in decreasing order as a reflection of the quintessential narratives of all ten interviews.

Table 3. Interviews Themes Reported from Highest to Lowest Average (Decreasing Order)

Interview Themes	Average in All Interviews	Sub-Themes	Representative Quote
Theme 7: Black Excellence, Resilience, and Connection	19.3	-Black resilience -Black connection and the need to organize -Black confidence	"But that makes me dig a little bit harder to work harder to work to support the students more and it makes me maximize my resources and skills that are available".
Theme 2: Student-Centered and Racial Equity Representation, Access and Influence for Black Leaders	15.3	-Fostering Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion -Access and Influence for Black Leaders	"Because everybody you know, everybody thinks differently. And so, you know, there's always more than one way or the problem or to handle the situation and you know, just don't always think that you are always the only one who can get that".
Theme 1: Racial Inequity among Black Students and Black Leaders	13.5	- Learning Gap - Opportunity Gap	"There are kids still going through what I went through, and probably worse because now people are older and probably less tolerant".
Theme 3: System Change, Growth	12.4	-Student Growth -Black leadership Growth -More Representation	"And if you're just going to keep the status quo people, it's easy, but if you're trying to change things, it's a lot tougher". "I can help with the students and their families".
Theme 4: Out of Place, Under-representation, and Over-Scrutiny	11.9	-Under-representation -Over-Scrutiny	"So no, while I wouldn't advocate a Black person to be a teacher, I wouldn't do so for an administrator, because it's lonely. If you become an administrator in this district, you will be one of 16 among dozens of school leaders, and that's a cold feeling. It would be announced that we would fight all the time. It's tiring".
Theme 6- Systemic White Supremacy	5.4	Double-Standard	"But they're not going to hire me because we're Black".. "Because when I question missteps from the district or other people, it's brushed to the side.
Theme 5- Cultural Assimilation	2.9	Continuous Need to Conform to the White Worldview	"So it's interesting that these rumors or whatever held me back, rumors of not being ready. I don't even know what that means".

Interview Data Analysis

This segment discusses and analyzes the data collection from the 10 interview participants. These interviews were collections of narratives that revealed meaningful insights from the personal and professional experiences of the Black school administrators in responding to interview questions. Although all the leaders interviewed had some key characteristics in common such as being identified as Black, holding a K-12 Principal license, and working at an urban school district, each participant had a unique perspective and view to offer to this research.

Each interview and its analysis unpacked a series of issues and understandings narrated from the point of view of the participants. In order to increase the accuracy of each participant's narrative, I used a two-fold approach of reporting. First, I made a summary of each interview. Second, that summary is followed by one or two combined quotes reflecting the participant's dominant insight based on the frequency of the emerging themes as shown in the coding process. In other words, I selected a quote or two that helped me understand the quintessential aspect of the interviewee's story or take on the urban school system. For instance, in the coding of the interview one transcript the dominant emerging theme (Racial Inequity among Black Students and Black Leaders) was mentioned 22 times. Therefore, for interview One, I chose a quote highlighting this theme "Racial Inequity among Black Students and Black Leaders." The same approach was repeated in all the remaining interview transcripts. Finally, some of the quotes have been slightly modified to reduce disfluency and increase clarity of the text to readers.

Analysis and Summary of Interview One

The analysis of the transcript for interview One highlighted the dominance of racial inequity in the current school system in an urban setting. The respondent described

their bitter experience with the unequal treatment of Black administrators compared to their White peers. For this participant this was a pervasive issue that constitutes one of the major characteristics of public schools in many of these diverse communities. Throughout the transcript, respondent One describes the noticeable cultural and worldview mismatch between the largely diverse student populations composing their urban school and the licensed educators that lead it. They continued to note how the absence of teachers, counselors, and school administrators that share the social and cultural backgrounds of the learners that they serve has contributed to the current learning gap between White students and their Black peers.

The perspective of Respondent One was that this lack of Black licensed staff, particularly teachers has also direct ramifications on the underrepresentation of Black administrators. Respondent One went on to say that as a former school counselor who transitioned to school administration, it has been a difficult journey. According to the interviewee, some of the factors that make this role more challenging for them is this profound sense of isolation and underestimation that Black administrators have to face on a daily basis. For instance, as one of the few Black leaders in their district, this sense of isolation is often shown as an acute sense that they are always being watched and second guessed by others. For them, this sad sense of otherness has often led to frequent burnouts and low rate of retention among Black administrators.

This respondent also described how in their experience Black leaders are often undervalued and largely overlooked in different ways. Respondent One attributed being underestimated as the reason on multiple occasions, on their path to administration, their White colleagues explicitly stated that they were not ready or needed more time before

taking on a leadership role. The respondent's described these statements as rumors and noted ". . . It's interesting that these rumors or whatever [they were] held me back, rumors of not being ready. I don't even know what that means."

In another segment of the interview transcript the Respondent One stated how White supremacy is at the center of their urban school system and how this phenomenon is detrimental to the Black and Brown kids who form most of this learning organization. The desire to change the current system has played a critical role in Respondent One's decision to become a school leader. In their own words, Respondent One described the desire to make change - "I want change." Respondent One furthered their perspective by stating, "I want what is good for all the kids that go to my school. Black and Brown kids should be protected from the harms of White supremacy and the trauma of forced cultural assimilation."

Not only did Respondent One describe the impact of white supremacy in their urban school they passionately stated that

> Although . . .. Black school administrators are facing similar prejudices as those children [learners], as adults, our resilience allowed us to overcome and stay the course. This can be different for many of our students. When it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), there is a clear gap between what the district promotes philosophically and what it actually does. That is why despite all the buzz talks of DEI, the system outcomes are still unfavorable to kids of color in our district.

The interview ended with Respondent One providing the following advice for current and future Black administrators. Respondent One said "It is critical for Black administrators

to be authentic, knowledgeable of themselves as they work hard to influence the system

for the benefit of all the underrepresented populations of learners that they." Reflecting

on this interview, the dominant theme was: Racial Inequity among Black Students and

Black Leaders.

During the analysis of the interview transcript I identified 22 different times this

respondent made reference to the theme. The following quote was selected to highlight

the importance of this theme for the respondent. The respondent described their

experience as follows

> I was unaware that kids were being mistreated. Students that look like me Black
>
> male students. We're definitely being mistreated . . . And the reason it took me so
>
> long to go from administrative intern to assistant principal has nothing to do with
>
> me

These quotes illustrated the essence of the interview in which the participant discussed

racial inequity that has dominated the urban school system. In light of the combined

quotes above, it is clear that Participant One sees this [such an] inequity is not only

detrimental to Black students, but it [has] also directly [negatively] impacted Black

school administrators. For Black learners, the inequity has perpetuated the learning gap in

the form of academic and social emotional failure. For Black leaders, it is a constant lack

of leadership opportunity and continuous mistreatment and underestimation of Black

leadership. Participant One concluded by stating that the state of inequity of the urban

school has been a key motivator for their unwavering commitment to becoming an

administrator and changing the system for the better.

Analysis and Summary of Interview Two

The analysis of the transcript for Interview Two underscored the inherent preponderance of inequity in their urban school system, according to Participant 2. The interviewee emphasized how (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) BIPOC students at their school are under-resourced and underrepresented in many extracurricular activities such as music, tennis, and theater performances. The participant further argued that these learners find themselves in a setting that does not value who they are or the communities where they are from.

Interviewee 2 continued to say that although they constitute the majority of that setting, students of color continuously struggle to fit in and feel that they belong. For this participant such an experience of disconnect plays a major role in the trauma and fear feeding the lives of many learners of diverse backgrounds in an urban setting. Feeding this fear is the lack of representation among licensed staff, particularly among teachers and administrators implicitly sending a negative message to BIPOC learners. Participant 2 pointed out that these learners feel disconnected to their place of learning just like they (Participant 2) did when they were their age in a similar setting. From interviewee's time going to an urban school in the 80s, when it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion, among staff and leadership, very little has changed. Participant 2 further remarked that "there are kids still going through what I went through, and probably worse because now people are older and probably less tolerant." The general conclusion of Participant 2 was that Black students experience daily trauma at their school.

Participant 2 noted that this ongoing inequity is also reflected in the achievement gap between Black and White students. In Participant 2's view, there is a tale of two standards in the school system. One for White students and another for Black students.

White students are expected to succeed because they do not have to assimilate. They are the culture of the school. However, Black students at Participant's Two school are expected to adapt constantly and/or to fail in the process. Participant Two added that the same logic is true for Black school administrators who wanted to join education to change that phenomenon. They either adapt to the White cultural dominance in school or fail. As a Black teacher, they wanted to change that narrative, and they thought by becoming a school administrator they would be able to increase their influence to do just that. Participants 2 wanted (still wants) to make the school setting a more welcoming place for all BIPOC, particularly Black students. Participant 2 thought of themselves as a buffer between White supremacy and the young people of color who have to constantly navigate the urban school system in order to have a decent education and a better shot in life.

In their role as a Black leader, Participant Two described feeling isolated, underrepresented, burned out and pigeon-holed. Every day they feel like they are the object of microaggressions and racism. They feel constantly over scrutinized by the overwhelmingly White staff that they lead. Sometimes, they experience the same over scrutiny from the few BIPOC staff as well. Participant 2 feels like they always have to over perform, to do better than their White peers in order to be accepted and respected as a leader.

The overall group of administrators of this study expressed a relentless search for excellence, for growth, for self-knowledge defines their leadership and their ability to represent themselves and the kids that they are here for. Although Participant Two has made enormous progress in that regard, it gets tiring. According to Participant Two, this

experience is not uniquely theirs. It is similar for many other Black administrators. That is why many of them have left the profession altogether. Those Black leaders felt burned out, limited, and unsupported by those in charge. Just like the Black students that they served, they felt neglected and disconnected to the school system due to the continuous need to assimilate to the White culture to fit it.

Participant 2 believes that the way to push against White supremacy in school is to increase representation among licensed staff, especially among teachers and administrators. Interviewee 2 argued that diverse students need to see more of themselves into the people that lead them. The analysis of the interview 2 transcript and subsequent coding revealed that Black excellence and Black Resilience was in the center of this interview and became its dominant theme.

During the analysis of interview transcript 2, this theme was identified 22 different times to become the dominant theme. The quote below was chosen to underscore the importance of this theme for Respondent 2 who stated "Just be true to whoever you are . . . I was successful and I cannot fully explain it to you." Participant 2 also expressed the inherent intertwine of being authentic as a Black leader while focusing on growth.

Participant's 2 commitment to being authentic has led interviewee 2 to success in instructional leadership. Guided by their commitment to educational equity, Participant 2 has not let their ethnic and gender identity stop them from being their authentic self. Instead, those characteristics have been an inspiration and a gift to their daily work as a female and a Black ethnic minority in educational leadership.

Analysis and Summary of Interview Three

The transcript analysis for interview Three underlined the significance of representation at the leadership level in urban schools. Participant 3 became a school administrator because they wanted to have more influence on the decision-making process in their urban school system. As a counselor for many years, the interviewee thought by becoming a school leader, they would have more opportunities to bring substantial change in the current setting. According to their observation, despite the increasing diversity of the student populations in this district, Black leaders are still immensely underrepresented. Participant 3 thought that the leadership underrepresentation issue is one of the most powerful reflections of the inequity that dominates their school district.

Interviewee 3 further stated that this inequity also motivated them on their path to become a school leader. Witnessing the educational injustice to which BIPOC, particularly Black learners are subjected, Participant 3 felt the urge to become a leader and an advocate to those populations. They felt like, as a Black immigrant leader, they could make a difference that could better the lives of the students that I serve in a unique way by saying "I can help with the students and their families." Participant 3 argued that given the diverse demography of urban schools, Black leaders are critical to promoting equitable teaching and learning. These committed administrators have the unique abilities to understand the multicultural students and families that they serve.

For Interviewee 3, Black administrators' abilities stand out not only because of their personal backgrounds but also due to their historical and present experiences facing and fighting against discrimination in the school system and in the society at large. These leaders have experienced social and employment biases and discriminations at all levels.

When it comes to equity, diversity, and inclusion, Participant 3 pointed out that there is a wide gap between their district's vision and actions. The outcomes of the district's policies and approaches to these values speak for themselves in the consequential achievement gaps between White and Black learners and the wide opportunities gaps between White and Black administrators.

Participant 3 went on to say that despite the remarkable and necessary knowledge and skills of Black leaders working in urban settings, they, as well as many other Black administrators are often told that they are not ready to lead. In participant's 3 experiences many Black administrators had to wait much longer than their White counterparts before they were finally offered an administrative position. Participant 3 personally was told that "You have never been a teacher, how could you become a school leader?" Interviewee 3's message to other Black administrators is to remind yourselves of the gifts you have and the uniqueness of your abilities to bring change and excellence in your learning organization.

Participant 3 further argued that there is enormous distrust among Black learners and their parents in the White dominated school system. Similar distrust can also be found between Black leaders and their majority White peers and staff. For Participant 3 the way to build trust between Black learners, license staff, and leaders is to substantially diversify the urban school setting to make it look more like the populations that they serve. It is important to create a system in which Black leadership is no longer discouraged, isolated, and over scrutinized. Instead, Participant Three described how Black leadership should be promoted, strongly supported, and actively recognized as the critical true force for change that it represents.

Interviewee 3 concluded by stating that representation constitutes a fundamental component of equity and trust. That is how urban schools will have a chance to effectively combat micro-aggression, racism, White Supremacy, and all the negative forces that perpetuate the achievement gaps as well as the opportunity gaps. For Interviewee 3 Black administrators have to unite, connect with each other, and collaboratively push back against the injustices of this oppressive system for the educational justice of all students. "As Black leaders, you have to focus on what is important for you and others." In other words, these educators must constantly choose a way to strategize and build resilience so they can thrive.

In Interview Three, the themes, student-centered and racial equity and representation, access and influence and system change were central. There were its dominant themes. According to the transcript, "Student-centered and racial equity and system change" were cited 30 and 27 times respectively. The following quotes were selected for their meaningful capture of the thoughts of Respondent 3. "Just be true to whoever you are . . . I was successful and I cannot fully explain it to you." Respondent 3 also had the following advice for Black administrators.

My message to other Black administrators is to remind yourselves of the gifts you have and the uniqueness of your abilities to bring change and excellence in your learning organization. I think there is a need to hire more Black educators or more Black school leaders because they can relate so many cases in political districts.

This interview highlighted the gift of Black, multicultural school leaders and the need to increase them in number in order to have a more effective urban school. The interviewee defined Black administrators working in diverse school districts as highly related with the

populations they work with. Combined with excellence, care, and passion for student success, Back leaders are the most qualified to be the change agents that diverse learning communities need to thrive.

Analysis and Summary of Interview Four

The transcript analysis for interview 4 highlighted how Black excellence and growth plays a critical part in the efforts of working for a more equitable urban school district. Participants 4 described the urban school system, particularly the one where they lead, as profoundly marked by education inequity. For Participant 4, the educational outcomes documenting the persisting learning gap between Black and White students, mainly reflect the social and economic gaps between White and BIPOC populations. Participant 4 further argued that this phenomenon also demonstrated how these gaps dominate almost every aspect of the urban education system. For interviewee 4, school leaders are not immune to these ongoing opportunity gaps.

For Participant 4, White supremacy gets to dictate how the school system operates. The interviewee argued that an essential part of the ramification of this White-centered school system is the gross underrepresentation of BIPOC, especially Black leaders. Many Black school administrators are not hired because they are Black, said participant 4. Despite their high qualifications and their unique abilities to lead all students, particularly those who share their backgrounds are often denied leadership opportunities. In participant's 4 experiences these opportunities often go to their White counterparts with less qualification and much less knowledge of the diverse populations that they are assigned to work with bluntly saying "But they're not gonna hire me because we're Black." Participant 4 continued to say they in the face of systemic racism

dominated by White supremacy, Black school leaders have succeeded to foster a culture of excellence.

These leaders have strongly invested in building capacities by focusing on personal as well as professional improvement as a way to resist the current system. Interviewee 4 stated that Black school administrators are in the frontline in the fight for organizational change. They believe that it is obvious that the current system is not working for Black students. For them, to say that urban schools have been inconsistent with their vision of equity, diversity, and inclusion is an understatement. Participant 4 argued that we cannot overstate the detrimental effects of inequity, social and economic biases that Black administrators are subject to.

For them, there is a widespread perception among White people and White staff and leaders that Black school administrators are not equally competent as their White peers. As a result, Black leaders are often second guessed and overly scrutinized by the White establishment. Interviewee 4 stated that one common way to dominate school leaders is to implicitly force them to assimilate to the White culture in order for them to succeed. For participant 4, as they fight for system change and job opportunities, leading urban schools while Black often requires walking a very fine line between being yourself, and caving to the demand established by whiteness and the inequity that it inherently produces. Participant 4 stated that Black leaders feel forced to constantly work twice as hard as their White peers while gaining much less respect and recognition than their White peers. Black administrators are pigeonholed, isolated, gaslighted, and often forced out from employment opportunities because of their racial identity and their commitment to system change.

Participant 4 argued that those in power need to know that it is not enough to just hire Black leaders. Once hired, it is fundamental to allow these school administrators to freely express their voice and exert their professional judgment while doing their job without fear of retaliation from more powerful White leaders or/and overwhelmingly dominant White staff. Black leaders believe in education as a force for change. That is why they have so heavily invested in it. Interviewee 4 concluded by pointing out how the murder of Georges Floyde has amplified the desire and commitment of Black leaders to fight against all types of racism, including internalized racism. In the midst of consequential social and political upheavals that have recently troubled this nation and its urban public schools, Black administrators more than ever are committed to fighting for change and for a more equitable work environment. These leaders want to close the gap between the school district's vision and mission and the outcomes produced by its actual policies and practices. The dominant theme in the analysis of interview 4 is Black Excellence, Black resilience spearheading the fight against racial inequity in the school system.

According to the analysis of transcript 4. Black Excellence, Resilience, and connection was cited 30 times. These following quotes capture the essence of interview 4, for Participant 4 it is essential that Black leaders ". . . be true to whoever you are . . . I was successful and I cannot fully explain it to you." They also explained how ". . . I'm always of the belief that I'm qualified to work anywhere. And the worst that can happen, I'm gonna be told no, but it's not going to stop me from applying." Self-confidence, competence, and persistence constituted some key characteristics portrayed in this interview. This interview participant highlighted the importance of Black leaders to be

relentless and committed to growth and to the pursuit of their dreams. For this interviewee, in order to succeed, Black administrators have to promote their brand and increase their leadership capacity by continuously working towards reaching their goals for the benefit of the students they are fortunate to serve.

Analysis and Summary of Interview Five

Interview 5 underscored Black administration's commitment to System Change and growth even while being scrutinized and working in a non-supportive environment. Participant 5 pointed out that many other Black women in leadership, including themselves, feel constantly scrutinized saying "It is easy and frequent for people to question my leadership . . . . oftentimes, I don't feel supported in my position." Participant 5 added that for Black women leaders, there is a constant need to try to fit in an unwelcoming environment dictated by White supremacy. Participant 5 described how your White boss with whom you happen to have meaningful cultural and political differences have a lot of power over you. These often-antagonistic bosses have enough power to shape your career and even to end it if they want to. An example of the boss's power is the sense that " . . . when I question missteps from the district or other people, it's brushed to the side." Interviewee 4 perception of an unwelcoming environment is how despite Black administrators experiences and outstanding competence in problem solving and successfully working with diverse student populations, Black administrators do not feel like we are listened to. In their experience Black administrators' ideas and initiatives are often ignored and their knowledge and abilities to lead are diverted.

Participant 5 argued that the key to fight White supremacy in urban education is to fight the underrepresentation of BIPOC teachers and leaders, particularly among Black

educators and to normalize Black leadership in our school system. For interviewee 5, equitable racial representation is the most effective way to address the cognitive dissonance that separates their school district vision and mission statement from their actual action plans and the outcomes they produce. Participant 5 further stated that it is time to trust and promote Black leadership because in their experience Black leadership is about excellence, connection, the commitment to fighting against the harms of White supremacy in education.

In their experience Participant 5 works with Black administrators who believe in working with stakeholders of all races to build a more equitable school system. Interviewee 5 argued that diversity, equity, and inclusion begin with making room for more BIPOC representation, especially Black ideas, and initiatives to thrive. For Participant 5, increasing Black administrators is how to build connections, equity, and fairness that will lead to using the rich and indispensable Black human capital in closing the leadership opportunity gap as well as the learning gap among White and Black students. Participant 5's conclusion is that the current system must change. And for this to happen, those in power as well as the dominant White community have to be led to realize that true racial equity has to be at the center of all decisions made for a successful urban school system. For this participant Black leadership, in partnership with others, must lead those efforts.

The common theme of interview 5 is System Change, Growth. According to transcript 5, this theme was identified 21 times. This quote captures the essence of the interviewee's 5 narrative and how they would advocate for more Black administrators to be hired

. . . we normalize leadership when we have more diversity in our leadership in

our buildings. . .. Black administrators become more normalized, the interactions,

the beliefs, then it will start to engage in more of those conversations that people

back away from, you know, with regards to stereotypes, and you know,

conversations about race.

According to this interview, leadership opportunity inequity is a major issue in urban

school districts.

A key idea from the analysis of Interview 5 is that one of the most effective ways

to fight that leadership opportunity inequity is to increase the number of Black

administrators. For Participant 5 having more Black leaders in urban schools will

normalize Black leadership and provide greater opportunity to have effective

conversations, policies, and practices on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Such an

approach will effectively fight microaggressions, racism, White supremacy, and blatant

inequality and anti-Black that ravage urban school systems across the state and the

country.

Analysis and Summary of Interview Six

Analyzing the transcript of interview 6, the common theme of Black Excellence,

resilience, and connection raised to the top. The respondent eloquently described Black

administrators' work in the school system as a commitment to growth and excellence in

the face of adversity. According to interviewee 6, Black leaders are constantly subjected

to a double standard in the urban education system. In their experience facing all sorts of

structural discrimination, Black leadership has learned to push back by focusing on

personal and professional growth and excellence.

For participant 6, to be a Black leader in the current system, you have to develop a high level of self-control and perfection that your White peers do not even have to think about. Black leaders have limited access to power and Participant 6 described this as one of the reasons that explain the real and visible underrepresentation of Black leadership among the most diverse learning communities. Participant 6 stated that these well-equipped and exceptionally prepared leaders are often pigeon-holed, neglected, underpaid, and forced to quit the profession that they love and want to see protected. In addition to protecting the educational environment Interviewee 6 further argued that Black leaders are profoundly committed to equity and fairness in education.

In the fight against the oppressive White supremacist system, Interviewee 6 states Black leadership is in the front line. They demand tangible actions that align with the school district vision on equity, diversity, and inclusion. Participant 6 continued to say that Black leaders want to see more appreciation for the educational force they represent as they are a force for chance. Black leadership commitment to equity and the success of all students is an inspiration to BIPOC, especially Black learners. Interviewee 6 emphasized that Black leaders are committed to closing the district's gap between vision and action and describe the bigotry of the low-expectation mindset dominating our school system has been profoundly detrimental to Black students. For Participant 6 the low-expectation mindset is an unacknowledged phenomenon that has significantly contributed to the persisting systemic learning gap.

In addition, Black leaders fight educational injustices and bigotry by constantly having to prove themselves. Participant 6 added that to do so they work harder and take more personal responsibilities only to earn less than their White counterparts, in many

cases. Participant 6 stated that, despite their victimization by the current system, Black leaders continue to use their constrained power and influence to work for organizational changes that will lead to more equitable student success.

For Participant 6 the current situation " . . . makes me dig a little bit harder to work harder to work to support the students more and it makes me maximize my resources and skills that are available." Interviewee 6 concluded that White staff, and White leaders often misunderstand Black leaders. Too often, many of these White educators approach their Black administrators with a perverse sense of superiority complex. In their experience, to counter the white sense of superiority, Black leaders commit to fighting back by focusing on fostering Black excellence. Such a focus consists of fostering work-life-balance, connections, and self-confidence. For Participant 6 this commitment essentially leads to a more equitable urban education system. One that promotes equal learning and working opportunity for all.

The dominant theme from the interview transcript 6 was Black Excellence, resilience, and connection. During the analysis of the interview transcript 6 respondent 6 made 57 different references to the theme. This quote was selected to underline the importance of this theme for the respondent. The respondent described their experience as follows "I have great leadership skills; I believe that I can be successful. And the only thing I'm asking for is a chance. And if you don't hire me, it's going to be a mistake on your behalf." Participant 6 advocated for more leadership opportunities for Black administrators.

This participant underscored the numerous roadblocks they had to overcome to become a school principal. The unfair treatment and unforgiving racism that this

participant endured did not break them. Instead, those hurdles reaffirmed their commitment to serve all learners and staff, particularly those of BIPOC background. This participant sees their personal experience as a story of survival and a constant fight for Black leaders as they claim what is rightfully theirs. In their words "I have the right to work and to lead with dignity."

Analysis and Summary of Interview Seven

The analysis of the transcript for interview 7 emphasized Black Excellence, resilience, and connection and its push back against racial injustice in public schools. Respondent 7 described how fostering diversity, equity and inclusion in urban schools is critical to the necessary system change. Interviewee 7 argued that in order to combat inequity and the opportunity gap, Black administrators must be organized and grow in number as they demand more equitable representation in urban learning organizations. Participant 7 further stated the success of Black leaders is intertwined with that of BIPOC, particularly Black learners, and vice versa. For this participant, promoting multiculturalism as opposed to an Anglocentric organizational learning and working environment is key to cultural acceptance, mutual respect, and fairness in our school system.

Participant 7 argued that Black leaders are uniquely equipped to help promote and implement those values. In their words "Because everybody's, everybody thinks differently. And so, there's always more than one way or the problem or to handle the situation and you know, just don't always think that you are always the only one who can get that." Participant 7 continued by stating that our school system must walk the talk and practice the diversity and equity motto as stated in its vision. For interviewee 7,

unfortunately, Black leaders' current experience does not reflect the welcoming and inclusive philosophy promoted by their district.

In this participant's experience there is a culture of distrust, isolation, and opacity detrimental to Black leaders in their school system. For them this culture must be effectively confronted and revisited to make real change happen. Participant 7 demanded that the over scrutiny and the marginalization of leaders of African descent stop and be replaced by more inclusion and collaboration among educators of all races. In their words "When the school system is fairer to its leaders and dedicated educators of all backgrounds, all stakeholders benefit from it, particularly BIPOC learners." For participant 7, there is also a great deal of trauma and disillusion among Black administrators in the urban setting.

In this participant's experience the trauma and disillusion among Black administrators is due to lack of support and resulted in many Black leaders feeling forced to leave to other less diverse districts in the suburbs. Many Black leaders who this participant knew left because they felt underappreciated and underpaid. However, this participant also knows other Black leaders who remain in the front line of the fight against assimilation and White supremacy within their learning community. Those leaders, more than ever, commit to personal and professional excellence and social and educational justice. Participant 7 concluded the interview by reaffirming Black leaders' vow to stay the course in the commitment to foster a diverse learning community where all students, particularly Black learners can equally thrive along with their White peers. For this participant "It is time for urban schools to fully embrace real policies and

practices that lead to the implementation of fair and equitable representation among its leaders. Black leaders are fully prepared and ready to help meet that challenge."

The dominant theme from the interview transcript 7 was - Black Excellence, resilience, and connection. During the analysis of the interview transcript 7, it was identified 22 different times. This quote was chosen to underscore the preponderance of this theme respondent 7's narrative.

Don't reinvent the wheel if you don't have to, if you can get it from somebody else, and it's working, use their resources, right? So, share resources, . . . , find good people who, you know, you can ask for good resources, right, because there's some people who I'll add resources that I know they gotta go resources, but there's some people who are the same people who are waiting for, you know, tangible resources. I wouldn't ask them for adaptive kind of questions and second order change kind of stuff, because I'm like, no, for everybody's got a skill set. You just have to figure out who those people are, and make those connections and then, you know, learn as much as you can from the different systems

Participant 7 concluded by stating the importance of fostering the practices of connections, collaboration, and organization among leaders, especially among Black leaders. In their mind, by practicing diversity of thoughts, race, and ethnicities, urban schools better reflect the identity and the strengths of the populations that they serve. The analysis of Participant's 7 transcript highlights their ideas about how equity, diversity, and inclusion among leaders is good for an urban school and that it has to be constantly and systematically encouraged.

Analysis and Summary of Interview Eight

The analysis of transcript 8 highlighted the significance of System change and growth and how it played a central role in participant 8's narrative of their professional experience in the urban school system. Respondent 8 described their bitter experience with the unequal treatment of Black administrators compared to their White peers. Participant 8 continued by stating that their goal for over my two decades in education has been to change the status quo in the school system. In addition to changing the status quo this interviewee described how they have always been motivated to help kids [students], particularly Black kids to grow academically and behaviorally.

For participant 8, the system has not been set up for BIPOC learners. This is a White-centered learning organization that is led by White values and expectations. These are rules set by White people, and it is strangely expected that everyone else needs to follow them in order to and fit in at all costs in order to be successful. According to interviewee 8, that is why so many Black learners are failing.

In this participant's district where the majority of learners are from BIPOC populations, the presence of licensed White educators and leaders is overwhelmingly high and it gets even higher at the leadership level. From Participant 8's view it is very difficult for a Black administrator to make it in their setting describing that there are so many obstacles and hoops to jump through. This participant elaborated on how Black leaders in their setting are constantly over-scrutinized and continuously undervalued and in a constant battle to prove themselves. From their perspective these challenges are even worse for Black female administrators. For Black leaders, argued participant 8, leading in an urban setting can be a traumatizing experience. The attitude of White staff and other White stakeholders can be triggering. Leading in this environment sometimes is like

walking a tightrope. Participant 8 described how it is hard to change a system that was not created to work for children that you care so much about and how " . . . if you're just going to keep the status quo people, it's easy, but if you're trying to change things, it's a lot tougher." As a result of the double standard to which they are subjected, according to the interviewee, administering while Black involves a remarkable level of complexity and mindfulness.

According to participant 8, there is a double standard for Black leaders and their White peers. During the interview they note how Black leaders are often assigned to work at the most under-resourced schools and they are expected to fix the most challenging learning communities. Participant 8 also elaborated on how these leaders often do not have equal access to district's decision-makers as their White counterparts. This lack of access reflects on the underrepresentation of Black leadership even in schools that are predominantly composed of Black students. For interviewee 8, protecting Black learners and ensuring their academic and social emotional success is largely connected to the meaningful presence of effective Black leaders.

For interviewee 8, these leaders not only care for those students, but they also approach their responsibility with a commitment to bring system change that benefits all students, particularly BIPOC. Their district vision does not match its policies related to Black leadership, added participant 8. The mismatch has resulted in a disparity that has detrimentally affected Black leadership. Participant 8 elaborated that the detrimental impact on Black leadership is feeling unseen, and unheard by the White dominated system, with the additional outcome of Black students often paying the price by underperforming academically and feeling harmed emotionally. A driving force for

Participant 8 was to be a Black leader, who worked really hard to make all students, particularly Black kids feel welcome and cared for.

Participant 8 described how as a Black school administrator, working in the most segregated cities in the nation can be a challenge. One often has to face all sorts of stereotypes. But for Participant 8 one of the most important skills for Black leaders to develop is to keep one eye on the prize with elegance. Interviewee 8 concluded that one constantly has to re-reflect on oneself and act in a way that honors the things that you stand for. Interviewee 8 stated that "What really matters is the kids that you are privileged to serve." Participant 8 further summed up their stance as

> One has to push back against inequity by working relentlessly for all the students and staff under your leadership. That is what the job is about, being present and promoting the values of equity, diversity, and inclusion through best practices that lead to equitable outcomes

In other terms, Interviewee 8, was unequivocal about the need to foster a more equitable school system through an inclusive, diverse, and effective school leadership for the benefit of all learners.

System changes and growth was the common theme of interview 8. According to transcript 8 System change and growth was noted, 20 times. This quote best captured the fundamental narrative of this interview.

> You know what, this educational thing I might need to invest in right now so young brothers and young sisters can see themselves represented not just in entertainment, throwing a ball catching the ball, but also in education. I help people serve in the community. And not just them, not just Black folks, but also I

think it's important for White folks to see and Latino folks and all folks of all

races, because I think there's specifically in [the Upper Midwest] like there's just

not enough of us.

For participant 8, equity and representation constitute the inherent components of an

equitable educational setting.

A clear message in the analysis of interview 8 was the participant's belief that

urban school students need to see themselves represented in those who lead them. There

is a lack of Black leaders in a large metropolitan area in the upper Midwest where this

participant worked, and this was an issue. For this interview participant, increasing

BIPOC representation in school leadership is critical especially for BIPOC students and

White learners who also benefit from diverse leadership. In this participant's mind

promoting Black leadership, their district sends a powerful message to all students, that

their lives, and dignity matter. Interviewee 8 concluded by saying how fostering Black

leadership is good policy and best practices. The commitment to fostering Black

leadership empowers kids of all races through equal and fair representation for an

equitable school that meets the needs and builds capacity of all its members.

Analysis and Summary of Interview Nine

The experience of feeling out of place, being under-represented, and being over-

scrutinized? was identified in the analysis of transcript 9 as the common theme. For

participant 9, being a Black administrator in an urban school can be a constant struggle

and turns out to be a very isolating experience. Interviewee 9 stated that the level of

discomfort can be high, and the support system can be low and leave a lot to be desired.

For participant 9, this is not the healthiest environment for Black leaders, especially if

you are a female. However, interviewee 9 added that they feel that their presence in the urban setting is like a buffer for BIPOC students, especially Black students. They describe the buffer as

> I have become a voice for these kids, and for the communities where they are from. Those minoritized learners need people who look like them to build trust in the system and give them the confidence they need so they can succeed.

Participant 9 continued by saying that as someone who grew up in the urban school system becoming a school administrator is their way to give back to the community that has given so much to them.

While giving back to the community was important, for participant 9, the dominant White supremacist mind-set shared by a great number and powerful part of this diverse community makes it hard for them to be successful at their job as a Black woman. At this point, continued participant 9, it is really challenging for me to advocate for the recruitment of more Black administrators in this system when I know and experience first-hand the massive challenges that they will face just by trying to do and keep their job. They describe their reluctance in the following quote

> So no, while I would advocate a Black person to be a teacher, I wouldn't do so for an administrator, because it's lonely. If you become an administrator in this district, you will be one of 16 among dozens of school leaders, and that's a cold feeling. It would be announced that we would fight all the time. It's tiring.

Interviewee 9 further stated that although it can get extremely frustrating, however, for Black leaders who decide to stay and face this system they were clear it is for the good of

BIPOC students and it is worth the fight. The participant was also clear on a specific tool that Black leaders need to be successful.

Participant 9 argued that one of the most important tools needed for Black leaders to succeed is access. In fact, these intellectually, and socially emotionally well-equipped and committed administrators desperately need to be seen and heard by the decision-makers. Such professional access, from this participant's perspective, is necessary for Black leaders' work to be more impactful on the system and bring critical change in the school culture and climate. They emphasized how the culture of urban school has to change to a more welcoming and equitable one. One that empowers Black leaders and Black learners to thrive and be proud of their school. Interviewee 9 added that such a change will turn the urban community into a place of growth, not just for White students and leaders, but for all BIPOC learners and staff as well. For participant 9, every community member, every leader needs to feel comfortable to be their authentic selves without the fear and the need to conform to a White-centered education system.

Participant 9 also argued that changing the system is about equitable representation at all levels of the school system. Black leaders are more than up to that task and in Participant 9's mind increasing their numbers is how true change will happen for a more inclusive, equitable, and effective school district. Increasing the number of Black leaders will be a new reality where Black leaders will no longer feel out of place. But instead, those committed change agents will feel they fully belong in the urban schools as they continue to work relentlessly to improve the lives of Black learners for a better system. Participant 9 concluded that when the school district's vision contradicts its practices, Black leaders are expected to play the hard part, speak up, demand change,

claim their place, and fight for a more equitable learning organization. It is an exhausting but a necessary task.

The dominant theme from the interview transcript 9 was - Feeling out of Place, being Under-represented, and being over-scrutinized. During the analysis of the interview transcript 9 this theme was identified 27 different times. The following quote was selected as a highlight of their experience.

I think one of the biggest ones was not being seen as I wasn't seen as an administrator; I was seen as just another Black person that just came and went like I didn't. I wasn't somebody that they (parents, licensed staff, and other administrators) respected or, like believed, was really like an administrator. They treated me like I was just like somebody that was subbing or like, I didn't have the qualifications. I think that not being, I don't want to say valued but not necessarily seen as a leader was one of the biggest roadblocks for me, just due to my age, my race, my gender.

For participant 9, being seen as a constant outsider, or even an out of place school worker is the main sentiment expressed by this interviewee.

According to participant 9, many Black female school administrators often reported their experience with a double standard in the school setting. One for White administrators, which comes with the dignity and the respect that roles demand. Participant 9 went on to conclude that Black administrators are often treated as if they do not belong. Recounting her countless hurdles in a diverse school setting, this Black women administrator showed strong skepticism that this racist system can actually fix itself.

Analysis and Summary of Interview Ten

The analysis of the transcript 10 underscored how system change, growth emerged as the common themes of the interview. Respondent 10 described the experience of Black school leaders as often pigeonholed and subject to all sorts of stereotypes.

> They try to reduce us to one thing . . . . far too often in my experience, and I speak about my own personal local media, if there is a Black administrator [portrayed in the media] whether they are whether they are deans of students, whether they are the assistant principals, or even a principal, you're seen as like, the behavior manager, you're not always seen as an instructional leader. You're seen as you got put in this position [Black administrator] to control the Black kids to keep them in line.

Participant 10 argued that many in the school setting see Black administrators as limited and fit to mainly work with Black kids. For this participant the limited view of Black administrators is the direct consequence of a system built entirely on the misguided principles of White supremacy and the resulting inherent inequity. Interviewee 10 further stated that despite the words and philosophy promoted by their district leaders in favor of diversity, equity and inclusion, Black leaders keep experiencing the same anti-Black biases and microaggressions repeatedly. The gap between White and African American students remains wide and hard to close.

Interviewee 10 argued that the racial opportunity gap remains a real challenge as well. This opportunity gap reflects the results of continuous microaggressions and double standards that Black administrators are constantly exposed to. Participant 10 added that

even though urban student populations become more and more diverse, they keep seeing licensed staff remain deeply homogenous. This homogeneity creates a cultural mismatch that perpetuates racial biases against Black students and the few Black administrators who have managed to make it to the system.

Participant 10 went on to say that as a Black administrator, they came across several roadblocks and that could easily break them and turn them away from the profession altogether. For Participant 10 roadblocks included getting laid off more than once, discouraged by White peers and supervisors, and passed upon for promotions only to have the position be given to less qualified White educators. In the beginning of my career, I was marked by the fear of taking on the role due to some school leadership demands that were mainly guided by biases and the refusal to give me a chance as a Black man leader.

However, this interviewee persisted, adding that they did so because it felt like it was necessary. In Participant 10's words I had to be there because the BIPOC students are grossly under-represented among those who decided the fate of their education. I needed to be a voice, an advocate for the Black kids who struggle to make it in a system that they, including their parents, struggle to understand. I am the product of an urban private school. My Black parents did not trust the urban public school system with my education. I wanted to change that. I wanted BIPOC students to be able to see themselves in me. I wanted BIPOC, particularly Black parents to feel seen and welcomed in the urban school environment where their children come to learn and build their future. In addition to their desire to create a welcoming urban school environment for all students, Participant 10 also wanted to push back against White supremacy.

In this participant's mind pushing back against White supremacy requires Black administrators to connect with one another, organize, and exert their leadership influence for the good of all students. Interviewee 10 pointed out their personal experience with other Black administrators provides evidence of how these leaders demonstrate a constant commitment to racial equity among leaders as well as among staff. This participant described how Black leaders strive for authenticity, flexibility, versatility, growth, and the need to keep a work-life balance. Those values and practices are at the center of the system change that Black leaders are continuously fighting for concluded participant 10.

The dominant theme from the interview transcript 10 was - System change and growth. During the analysis of the interview transcript 10, this theme was identified 30 different times. The following quote was chosen to underscore the emergence of System change and growth in the respondent's narrative. The respondent narrated their experience as follows:

You know, far too often in my experience, and I speak from my own personal experience interacting with local media is that the Black administrator whether it be a dean of students, whether it be the assistant principal, or even a principal, you're seen as by like, the behavior manager, you're not always seen as an instructional leader. You're seen as you got put in this position to control the Black kids to keep them in line. And far too often, what we see or what I have seen on speaking [with], my first local media, is that your ability to be an instructional leader tends to be overlooked because people in [dismiss] your ability or in your district, [they see your role as even] if they don't say it explicitly, but implicitly they say you're there to control the Black kids.

Participant 10 is deeply concerned about how Black administrators have been pigeonholed in the system.

This interviewee does not experience people in their district/building seeing them as instructional leaders. Instead, Participant 10's experience is that staff/teachers see them as a behavior specialist who is mainly effective when working with behaviorally challenged students. Interview 10 concluded the interview by stating that Black leaders are overlooked and belittled. The conclusion of Participant 10 is that the practice of constant inequity, White supremacy, and unfair treatment of Black leaders, has to stop. For them, that is the only way urban schools can achieve the kind of diversity, inclusion, and equity that are often promoted in their vision and mission statements. In this participant's mind Black students as well as the rest of the urban school community will greatly benefit from such a fair approach.

Conclusion

Despite the multiple systemic hurdles, they have to overcome on an almost everyday basis, this group of Black school administrators describe themselves as the standard bearers of education equity and excellence. The analysis of the ten transcripts provides evidence in support of the conclusion that these leaders overwhelmingly agree on four key points. One, that Black and BIPOC students need to see more of themselves in charge of their education in order to feel more invested and emotionally more connected with their school. Two, a more diverse representation at the leadership level is critical to ensuring a more equitable and inclusive urban learning community. In other words, diverse and unprivileged populations are entitled to fair leadership representation as part of an equitable school system. Three, a more inclusive and racially equitable

leadership not only inspires trust and improves the level of involvement among diverse learners and population, it is also a paramount strategy for a real and lasting culture change. The fourth and final point expressed unanimously and vehemently by these participants is that White supremacy has shaped the very structure of urban schools and that has caused profound harm to all, particularly PIPOC learners. Based on the findings of this research, these interviewees advocated for change and the replacement of the status quo by a more student-centered, fair, and racially inclusive and balanced leadership.

Chapter Five is a reflection on the major learning of the research interviews. This chapter will also establish some clear connections with the literature review and some explication implications. Key limitations of the research will also be addressed. This segment will discuss a series of research recommendations and plan to communicate the results or use them as needed or possible.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to understand the professional experiences of a small group of Black administrators working in an urban school district in the upper Midwest of the United States (U.S.). By understanding the personal and professional narratives of those specific school leaders, a generalizable set of understandings can emerge to inform everyone from district executives to community members. Organizing and sharing these narratives will potentially increase many educational stakeholders' abilities to effectively collaborate with Black school administrators to foster a more successful school community. A community informed by the knowledge of these Black leadership narratives will be sensitized to how to become more inclusive, equitable, and welcoming to diverse populations of learners and leaders. These are the guiding questions posed to achieve this goal:

Primary Research Question

How do Black PreK–12 leaders describe the influences on their journey to leadership in an urban setting and what it took for them to remain in that position?

Secondary Questions

a) What do Black PreK–12 administrators identify as factors that supported them in becoming a leader and factors that served as roadblocks to overcome?

b) What factors inspire Black administrators to remain in PreK–12 leadership in lesser-resourced urban schools instead of leaving for more affluent communities?

c) What recommendations do PreK–12 administrators describe as necessary for

increasing the percentage of Black or African American administrators working at the building or district level?

Reflections

This qualitative research study aimed to understand the narratives of ten Black school leaders working in an urban school district. Increasing one's understanding of a specific group of (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) BIPOC leaders, Black leadership, learning communities and society at large can improve their potential to help close the persistent learning and opportunity gap within urban school systems across the nation. Bolizer et al. (2016) argued that educators must think "deeply about their students' and "the broader social context in which they and their students are situated" (p. 29). Focusing on student growth means incrementally creating a path for their progress that is responsive to their cultural and social reality. Finding ways for leaders to understand students' actual social and cultural backgrounds can equitably increase a student's potential; Black leaders in most cases bring this understanding.

An essential part of fostering equity among BIPOC, especially Black students, has been to seek a better understanding of one of the most critical players of their community: Black leaders. That is why this research focused on answering the previously mentioned guiding questions; if we examine the narratives of Black school leaders, it increases the probability of ascertaining what factors might build the capacity of Black students, and we can also keep focused on the people who the role models for Black student success are.

To answer these questions, a two-fold data collection method was used for each participant. First, a survey questionnaire was conducted where each participant provided

information on their background and educational path to leadership. Second, after the interview protocol, a questionnaire composed of nine questions was given to each respondent. Both data collection methods took place virtually in a confidential context that was in accordance with Hamline's IRB. Following these protocols inspired trust and generated openness between the researcher and the interviewees. This safe and trustworthy environment established a vital bond and a common understanding of the participants and the researcher as they tackled each question from which the research process could construct vivid and authentic narratives as was the goal.

Connections to the Literature Review

The literature review for this research as presented in Chapter Two has significantly influenced the itinerary of this field research. My review led to a focused exploration and a deeper appreciation of topics central to understanding the narratives of the ten interviewed Black leaders. By examining these topics using an equity lens, some major themes emerged. These themes gave the researcher a more comprehensive view of the role these ten Black administrators play in urban schools and how they experience diversity, equity, and inclusion in that environment. These conclusions are based on the narratives of a specific group of ten Black leaders; all of them work or have worked in one of the most populous urban school districts in the Upper Midwest. Some of the key themes of Black leaders' experiences to emerge are: White Supremacy, racial equity, diversity and inclusion, and Black excellence. Connections between these themes and literature review are also included.

White Supremacy

Chapter Two noted the systemic dominance of White supremacy in American

society and how this phenomenon is especially true in the preK-12 public education system. Tillman, L. C. (2004), reported that Black administrators struggle in their commitment to create and advocate for a more inclusive learning and teaching environment as some of them fear retribution from White supervisors and even from the majority of school licensed staff. One of the most critical indicators of this issue is the cultural and racial mismatch between licensed educators (specially teachers and school administrators) and the student populations that they serve.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2022) reported that "in 2017–18, about 78 percent of public-school principals were White, 11 percent were Black, and 9 percent were Hispanic" (para. 2). Such a lack of representation is even stronger in upper Midwest states like Minnesota. The National Teacher and Principal Survey (2017-18) reported that 94.1 percent of principals in Minnesota are White while only 3.5 percent are Black. This data demonstrates that an overwhelming majority of principals in Minnesota are White despite the rapid increase of the BIPOC student populations. Fischens (2020) reported that "during the 2018-19 school year, nearly half of Minnesota's public-school districts didn't employ any teachers of color" (para. 5). Since this publication this lack of representation has barely changed.

As a result of these cultural gaps, a persistent learning gap between Black and White students, as well as an employment gap between Black and White licensed staff, have dominated the urban school system. Chapter Two also elaborated on how African American teachers and school administrators have historically played a key role in pushing back against White supremacy by promoting a culture of learning and equity among BIPOC, particularly Black, students. Many principals of color expressed that

advancing into administration provided them:

> with more influence in the public education system and the community
>
> compared to being a classroom teacher . . .. Principal's actions to support urban
>
> school reform and community improvement included the following: positioned
>
> the school as a social broker in the community, linked school culture to
>
> community revitalization projects, and connected instruction to community
>
> realities. (p. 111)

In essence, these diverse leaders use their experiences and knowledge to effectively

respond to the needs of students from under-represented communities, particularly in

often segregated urban schools.

However, following the 1954 Supreme court decision of Brown V. Board of

Education, licensed Black educators have seen their educational leadership role

significantly stripped away from them in favor of their White peers. Karpinski (2004)

argued that the systematic displacement of Black Principals following *Brown v. Board of*

Education detrimentally affected those critical leaders and the Black student population

that they served. The patterns of displacement of Black principals also negatively

affected the pool of Black teachers. The negative impact for Black principals described

by Karpinski (2004) was that, for those few Black teachers who managed to remain, they

could no longer benefit from mentorship from another Black educator, mentorship meant

to guide them forward and get them moving into principal roles. In the meantime, White

leadership has increasingly become the norm despite the fast and steady growth of

BIPOC learners in public education.

This cultural and leadership gap in the most diverse settings has become not only

problematic in terms of employment opportunities for Black leaders and other people of color seeking positions in school leadership, but also a source of major harm to the underrepresented student populations, particularly Black students. Feagin (2013) argued that the White racial frame, "provides the language and interpretations that help structure, normalize, and make sense out of society" (p.11). This White-centered frame, and its implications that Whiteness is superior, preferred, and the worldview everyone should participate in, has played a key role not only in the society at large but also in the urban schools where the majority of students are BIPOC. As shown in the research, especially the learning and opportunity gaps, such a pervasive and inequitable recipe has proven to be detrimental to BIPOC students and school leaders. As a result, the learning gap for Black students and the leadership opportunity gap for Black educators have become the norm in American urban schools. These enduring gaps represent some of the most visible ramifications of the White supremacy frame in the urban school system.

The Black leaders participating in this research have repeatedly argued that it is the predominance of Whiteness and its damaging supremacy that has profoundly curtailed the educational and career attainment of BIPOC, in particular Black learners and the leaders from those populations. The study participants adamantly asserted that systemic White supremacy constitutes the most powerful and active roadblock to student learning and staff development. The participants were also in agreement that this lingering phenomenon has been the centerpiece behind the normalization and perpetuation of the learning gap in the preK-12 system. The interviewed leaders also described the opportunity gaps among licensed staff, especially among administrators as a direct consequence of that structural issue. The research participants advocated for

racial and ethnic equity, diversity, and inclusion, and for an education system that

represents and meets the needs of all students regardless of their racial background and

learning abilities. They described wanting to use the power of leadership to help

transform the school system and even society at large for the better.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

If White supremacy in pre-K12 education is about structural domination and over-

representation of whiteness at the leadership level, the research participants argued that

diversifying school leadership is critical to changing the status quo. The need to change

the status quo was also highlighted by Katz (1978) who noted that because "race has been

such a contentious and difficult subject for many, we talk around it rather than address it

head on" (p. 3). The difficulty of talking about race described by Katz (1978) is mirrored

in the participant's and my own professional experience.

Our experience is that talking about race in education, especially its impact at the

leadership level, can be a complex exercise. Our experience supports the notion that the

complexity of talking about race directly, or meaningfully is due mainly to the high

stakes implications about who should be positioned as leaders to make an equitable

school system. Addressing this directly is perceived a threat among the mostly White

men and women decision makers who benefit from the current system despite the

profound change in demography among urban students and populations from

predominantly White in many cases to predominantly students of Color.

It seems easier to recite the usual statistics about learning gaps and even the

under-representation of BIPOC teachers, but it appears much harder to address the

opportunity gap at the leadership level. In other words, the ubiquitous conversation on

equity, diversity, and inclusion in the pre-K12 system often excludes the underrepresentation of BIPOC educational leaders. In fact, the terms equity, diversity and inclusion even produce this barrier to a real conversation about the real systemic issues, because they do not call out the problem, which is White supremacy, or the solution, which, this research supports, has to be an anti-racist approach to every issue in K-12 education. Every one of the 10 Black interviewees referenced this issue in the heart of their narratives. The participants commonly expressed frustrations, anger, and shame over the enduring professional exclusion and discrimination at their workplace.

The interviewees castigated the current school system. They talked about the issue of under-representation of BIPOC educational leaders and pointed out how anti-Black racism has been used to keep them out of leadership. The Black leaders advocated for better representation at the leadership level as a fundamental way to bring systemic change by promoting racial equity and cultural diversity and inclusion. For them, fostering a school system based on equity and mutual respect can greatly benefit all students, especially BIPOC and Black students, to help them grow and become engaged and successful citizens. The participants made the case for the numerous assets that their background and their personal and professional experiences represent. Assets that have been time and time again overlooked for no explainable reason other than racism. These Black leaders argued that they are uniquely equipped and motivated to lead the necessary and overdue system change.

Black Excellence

Black excellence has been the dominant emerging theme among the majority of the participants. For those Black school administrators, their excellence has been

profoundly motivated by the inherent inequality of the school system shaped by White supremacy. The harms caused by racism to their profession and BIPOC students occupied the top of their concerns. This group of administrators did not shy away from talking about their race and how the perception of it influenced their responsibility, concerns, and the access or lack thereof to power. Patton et al. (2007) argued that "a critical race lens should be demonstrated in the preparation of new professionals to help them understand the complex dynamics of how race is constructed to grant agency to one group while disadvantaging and stifling the progress of others" (p. 47). This structural race-based unfairness that has continuously limited progress among Black students and Black leadership is often ignored or downplayed by White leadership. This is often due to willful ignorance or blatant opposition or lack of personal interest in this ongoing inequity that marks educational leadership in the U.S.

Because all ten of the participants described feeling invested in seeking solutions to all levels of systemic anti-Black racism and White supremacy, the interviewees feel like they are uniquely equipped to successfully tackle these issues and bring down the status quo. The ten research participants feel like they, and other Black colleagues— despite stiff opposition from the system— have, to some degree, succeeded in sensitizing the injustice of White supremacy in public education. These Black leaders described having successfully fostered various initiatives as they strengthened their commitments to dismantle White supremacy in PreK–12 education. They do so by focusing on creating a more inclusive, equitable, and student-centered urban school system.

To bring this commitment to fruition, these ten Black leaders have dedicated their career to learn and perfect the craft of school leadership in a way that demands their

whole dedication to learning. These leaders not only see education as the great equalizer, but also as the most fundamental right of every citizen in a free and fair society. By devoting their lives to promoting urban schools as equitable and mutually respectful learning communities, these Black leaders described themselves as excellent and ready to lead at all costs.

For them, their self-concept is strong, appropriate, and not shaken by the horrific pressures put on Black people in society to think they are inherently less capable. They have become excellent because they had to be sometimes twice as good as a competing candidate to overcome the racial hurdle. According to the interviewees, this excellence of theirs is hard-earned, and their expressed strong commitments are in response to the urgency of the moment. For these leaders, change is not just a series of nice ideas and initiatives; for them it is a requirement to undo the injustice of the past, and a responsibility to change the trajectory of PreK–12 urban schools for the better.

Limitations and Capacity for Future Research

Despite my profound commitment to finding factual stories and narratives informing this study, this research had its limitations given its qualitative approach. These limitations have also highlighted that further investigation is needed to enrich the body of educational scholarship on Black leadership in schools. There were three important limitations: the scope of the participants, the limited number of questions asked to the interviewees, and my own positionality as a Black school administrator. These limitations were noted in this final chapter with the goal to better contextualize this study and raise pertinent questions from readers, which could be explored through further research study in the area of urban public education.

Scope of Participants

The fact that only ten participants, five males, and five females, took part in the research means that this study only captured a fraction of that target demographic. However, due to the limited candidate pool, where only 3% of the workforce is Black, research on Black leadership in schools is qualitatively more difficult to conduct than research on White leadership.

It is also worth noting that the majority of the participants who came forward from all of the potential candidates for this study are early or mid-career leaders, not seasoned school leaders. Which means this research may not be as representative of long-term administrators' viewpoints on their workplace as it is on earlier career professionals. As a result, the findings are less generalizable than they would have been had there been a more varied group or a larger group of experienced participants. Furthermore, since participants chose only to work in urban districts, this study did not include another important demographic: Black leaders working in suburban school districts. In other terms, including Black administrators from less diverse communities could shed significant light on the whole experience and narrative of that group and therefore create a broader understanding among the public that they serve.

Limited Number of Questions

To preserve consistency throughout the study, there were no follow up questions to the nine open-ended questions posed during the interview. This choice potentially prevented some more nuanced questions or insights that well-thought out follow up questions could have brought to the conversation. In that way, one can assume that there is a loss in nuance and lack of contextualizing for some answers that were given

throughout the interviews.

My Positionality as a Black School Administrator

As a Black school administrator, I shared many of the experiences of my interviewees. To mitigate the effects of my potential biases on this research, I made the conscious choice not to interfere between participants with my own comments or suggestions. However, given that my interviewees knew about my leadership role in an urban district, it is not unlikely that at some point their answers might have been influenced by my very presence and the nature of my questions that I posed during the interview. In other words, my positionality might have indirectly or unintentionally created a feeling of sympathy and solidarity among Black administrators, which could, appeared to some, to be potentially in contrast with some of the facts and experiences reported by the participants.

Ideas for Future Research

My experience researching the literature and interviewing its participants inspired me to dig deeper into certain aspects of research that could significantly contribute to the body of scholarship in urban education. During the interviews, most of the emerging themes depicted some key strengths and needs that characterize diverse learning communities in the cities. The participants' responses overwhelmingly revealed how White supremacy has shaped the structure of PreK–12 schools and how the presence of highly effective, but often undervalued, Black administrators can change the status quo. Therefore, for future research, I strongly encourage the exploration of the following topics:

- How Black and White PreK–12 school administrators can collaborate in order to

dismantle White supremacy in urban school districts.

- How can BIPOC, particularly Black women and men and gender fluid people in PreK–12 school administrator roles, unite to fight for a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive urban school system to overcome loneliness and isolation in their role?

As to the first proposed topic, my conclusion is that White school administrators have both a disproportionate power and the moral responsibility to support their Black peers in their efforts to fight for equity and inclusion in their profession. To be successful, such collaborative efforts have to be well coordinated, intentional, and determined to bring transformative change for a better public education system. Such a concerted effort will prioritize capacity building among educators of all backgrounds so they can represent the populations that they serve, especially at the leadership level.

Regarding the second topic, Larson and Murtadha (2002) pointed out the practices of school districts to assign BIPOC, particularly, Black women, to leadership roles in the most challenging schools, serving the lowest income populations. This illustrated how Black women not only suffer racial biases, but they also often must face gender related biases as well. Researching Black administrators across the gender divide through the lens of race and solidarity to bring systemic change could further advance the fight for racial fairness against systemic White supremacy in education.

Communicating Study Results

One instrumental part of this study is communicating its results to the appropriate parties. For this, I will share these results with key educational organizations such as The Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association (MESPA), The National

Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP), The Minnesota Teachers of Color
(MNTOC), The Minnesota Association of Administrators (MASA), The Education
Minnesota (EdMN), and The American Federation of Teachers (AFT), etc. This
dissertation will also be available at DigitalCommons@Hamline. Digital
Commons@Hamline is an open access institutional repository providing free and open
access to Dissertations. More importantly, this study, at some point, may be submitted by
the author to be published as a book.

Sharing information and insights gathered during this research could help in the
efforts to break the current structural status quo. Such an initiative could play a major
role in building a more equitable, inclusive, and diverse education system, particularly at
the leadership level in urban school districts.

Recommendations

In terms of recommendations on how to make urban school's leadership more
inclusive, diverse and equitable, the participants of this research have made several. All
of them essentially geared towards finding ways to eradicate racism, particularly White
supremacy in public education. These Black leaders used their personal and professional
narratives to plead for the defense of equal opportunities, solidarity, and mutual respect in
urban schools. For those leaders, while overt or legalized types of racism might be an
object of the past, the legacy of a Eurocentric educational system remains as dominant as
ever. The interviewees described the detrimental effects of such a legacy on BIPOC
students and educational leaders as pervasive and profoundly harmful.

In sum, according to the participants, to close the leadership opportunity gap
between Black PreK–12 leaders and their White counterparts, two major actions need to

take place. First, increase the pipeline from which Black school leaders are selected by aggressively working to create more opportunities in order to raise the number of Black licensed staff, particularly teachers. The participants argued that given that most school administrators were teachers before becoming principals, the most effective way to achieve leadership equity is by increasing the number of Black teachers while giving them several opportunities to grow and become leaders.

Second, create structural or organizational-led networking opportunities for potential Black school leaders. According to the participants, the state where this research has been conducted must work in partnership with educational organizations that train teachers and administrators to create networking opportunities for potential Black leaders. The interviewees further elaborated that facilitating networking and professional ties with established educational leaders, the majority of whom are White, will meaningfully address a strong disadvantage among Black educators. The participants stated that in this racialized society and school system, due to their lack of connections with White insiders, potential Black leaders with an administrative license commonly are among the last to learn of new employment opportunities. This limited access to information and employment connections have made it harder for Black leaders to have leadership opportunities as opposed to their White peers who often have stronger and deeper connections with those in power.

In an age where many White parents across the nation are leading a crusade against cultural integration in public schools by waging a war against libraries, books, and curricula promoting LGBTQIA+ and Black history, these recommendations are vital These overwhelmingly White conservative parents are overtly and politically organized

under the rationale of protecting their children from the "Woke culture" and the perceived harm of teaching the dark, but true, side of American history such as slavery and segregation. In the face of such organized reactionary opposition to historical truth and racial progress in schools, the interviewees argued that now more than ever, it is pivotal to understand their first-hand experiences by heeding their voices as a way to stand for real and systemic educational change in urban public schools.

For this small group of administrators, public education is where the demarcation line is drawn between maintaining a system built on the oligarchy of White supremacy and a multicultural, progressive, and democratic society. The interviewees also acknowledged that the state of the current educational system is the product of a prevailing unwelcoming attitude of many White Americans towards racially integrated public institutions, noticeably, neighborhood community schools. These educators arguably made their case for a more collective respect of the existing diversity that defined the urban populations with leadership representation as a landmark to an equitable and quality education.

Closing Reflection

I started this research inspired by my personal and professional experiences. My intersectionality as a Black immigrant and educational leader and my values have been critical to shaping the trajectory of this project. During my two decades in public education in the United States, some key values have fueled my commitment to fostering structural change for a fairer and more effective, and representative public school system. The experience of researching Black school administrators working in urban school districts has been an opportunity for me to reaffirm my values and commitments. This

also allowed me to delve deeper in seeking to understand the significance of Black leadership in particular in fostering an educational system built on compassion and equity. Such a system aligns with the values of a free and democratic society in which all citizens are treated as equal and worthy of reaching their full potential.

The contrasting nature of the field of education in the United States as reported in my literature review and observed in my field interviews has underscored why it is fundamental to promote the values of inclusion, equity, and diversity as vital to public education, especially in urban communities. Lagemann (2000) stated

> One might sometimes wish that scientific expertise could acquire the authority freely to govern in education, the fact is that education is about values and people appropriately disagree about values and should have the opportunities to voice and work for their value. (p. 237)

As values sometimes clash, some fundamental needs remain unchanged. The imperative need to shape one's own destiny through education and leadership representation has been in the center of this research. The research questions above have been essentially guided by that quintessential aspect of this study.

In a recent study on how to increase the number of BIPOC in school leadership positions, Superville (2023) reported that "Participants also noted that racism should be explicitly addressed" (paragraph. 28). In other words, tackling racism in urban school leadership must be a top priority for those in charge of the school system. Unfortunately, this study's participants reported that despite the frequent talk on the subject, fighting racism and White supremacy in schools has not been central enough for leaders in their school district.

Throughout this research and conversations with the ten Black administrators, several them stated that their path to leadership has often been inspired by the encouragement of another person seeing their potential and pushing them to lead. Many of those talent-spotters and cheerleaders are White administrators who are also committed to seeing systemic change in public preK-12 education. As learning organizations, leaders, and scholarly researchers struggle to mitigate the harms of White supremacy in every aspect of the urban school system, it is critical for educators of all backgrounds (BIPOC, White, differently-abled, neurodivergent, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, and LGBTQIA+) to unite. According to the participants, through unity and diverse leadership, public schools, especially in urban districts, will deliver the promise of a universal quality education to all students as a social, economic, and racial equalizer.

In light of the efforts and recommendations of this study's participants, to answer the research questions in an authentic way, I conclude this project with a key question inspired by this research's emerging themes, and by the notion that some institutions, such as the banking industry in 2008, were thought of as "too big to fail," in other words, no one could imagine them faltering. Conversely, I ask when it comes to preK-12 Schools, is White supremacy too big to fail? The response to this question will depend on the depth of the commitment of stakeholders such as policymakers, educational leaders, community members, and citizens of all walks of life to form more organized coalitions and educational opportunities that can result in a meaningful change to the leadership status quo.

Finally, in the efforts to effectively fight the injustice of White supremacy in

public education that is so detrimental to learners, a common and transformative language is necessary. Such a common language will aim to connect and create a common understanding among educational leaders, policymakers, and the rest of the populations that they serve. Block (2018) stated that "all transformation is linguistic" (p. 15). Through the words of the participants, this research showed that to transform this racially biased system, a sociolinguistic consensus needs to be built around identifying and naming White supremacy as the primary enemy of a fair education system. In this multi-racial society, the omnipresent phenomenon of White supremacy is antithetical to a representative democracy. As a researcher, scholar, and leader, the correct naming, or calling out, of these brutal and overly vicious mindsets and practices will play a major role in the fight leading to a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive urban school system— one that values the most inclusive, representative, and effective form of leadership that benefits all learners.

Overlooking Black excellence, Black contributions to school leadership, Black role models in education for Black and other BIPOC students, Black scholarship, and Black experience in general will continue to be damaging for all BIPOC students and school professionals and ensure the damaging status quo. Centering and positioning Black leaders in schools who will dismantle the entrenched White supremacy and create anti-racist school cultures is the critical project of our time. With these structural, institutional transformations, this society can achieve the alignment of Black leadership and Black excellence in schools to equitably serve and benefit the most important stakeholders in this entire enterprise, the students.

REFERENCES

Ali, A. & Sichel, C. (2018). Humanizing the scientific method. In Way, N., Ali, A., Gilligan, C., & Noguera, P. (Eds.), *The crisis of connection: Roots, consequence, and solutions* (pp. 211-227). New York University Press.

Bailes and Guthery (2020). *Analysis: New study of the principal pipeline shows women, African Americans wait longer, are promoted less often than white men.* https://www.the74million.org/article/analysis-new-study-of-the-principal-pipeline-showwomen-african-americans-wait-longer-are-promoted-less-often-than-white-men/

Baldwin. J. (1998). *Collected essays, literary classics of the United States.* Library of America.

Bass, R., & Linkon, S. L. (2008). On the evidence of theory: Close reading as a disciplinary model for writing about teaching and learning. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education, 7*(3), 245-261. https://doi.org/10.1177/1474022208094410.

Bass, R. (1999). The scholarship of teaching: What's the problem? *Inventio: Creative Thinking about Teaching and Learning, 1*(1), 1-10.

Bass, L. (Ed.). (2016). Black mask-culinity: A framework for Black Masculine Caring. Peter Lang.

Bass, L. R. (2020). Black male leaders care too: An introduction to Black masculine caring in educational leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *56*(3), 353-395.

http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.hamline.edu:2048/10.1177/0013161X19840402

Block, P. (2018). *Community: The structure of belonging* (2nd ed.). Berrett-Koehler

    Publishers, Inc.

Camera, L. (2016, January 13). Achievement gap between White and Black students is

    still gaping. *U.S. News & World Report*.

    https://www.usnews.com/news/blogs/data-mine/2016/01/13/achievement-gap-bet

    ween-white-and-Black-students-still-gaping.

Cecelski, D. (1994). *Along freedom road*. The University of North Carolina Press.

Creswell, J. (2007). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods*

    approach (3rd ed.). Sage.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2010). *The flat world and education: How America's commitment*

    to equity will determine our future. Teachers College Press.

Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New Press.

Eischens, R. (2020, February 19). Minnesota teachers are still overwhelmingly White as

    the student population becomes more diverse. *Northfield News*.

    https://www.southernminn.com/northfield_news/news/state/article_e067a9ad-

    6e9e-5814-a636-1cf8ad55546d.html

Enloe, W. (2019). The development of Hiroshima international school: The influence of

    Piaget. Achorn International.

    https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/705647

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum Press.

Gershenson, S., Hart, C., Hyman, J., Lindsay, C., & Papageorge, W.P. (2018). The long-

    run impacts of same-race teachers. *National Bureau of Economic Research.*

    https://www.nber.org/papers/w25254

hooks, b. (2003). *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope*. Taylor & Francis

Publishing.

Joetruss. (2019). The power of leaders of color. *Culturally Responsive Leadership*.

https://culturallyresponsiveleadership.com/loc/

Joyner, R. L., Rouse, W.A., Glatthorn, A (2013). *Writing the winning thesis or*

dissertation. Better World Books.

Kats, R. (2021, January 27). 'Increase teachers of color act of 2021' clears education

committee on party-line vote. *Minnesota House of Representatives*.

https://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/SessionDaily/Story/15517

Kendi, I. X. (2017). *Stamped from the beginning: The definitive history of racist ideas in*

America. Bold Type Books.

Kvales, S (1996) *InterViews: An introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Sage.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2004). Landing on the wrong note: The price we paid for Brown.

Educational Researcher, *33*, 3-13.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt:

Understanding achievement in US schools. *Educational Researcher, 35*(7), 3–12.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2011). Asking the right questions. In Ball. A.F. & Tyson. C.A.

(Eds.). *Studying diversity in teacher education*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Lagemann, E. C. (2000). *An elusive science: The troubling history of education research*

(6th ed.). University of Chicago Press.

Louis, K. S., Dretzke, B., & Wahlstrom, K. (2010). How does leadership affect student

achievement? Results from a national US survey. *School Effectiveness and School*

Improvement, 21(3), 315-336. https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2010.486586

Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). Sage.

McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (2010). *Research in education: Evidence-based inquiry* (7th ed.). Pearson.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Role. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved April 5, 2022, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/role

Minnesota Compass. (n.d.). *Minnesota's population: All Minnesotans*. https://www.mncompass.org/topics/demographics?age#1-5228-g

Myers, S. L. Jr, Kim, H., Mandala, C. (2004).The Effect of School Poverty on Racial Gaps in Test Scores: The Case of the Minnesota Basic Standards Tests. *Journal of Negro Education.*

National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). *Definitions*. Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/urbaned/definitions.asp

National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). *Table 1*. Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/sass1112_2013313_p1s_001.asp

National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). *The Schools and Staffing Survey*. Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/index.asp

National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). *Urban education in America*. Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/urbaned/index.asp

Race Equity Glossary. (2020). Minnesota Education Equity Partnership. Retrieved from https://mneep.org/word/

Rubin, H. J. and I. S. Rubin. 1995. *Qualitative interviewing*: *The art of hearing data*. Sage.

Rouse, W., Joyner, R., & Glatthorn, A.A. (2012). *Writing the winning thesis or dissertation: A step-by-step guide* (3rd ed.). Corwin, A Sage Company.

Seidman, I. (2013). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (4th ed.). Teachers College Press.

Senge, P. M., Cambron-McCabe, N., Lucas, T., Smith, B., Dutton, J., & Kleiner, A. (2012). *Schools that learn (updated and revised): A fifth discipline fieldbook for educators, parents, and everyone who cares about education*. Random House.

Smith, A. N. (2020). The great black hope: An examination of African American parent perspectives at Bass Charter Academy. *Journal of Education*, *200*(3), 175–184.

Superville, D. R. (2021). Principals of color are scarce. Here's what districts are doing about it. *Education Week.* https://www.edweek.org/leadership/principals-of-color-are-scarce-heres-what-districts-are-doing-about-it/2021/12

Svinicki, M. D. (2004). Authentic assessment: Testing in reality. *New Directions in Teaching and Learning*, *100*, 23-29.

Tillman, L. C. (2004). Chapter 4: African American principals and the legacy of Brown. *Review of Research in Education*, *28*(1), 101–146. https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X028001101

Trochim, W. M. K. (2006). Research methods knowledge base. Retrieved on January 25, 2010, from http://www.socialresearchmethods.net.

Warren, C. A. (2001). Qualitative interviewing. In Gubrium J.F. & Holstein J.A. *Handbook of interview research* (pp. 17). Sage.

Way, N., Ali, A., Gilligan, C., & Nogura, P. (Eds). (2018). *The crisis of connection: Roots, consequences and solutions.* New York University Press.

Wilderson, F. B. (2017). *Afro-pessimism: An introduction*. Racked & Dispatched.

Zentella, A. C. (2005). Premises, promises, and pitfalls of language socialization research

in Latino families and communities. In A. C. Zentella (Ed), *Building on strength*:

Language and literacy in Latino families and communities (pp. 13-30). Teachers

College Press.

Zippia. (2022). Principal demographics and statistics in the US.

https://www.zippia.com/principal-jobs/demographics/

APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

Directions

This interview focuses on learning from you, your experiences, your journey to becoming aBlack school administrator in an urban school district. All the questions are open-ended ones.

We are not looking for the perfect answer or trying to influence your response in a way or another. We are seeking your most authentic and accurate description and recollections of your experience in the past and in your current position. Most importantly, I am interested in learning from your experiences so myself, other Black administrators, and the school community at large can benefit from your insights. Your story matters and is worth sharing. For this 30–40-minute interview, you are reminded that it is totally voluntary and that you can opt out anytime without necessarily having to justify your decision.

Interview Questions:

I am interested in hearing you describe some of the major factors that inspired you to become a school administrator. Can you talk about them?

1) As opposed to other BIPOC administrators, based on your own experience, what do you think is unique about the Black administrator's professional experience?

2) When looking for a leadership role, did working at an urban school or district influence your choice? If so, why?

3) How do you describe your experience as a Black leader of an urban school or district?

4) In your path to becoming a school administrator, were there any major roadblocks that

you had to overcome? If so, could you describe the major ones?

5) Now that you are a school administrator in an urban setting, please talk about the factors that inspire you to remain in this leadership position instead of leaving for a more affluent and less diverse school or school districts.

6) In your own words, briefly tell me about your school's or district's vision regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion. Describe the degree that your school or district has achieved this vision with regards to Black administrators. Tell me more about your rating.

7) I would like you to describe any situations where you have advocated for additional Black administrators to be hired. Please elaborate on the main reasons for your advocacy?

8) As a Black leader what are recommendations you have for your Black peers to be successful in an urban environment.

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Letter

Letter of Recruitment

June 1 , 2022

Dear prospective research participant,

My name is Jude Vales, and I am a doctoral candidate at Hamline University. I am writing to invite you to participate in my dissertation research for my doctoral degree. As part of this recruitment letter, I would like to share with you some important information about this project in accordance with some required organizational protocol that will be followed throughout the process.

Dissertation Topic:

- The Narratives of Black PreK—12 School Administrators in Urban School Districts.

Dissertation Primary Question:

● How do Black preK–12 leaders describe the influences on their journey to

leadership in urban settings and what it took for them to remain in that position?

Interview Timeline and Duration:

- Between September 1st and November 30th. 2022
- 1-to-2-minute Google survey
- **One (1) 30 to 45-minute** interview via Google meet

Dissertation Completion Date:

● Between December 2022 and January 2023.

Please note as a participant of this educational research, your identity will be kept totally confidential in accordance with the **Institutional Review Board (IRB)** interview guidelines.

Finally, once I get your participation confirmed, I will contact you to plan a date and time that works best for you for the interview research.

Again, I truly appreciate your support of this academic project.

For questions and suggestions, please email me or give me a call at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Jude Vales: Cell: 612-501-34 Jvales01@hamline.edu

APPENDIX C

Dissertation Qualitative Survey

Background Information

Directions:

For each of the following questions select all responses that apply.

Professional Path

What was your professional path to becoming a school administrator?

    a) Teaching

    b) Counseling

    c) A and B

    d) Others

Number of years of transition to administration

How long did it take you to transition from being a licensed educator to becoming an administrator?

    a) 0 to 5 years

    b) 6 to 10 years

    c) 11 to 16 years

    d) 16 years plus

Number of years as administrator

How long have you been a school administrator?

    a) 0 to 5 years

    b) 6 to 10 years

    c) 11 to 16 years

    d) 16 years plus

How long have you been in your current position?

    a) 0 to 5 years

    b) 6 to 10 years

    c) 11 to 16 years

    d) 16 years plus

Thank You

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. The information gathered in this survey will be used to help further the discussion of Black Pre-K12 administrators' narratives on working in an urban environment.

APPENDIX D

Table 1. Frequency of Participants Experience as Administrators and in Current

Position

Survey Questions	0-5 Years	6-10 Years	16+ Years
Number of Years as Administrator	3	1	4
Number of Years Current Position	6	2	0

Table 2. Frequency of Individual Themes in an Interview Transcript

Interview Themes	I-1	I-2	I-3	I-4	I-5	I-6	I-7	I-8	I-9	I-10	Ave
Theme 1 - Racial Inequity among Black Students and Black Leaders.	22	9	14	28	15	19	5	7	8	8	13.5
Theme 2- Student-Centered and Racial Equity Representation, Access and Influence for Black Leaders	17	7	30	13	6	31	14	20	14	11	15.3
Theme 3-System Change, Growth	14	8	27	12	21	5	6	25	3	32	12.4
Theme 4-Out of Place, Under-representation, and Over-Scrutiny	2	12	12	12	9	14	18	10	27	30	11.9
Theme 5- Cultural Assimilation	2	7	2	2	0	1	3	5	4	3	2.9
Theme 6- Systemic White Supremacy	6	4	9	9	7	4	1	8	5	14	5.4
Theme 7- Black Excellence, Resilience, and Connection	13	22	14	30	16	53	20	17	6	22	19.3

Table 3: Interviews Themes Reported from Highest to Lowest Average (Decreasing Order)

Themes	Average in All Interviews	Sub-Themes	Quote
Theme 7: Black Excellence, Resilience, and Connection	19.3	-Black resilience -Black connection and the need to organize -Black confidence	"But that makes me dig a little bit harder to work harder to work to support the students more and it makes me maximize my resources and skills that are available".
Theme 2: Student-Centered and Racial Equity Representation, Access and Influence for Black Leaders	15.3	-Fostering Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion -Access and Influence for Black Leaders	"Because everybody you know, everybody thinks differently. And so, you know, there's always more than one way or the problem or to handle the situation and you know, just don't always think that you are always the only one who can get that".
Theme 1: Racial Inequity among Black Students and Black Leaders	13.5	- Learning Gap - Opportunity Gap	"There are kids still going through what I went through, and probably worse because now people are older and probably less tolerant".
Theme 3: System Change, Growth	12.4	-Student Growth -Black leadership Growth -More Representation	"And if you're just going to keep the status quo people, it's easy, but if you're trying to change things, it's a lot tougher". "I can help with the students and their families".
Theme 4: Out of Place, Under-representation, and Over-Scrutiny	11.9	-Under-representation -Over-Scrutiny	"So no, while I wouldn't advocate a Black person to be a teacher, I wouldn't do so for an administrator, because it's lonely. If you become an administrator in this district you will be one of 16 among dozens of school leaders, and that's a cold feeling. It would be announced that we would fight all the time. It's tiring".
Theme 6- Systemic White Supremacy	5.4	Double-Standard	"But they're not gonna hire me because we're Black".. "Because when I question missteps from the district or other people, it's brushed to the side.
Theme 5- Cultural Assimilation	2.9	Continuous Need to Conform to the White Worldview	"So it's interesting that these rumors or whatever held me back, rumors of not being ready. I don't even know what that means".