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The Impact of Culturally Responsive Teaching on the Achievement of African American Students

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The Impact of Culturally Responsive Teaching
On the Achievement of African American Students

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The Impact of Culturally Responsive Teaching on the Achievement of African American
Students

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Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

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of the requirements of
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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Abstract

Culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogical practice that incorporates cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the impact of culturally responsive teaching on the academic achievement of African American students. The context of this inquiry is at a minority-majority Title I high school within a large urban school district. The district and evaluation school previously adopted a culturally responsive teaching initiative. My mixed-method study captures the quantitative performance of students within the school in teachers' classrooms using culturally responsive teaching strategies and the qualitative perspective of teachers, administrators, and parents about culturally responsive teaching's impact on student achievement.

Preface

I chose culturally responsive teaching strategies as my evaluation topic to identify how to narrow the achievement gap for African American students. As an African American woman with the fortunate opportunity to attend a predominately African American high school and a Predominately White Institution (PWI) for college, my educational journey has afforded me many opportunities. It allowed me to grow and see the world from different points of view. However, once entering the education field, I observed the same challenges plaguing my high school peers. My program study was conducted at a predominately African American high school in the same district I graduated from. While various interventions and resources are provided to this school, the achievement gap remains. As an educator and a product of this district, I am responsible for finding ways to mitigate the barriers influencing student learning and finding solutions to the achievement gap.

District and school leaders are responsible for educating students and setting them up for academic success. I conducted this program evaluation because I wanted to understand what factors had the most impact on student achievement and what, if any, impact culturally responsive teaching had on student achievement. My program evaluation taught me that more factors influence student learning than teachers' instructional decisions. The significant takeaway from this program evaluation was that meaningful connections and trust are substantial factors in teacher-student relationships. As a result of my study, I developed an action plan to address teachers' understanding of culturally responsive teaching and the required training on this pedagogical approach in the classroom.

Through this process, I have better-understood teacher competency and the implications of teachers needing more training on supporting students from culturally diverse backgrounds on student outcomes. Suppose all stakeholders invest in shifting the district climate and culture to meet the needs of all students. In that case, more consistent and sustainable success will be experienced by stakeholders throughout the district. My research shows that teachers felt classroom environments were more positive and improved student learning and effort. With the right mindset and approach to this action plan, district and school leaders have an opportunity to set all students up for a promising future.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to those who have played an integral part in my completion of this journey. I have been blessed to have many family members, sorority sisters, friends, and colleagues encouraging and motivating me to finish.

Thank God for giving me more than “enough” to accomplish this goal. It is He who wrote this story.

Thank you to my mother, Robin Clark, for always catching me when I fall. You have loved and encouraged me through many journeys in my life, and I hope this one made you proud!

Thank you to my sisters, Shamonte’ Clark, LaKeshia Clark, and Alexandra Thompson, for being my biggest supporters and protectors. You all make even the most challenging journeys possible.

Thank you to my grandparents, Deloris and the late Marvin Clark, for ensuring I grew up with integrity and a heart to serve. My work is a direct result of the seeds you both planted.

Thank you to my remaining family members, sorority sisters, friends, and colleagues for constantly pushing me to be great.

Thank you to Dr. Sparks for being a fantastic leader through this doctoral journey. I am especially appreciative for providing Dr. Christie McMullen as my dissertation chair. Dr. McMullen, I could not describe who and what you have been to me. I know I am a better educator and person, thanks to you. Thank you to my co-chair, Dr. Tamara Cornwell, for refining my writing and ensuring I was clear and concise. I truly appreciate every person who played a role in this accomplishment.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my late Granddaddy, Marvin Clark, for keeping this dream alive in me by continually asking when and not if I would get my doctorate. I know my Granddaddy is looking down, pleased that he finally has an answer to his frequent question, “When are you getting your doctorate?” I also dedicate this work to my mother, Robin Clark, who has always shown me that the sky is the limit and greatness resides within me

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Chapter One: Introduction

Now more than ever, schools are finding it more and more challenging to fill classrooms with certified teachers. Without trained and certified personnel, students are negatively impacted by instruction and lack a sense of belonging. Fourth through eighth graders in a study evaluating sense of belonging “describes that a teacher’s dedication towards caring for students as both learners and as individuals shape positive interactions” (Bouchard & Berg, 2017, p. 118). With the state of education and declining teacher workforce, the absence of the individuals responsible for fostering that environment could have long-term implications for schools, such as Title I schools, that struggle to recruit and retain highly effective teachers.

Serving in the same district that I attended school and graduated from has proven that some things have not changed. I was classified as gifted in primary and secondary school and mainly took advanced courses. However, many of my former teachers felt giving low-level work was appropriate based on school data and the fact that I was a minority student. *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* novel addressed the effects of literature in the 1960s and 1970s using phrases such as “culturally deprived” and “disadvantaged to identify African American students. As a result, the perception is that African American students are “deprived, deficient, and deviant” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 8).

The 1990 publication by J. Irvine, *Black Students and School Failure*, summarized research from 1960 through 1985 on teacher and student race regarding student expectations (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Addressing the limitations in the research, Irvine concluded that “White teachers tend to expect less of Black students than Black

teachers do” (Irvine, 1990, as cited in Villegas & Irvine, 2010, p.181). A more recent study on the matter, concluded that some teachers have “less favorable perceptions of Black students than of White students” (Oates, 2003, as cited in Villegas & Irvine, 2010, p. 181). While not always the case, my personal and professional experience has shown that over scaffolding for students can often be observed in minority-majority classrooms because those educators have limiting beliefs about student’s ability and aptitude for learning.

Since starting my journey in education, I have witnessed students expecting “breaks” from teachers or easy work simply because they attend a minority-majority high school. As a science teacher, I had to work extremely hard to ensure I maintained high expectations for students without overwhelming them or making learning inaccessible. I knew from my first day I would need to provide students with something I do not believe I received from some of my teachers growing up; care and understanding. Culturally responsive teaching is known to cultivate and encourage both, which made it a priority to explore and evaluate for school-wide implementation (Hammond, 2015).

The context of this study is within a Title I high school located in a large urban school district. Title I, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESEA), provides financial assistance to schools with a higher frequency of students from socioeconomically disadvantaged families to provide resources to equitably educate all students and close the achievement gap (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). The district serves over 200,000 students and employs over 20,000 instructional and classified employees. The school is a traditional brick-and-mortar high school that serves predominantly minority student demographics. COVID-19 has impacted receiving school

or district grades; however, during the 2018-2019 school year, the district was identified as an A district for its student achievement. The state education commissioner “shall assign a letter grade of A, B, C, D, or F to each school district annually, based on the same components included in the school letter grade calculation” (resource withheld for anonymity). Those components include core content (English I and II, Algebra I, Geometry, Biology, and U.S. History), state assessment achievement scores, learning gains, acceleration, and graduation rate. Acceleration points are awarded to students for earning industry certifications such as Culinary or completion of advanced courses such as Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Although this is the case, schools within the district still struggle to perform academically. The school used for this evaluation received a school grade of a D during this same year.

Many schools with academic challenges receive the district's tier two or three support. Tier two and three schools within this district are identified based on poor school grades, low or declining student achievement, and inconsistent teacher performance. The Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) approach to supporting schools in the district provide early intervention and adjustments necessary to support schools and students. The diversity, equity, and inclusion department within the district is responsible for providing schools with the appropriate interventions, forming action plans, supporting content-based planning and data analysis, and regular monitoring and feedback. This support takes place weekly or bi-weekly, depending on school needs and growth toward identified goals. Additionally, tier two and three schools are provided comprehensive walks by district and school-based personnel at least once a year, where teams capture instructional trends. The weekly or bi-weekly follow-up support at the school site assists

school-based leadership with the monitoring and appropriate adjusting necessary to improve student achievement.

This district was ahead of its time with integrating a one-to-one digital device pilot program for students and faculty starting in 2013, along with other supports to merge the use of technology with engagement and monitoring for student achievement. Using technology by students and staff before the COVID-19 pandemic allowed fewer challenges compared to some school districts during the transition from brick-and-mortar to digital learning at the start of the pandemic. The technology infrastructure of this district helps to alleviate some barriers that would traditionally cause a breakdown in student learning.

Data show that students in predominantly African American schools and socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods are more likely to have academic achievement gaps (Hammond, 2015). These schools may receive the most support from the district and special fund allocations to meet the school and student needs; however, these schools struggle to achieve long-term success. Culturally responsive teaching is where teachers are aware of the cultural, economic, and political factors of the community they serve and support students based on their background and contextual relevance to a topic (Glatthorn et al., 2019, p. 261). I will specifically evaluate what impact teachers using culturally responsive teaching practices has on student achievement, emphasizing African American students. Other schools and districts can use the data collected during this evaluation to make instructional decisions based on the cultural needs and considerations, specifically related to closing the achievement gap for African American students.

Purpose of the Program Evaluation

In my program evaluation, I aim to assess the impact of culturally responsive teaching on African American students in a large, diverse public-school district. The district where the evaluation high school is located was awarded an A distinction following the end of the 2018-2019 academic school year. Although districts across the country receive prominent ratings for schools, there continues to be schools serving predominately minority students that do not meet the same level of success as Caucasian peers. Most if not all these schools identified for intervention support serve predominately African American students.

District leaders established departments, personnel, and programs directly tasked with supporting underperforming schools. This support includes but is not limited to curriculum development, instructional planning, data analysis, modeling, and Professional Learning Community (PLC) action planning with periodic observation, feedback, and monitoring. Schools that receive support typically follow district-prepared curriculum and assessments, as district content experts have created those resources to ensure that instruction and tasks are appropriate for the standard. In addition, district curriculum writers attend sessions with the State Department of Education (DOE) to ensure appropriate standard alignment in instructional suggestions and associated tasks or assessments. The ultimate goal of this program evaluation is to identify how to best support African American students in closing the achievement gap. This is a priority for the school, and district leaders who serve these populations as consistent outcomes in achievement ensure the success of every student.

Rationale

The school district where the evaluation occurred has made great strides in student achievement. Far fewer schools are considered D or F schools by the state standards, and as a result, fewer receive additional tiered district support. Although this is true, school teachers who receive more support can become overwhelmed with planning, collaborating with peers, and receiving coaching and feedback, especially when student scores do not reflect the effort. I conclude this from my work as an instructional coach in supporting beginning teachers and those teachers needing coaching in their pedagogical practice. This district is the perfect footprint of diversity to assess whether or not culturally responsive teaching practices impact student learning and achievement. The goal of evaluating a school with demographics associated with an achievement gap is to identify if the curriculum or cultural approach impacts student learning.

As a graduate of a predominately African American high school in the district, I can attest to the disparities in some teachers' ability to gear their instructional decisions to the audience. This personal observation supports the current intervention model where schools with underperforming students typically receive intervention in instructional planning and design. Additionally, issues with some teachers' pedagogical practices and the students' lack of foundational skills can breed academic experiences students cannot connect to. However, in my reflection as a student and now a teacher in this district, I am aware that the achievement gap may also be due to a cultural barrier in predominately African American schools. As a gifted student, I did not feel connected to the content I learned, although I was exposed to the material and performed well traditionally. Likewise, students with academic challenges likely feel more disconnected because of the

lack of relevancy and success. As a teacher, I have witnessed the times students shut down simply because they have no context for what is being asked of them. The problem is not that students may not have exposure or familiarity with the concepts but that teachers or the curriculum do not consider those gaps when providing instruction or practicing and deepening knowledge. Educators have to be proactive in identifying what those gaps are and how-to best tailor the learning experience to support the mastery of all students.

Learning is the ultimate goal for all students who matriculate through school. Understanding how to best address the achievement gap seen among minority students is a long researched and ethical debate. Principal Leadership Standards (resource withheld for anonymity) addresses the need for school leaders to monitor decisions based on vision, mission, and improvement priorities. This program evaluation will allow for stakeholders to make shared decisions moving forward about how to support the school's vision and mission. These data can be used to determine best practices related to culturally responsive teaching and provide the appropriate support to schools as they observe the outcomes. With the current social divide in America, educators must show understanding and awareness of all cultures. This program evaluation could also bring a sense of community to schools by identifying, highlighting, and respecting differences in ethnicity and cultural experiences.

This evaluation is vital to stakeholders, including but not limited to the educational community and district, because it directly assesses the impact of culturally responsive teaching on African American students due to NCLB. Schools and districts had to report overall student performance by grade level which is disaggregated to reflect

the performance of subgroups within the student population (Kubiszyn & Borich, 2013, p. 26). Student achievement that directly correlates to school grades continues to be a low point for predominately African American schools. Kubiszyn and Borich (2013) highlight the backlash of high stakes testing and the belief that there is a “broken system of education that dismisses certain children and classes of children as unteachable” (p. 44). This program evaluation will provide insight into whether the current systems and procedures are adequate for schools and the students they support. Specifically, the school board and district that use school grades and student achievement to evaluate their practices in school support further highlight the importance of evaluating this program.

Students who do not master content or meet standards set for state assessments typically struggle to graduate. Studies conducted on the effects of exit exams found that failing an exit exam (state mandated assessment) leads to lower graduation rates for minorities, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students (Reardon et al., 2010, p. 503). This lack of mastery is a huge challenge for schools, students, and parents. By evaluating the impact of culturally responsive teaching, stakeholders can intervene earlier to mitigate the concerns seen on the secondary level. Lastly, the education community can take these data to make informed decisions in other states and districts.

Goals

In this program evaluation, I aim to demonstrate the effectiveness of culturally responsive teaching strategies being used to support students. Additionally, a goal of the program evaluation is to increase awareness to the general public about culturally responsive teaching and its impact on student learning. Many times, culturally responsive

teaching has been confused with other controversial topics, which could impact schools or districts using this initiative with fidelity. That being said, a policy change about the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies should be introduced to districts that are or have minority-majority schools. The purpose of this would be to understand how teachers should approach teaching based on the cultural needs of all students.

The ultimate goal is to narrow the achievement gap with the implementation of culturally responsive teaching. This encompasses everything from bias and sensitivity, macroaggressions, or the incorporation or lack thereof of culturally sensitive content and instruction. Culturally responsive teaching focuses on building students' learning power; therefore, it is a priority to assess whether this implementation will remedy the current disparities observed in diverse schools (Hammond, 2016). The program evaluation serves to identify whether culturally responsive teaching improves student achievement, which is an indicator of student learning. This evaluation will also serve as an opportunity to identify if any other contributing factors to the achievement gap of African American students are improved due to the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies.

Definition of Terms

Culturally Responsive Teaching - a pedagogical practice that uses cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective to them. (Gay, 2018, p. 36). For this study, culturally responsive teaching will be identified as the response in pedagogical practice to meet the needs of ethnically diverse learners with their cultural backgrounds and experiences in mind.

Culturally Relevant Teaching- a theoretical model that addresses student achievement and helps students accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing perspectives that challenge inequities that can be observed or perpetuated in schools (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 469). In contrast to culturally responsive teaching, culturally relevant teaching is about understanding and challenging inequitable instructional practices that could drive the achievement gap presence.

Achievement Gap - regularly used to describe differences in students' achievement or educational outcomes, often by race/ethnicity (Ladson-Billings, 2006). However, the disparity in academic performance is also observed between other subgroups, such as English Language Learners and native English speakers and socioeconomically disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged/affluent students.

Research Questions

I used a number of questions which allowed me to identify concrete connections between culturally responsive teaching and student outcomes. My primary and secondary research question(s) are the following:

1. How does culturally responsive teaching impact African American students' ability to learn?
2. To what extent does culturally responsive teaching improve the achievement on state assessments for African American students?
 - a. What differences happen in classrooms for students when culturally responsive teaching strategies are used?
 - b. How does culturally responsive teaching specifically support the teaching/learning (achievement) of African American students?

- c. What characteristics of culturally responsive teaching have the most significant impact on student learning and achievement?
- d. What are examples of Culturally Responsive pedagogy (e.g., high expectations, understanding students' interests and backgrounds, student-centered classroom, etc.) when used with fidelity in action?

The research questions will provide information into the approach that needs to take place for culturally responsive teaching to be meaningful. The evidence to these questions will be collected through quantitative and qualitative data aggregated from surveys and interviews.

Conclusion

In this program study, I evaluate the impact of culturally responsive teaching on the achievement of African American students in the context of a Title I high school within a large urban school district. The next chapter will explore what current research says about the use of culturally responsive teaching. A thorough exploration of past and current trends surrounding the impact of culturally responsive teaching on student achievement was reviewed.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Several factors are essential or could impact the outcomes when considering culturally responsive teaching strategies. The main topics I discuss are culturally relevant teaching vs. culturally responsive teaching, teacher predisposition, teacher preparation programs, professional development and learning, instructional pedagogy, and the achievement gap. These topics provide some context about culturally responsive teaching and the factors that could impact an educator's understanding of what it means and what those strategies look like in the classroom. Additionally, teacher predisposition, preparation programs, and professional development and learning provide insight into how and why teachers should appropriately be trained to support students with diverse cultural backgrounds.

I wanted to capture the educational concerns that warranted an exploration of methods to support African American students to narrow the achievement gap. The scholarly evidence provided throughout this study begins with the pioneers of culturally responsive teaching from the 1990s to the current. The trends consistent over time in research provide a blueprint for the critical components necessary to accomplish this change initiative while identifying ways to improve academic outcomes for African American students.

Culturally Relevant vs. Culturally Responsive Teaching

Gloria Ladson- Billings (1994, 2009), in her book *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*, introduced the concept of culturally relevant teaching. Since then, the term has been used interchangeably with culturally responsive teaching or pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1994) found that culturally relevant teaching

“empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 18). Ladson-Billing wanted to capture effective ways to support African American students in achieving academic excellence. This pedagogical approach has been a highly controversial topic in education because it aims to identify inequities in teacher practices based on race or ethnicity.

Zaretta Hammond (2015) defines culturally responsive teaching as

an educator’s ability to recognize students’ cultural displays of learning and meaning making. Teachers should respond with teaching moves that use cultural knowledge as a scaffold to connect what the student knows to new concepts and content in order to promote effective information processing (p. 15).

Educators should understand the cultural barriers that impact student learning and intentionally meet students’ needs. Hammond (2015) stresses in her book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*, the need to view this approach as a bag of “tools” to support student learning versus a magic trick to improve achievement.

Johnson-Smith (2020) uses the exploration of Zaretta Hammond’s (2015) book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching and The Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*, to frame her study capturing how a culturally responsive framework equips teachers with the resources needed to support diverse students effectively. Hammond concluded in her research that ethnicity does not impact student learning (Johnson-Smith, 2020, p. 35). Johnson-Smith takes on an Experientialist perspective in her findings that those who learn in culturally responsive settings achieve equally, if not exceedingly, to those taught in traditional

bureaucratic school systems. Johnson-Smith used the same Ready for Rigor framework that Hammond used to determine if she would get consistent results. The main findings of this case are that ethnicity did not impact learning as much as relatability impacted student achievement (Johnson-Smith, 2020, p. 35). Based on observations, it was clear to the evaluator that making connections was more important than the teacher's ethnicity for the students observed. Additionally, when followed with fidelity, the Ready for Rigor framework effectively established a learning environment conducive to the learning of all students (Johnson-Smith, 2020, p. 39).

Christy Byrd (2016) focused on determining if culturally relevant teaching worked from the student's perspective. Schubert's Social Behaviorist perspective addresses the need for education to be current and relevant to the student's learning (Schubert, 1996, p. 171). To this point, context and content are essential components of the learning environment and student achievement. Byrd (2016) structures this as a mixed-method study where student responses related to an array of factors directly associated with culturally relevant teaching, the sense of belonging, and student achievement are captured in a survey to give quantitative data. Byrd's (2016) study questioned, "How are students' perceptions of teachers' use of culturally relevant teaching and school racial socialization related to students' academic outcomes and racial attitudes?" (p. 3). Through classroom observations, surveys, and interviews, Byrd concluded that culturally relevant teaching led to a sense of belonging and more student engagement, which impacted student achievement (Byrd, 2016, p. 6). The decision to quantitatively explore culturally relevant teaching by looking at things from the student perspective and not within set classrooms gave context to what students believe supports

their learning. This speaks to a more significant issue of encouraging culturally relevant teaching as the data appears staged to achieve desired outcomes.

In a separate study, Christy Byrd (2017) evaluates the racial climate for middle and high school students. The study aimed to provide a framework for the racial climate of United States schools. Byrd (2017) defines *school racial climate* as “the perceptions of interracial interactions and the socialization around race and culture in a school” (p. 701). In the study, Byrd provided 819 middle and high school students with the School Climate for Diversity – Secondary Scale, which also assessed factors that included culturally responsive teaching. Like Schubert’s (1996) Critical Reconstructionist perspective, this evaluation has the underlying tone that some “schools can serve as “sorting machines” for society” The primary questions of the evaluation were the following:

- (1) Does the factor structure of the scale correspond to the theoretical framework?
- (2) Do the factors of the scale show good reliability?
- (3) Are the factors of school racial climate associated with general school climate, perceived discrimination, and culturally relevant teaching in common ways, and
- (4) Are the factors associated with academic outcomes in common ways? (Byrd, 2017, p. 704).

The overall findings of this evaluation show some impact of culturally responsive teaching on homogeneous groups of middle and high school students. To this point, the evaluation shows that groups that receive culturally responsive teaching have similar results.

Teacher Predisposition

A teacher’s disposition is defined as a teacher’s actions or patterns of behavior.

Chezare Warren (2018) states that “dispositions represent (a) visible patterns in behavior

demonstrated by teachers interacting with individual students, (b) their priorities with specific subgroups, and (c) the habits that drive other aspects of their instructional decision-making” (p. 172). The beliefs or values determine the teacher's disposition along with the existing culture of the teaching environment in which they work. Hammond (2015) highlights that navigating cultural differences can cause the brain to look for signs of danger or well-being. As a result, *“when our brain’s alarm system gets triggered, we become culturally reactive to protect ourselves rather than culturally responsive to the person we are interacting with”* (Hammond, 2015, p. 64). Culturally responsive teachers are aware of triggers that may cause a breakdown in the relationship with students and reframe those situations for positive outcomes.

Truscott and Stenhouse set out to identify the impact of teacher disposition on culturally responsive teaching. Specifically, the impact of urban teacher preparation programs and the ability to teach dispositions that fostered culturally relevant teaching/pedagogy (Truscott & Stenhouse, 2018, p. 24). The researchers used multiple frameworks associated with culturally relevant teaching or pedagogy; however, they mainly focused on Ladson-Billing’s research on culturally relevant/responsive teaching and those associated actions. Using the primary research question, the authors evaluated whether teaching dispositions can be pedagogically specific and whether specific dispositions emerged with certain aspects of teaching and learning (Truscott & Stenhouse, 2018, p. 8). Truscott and Stenhouse (2018) analyzed what dispositions were taught that specifically impacted culturally responsive teaching (p. 5). This case's main finding was that specific actions and interactions within a program focused on addressing culturally responsive teaching could impact teacher disposition. This study further

supports the findings of Ladson-Billings that culturally responsive teaching impacts student learning.

Another study uses the personal experiences of four African American middle school level teachers to evaluate the strategies necessary for cultural responsiveness. The primary research questions are “How do the life histories of African American middle-level teachers influence their professional identity as teachers, and what experiences do these teachers name as influential?” (Williams, 2018, p. 4). The main findings of this evaluation are that Culturally Responsive strategies can and should be foundational to successful teaching (Williams, 2018, p. 1). This idea was built on the foundation of “caring” shown by the educators. This study suggests that “caring teachers work with other teachers, families, and students as a village dedicated to the students (Williams, 2018, p. 11). This establishes a sense of belonging for students and a positive learning environment conducive to learning. Geneva Gay (2010), known for her research on culturally responsive teaching, emphasized that teachers must pair high expectations with showing they “care” to support students of minority subgroups.

Public schools are continually evolving and, as a result, becoming more diverse. Many teachers' education or induction programs have addressed this by incorporating diversity training to meet all students' academic and social-emotional needs. Research on teacher dispositions has concluded that pre-service teachers' behaviors and attitudes strongly influence the educator's impact on student learning and development (Butler et al., 2021; Howard & Milner, 2014; Thompson, 2013). If educators meet the needs of all students, they must have an understanding and respect for varying backgrounds and cultures. A study at a mid-sized college explored the impact of a comprehensive service-

learning course on a student's (pre-service teacher) perception of urban education. When teachers build relationships with students, they enhance their pedagogical skills to make learning meaningful and relevant to all students (Butler et al., 2021, p. 212). The study concluded that the participants' initial perceptions of students within an urban setting were primarily based on their prior experience with urban education. For example, participants with nonurban schooling experiences provided views based on stereotypes or misinformation (Butler et al., 2021, p. 210).

Teacher Preparation

Teacher preparation programs are a critical component of beginning educators' foundational knowledge and ability to teach. Although pre-service or new teacher induction programs may provide general support in supporting students of different cultural backgrounds, this is not a highly prioritized concept. For example, the previously discussed study implemented a 25-hour minimum service-learning project at a Title I middle school. In addition, a 27-hour instructional course was provided to cultivate a deeper understanding of themes surrounding social justice and equity and successful practices for engaging urban students (Butler et al., 2021, p. 202). The evaluators point out that being responsive involves having an open mind and a willingness to accept others outside of one's immediate circle. To this point, cultural responsiveness may require considerable preparation and effort for educators to master.

A study in Australia followed postgraduate students as they transitioned into their classrooms supporting students. The lack of buy-in from mentors and coaches was highlighted throughout the study, impacting the new teachers and their comfortability in approaching culturally responsive teaching strategies (Vass, 2017, p. 6). Schubert's

Critical Reconstructionist perspective describes that the structure of schooling mirrors much of society's character, including injustices (Schubert, 1996, p. 175). Based on observations and interviews, the mentor teachers wanted to keep things as they have been, even if their lack of cultural awareness negatively impacted students. The research question encompassed whether the opportunities and challenges of culturally responsive teaching impacted the ability to accomplish it (Vass, 2017, p. 6). The evaluator identified three barriers that impacted the teacher's ability to partake in culturally responsive teaching. Those barriers were (1) Limited and limiting focus in terms of pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment, (2) Resistance to seeing the need for change, and (3) Concerns with being evaluated during the learning experience (Vass, 2017). This shows a connection to teachers needing preparation programs to build capacity in culturally responsive strategies and has appropriate support and guidance.

Researchers conducted a multi-year study evaluating the impact of community-based engagement programs on the success and efficiency of culturally relevant pedagogy. The researchers specifically questioned whether a community-engaged teacher preparation program would make teachers more inclined to practice culturally relevant teaching than peers in a traditional teacher preparation program. Traditional teacher preparation programs allow in-field training, although requirements do not always include diversity measures. For this study, pre-service teachers (undergraduate) received a semester of in-field experience within a predominately African American school where 95% of elementary students received free or reduced lunch (Thomas et al., 2020). The main finding of this study was that pre-service teachers that participated in the community-engaged preparation program did have increased perceived efficacy in

enacting culturally responsive pedagogy (Thomas et al., 2020, p. 124). Based on their observations, Thomas et al. (2020) state, “If we wish for a new tomorrow where all children have access to teachers who meet their cultural needs, the field of educator preparation has a responsibility to adjust its course” (pp. 131-132).

Researchers evaluated two pre-service urban high-school teachers in Arizona, as they enacted culturally responsive teaching during a one-year residency. The evaluators highlight the ethical concern that Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) students in Arizona were dropping out at alarming rates due to educators' lack of cultural awareness (Ramirez, 2016). The primary research questions posed were (a) how do pre-service teachers enact culturally responsive teaching in urban high schools? and (b) what factors influence pre-service teachers' practices? (Ramirez, 2016, pp. 20-21). The study found that the mentor's perception of culturally responsive teaching highly influenced the pre-service teachers. One teacher maintained positive relationships with students and emphasized their importance; however, he had a neutral mentor who had reservations on using culturally responsive teaching in the classroom. The other participating teacher had a mentor who fully embraced culturally responsive teaching in her instructional practices. A modeled behavior made this teacher's planning more focused on meeting students' cultural and academic needs. Both teachers were able to identify issues that impacted the education of CLD youth while maintaining the belief that their students could be successful. This shows a disparity in induction programs, as stakeholders put in place to support teacher development and student achievement goals can influence results.

Professional Development and Learning

Professional Development is essential to ensure educators are competent to fulfill their roles. Leaders often set the tone for professional development even if educators have input and choice in what they attend. The aim of professional development or learning opportunities is to improve teaching quality through ongoing training and support (Lakhwani, 2019). Reeves (2009) suggests that professional development initiatives should consider, “what to teach, how to teach it, how to meet the needs of individual students, and how to build internal capacity” (p. 63). By tapping into the internal capacity of those within a school setting (mentors, coaches, teacher leaders), schools have the opportunity to streamline initiatives and increase engagement, and buy-in. When educators are allowed to have hands-on training that meets the varying needs of teachers, it increases collaboration and sustainable change (Reeves, 2009).

Lakhwani (2019) measured the impact of a K-12 district professional development and induction program on “new teachers” understanding and use of culturally responsive teaching (p. 101). New teachers in this study included any educators new to the district and therefore did not relate to years of service. Lakhwani wanted to evaluate the effectiveness of culturally responsive teaching professional development in a majority-minority school district. Therefore, the researcher provided participants with a pre-and post-assessment to determine if they possessed a list of traits aligned with culturally responsive teaching (Lakhwani, 2019, p. 103). The study concluded that teachers showed an increased understanding of culturally responsive teaching and practiced culturally responsive pedagogy within their respective roles as a result of the induction culturally responsive teaching training (Lakhwani, 2019, pp. 104-105).

A study specifically focused on how cultural responsiveness impacts leaders' learning highlights campus culture's impact. Culturally Relevant Leadership Learning (CRL) is a framework for transforming leadership programs to address the advantages and disadvantages created by differences (Jones et al., 2016, p. 10). The “combination of identity, capacity, and efficacy describes a student’s understanding of the self as an agent of change through interpersonal and intrapersonal development” (Jones et al., 2016, p. 12). The institution or organizational culture/climate can directly influence students’ ability to succeed. The evaluation found that “the domains of the Culturally Relevant Leadership Learning model create a framework that leadership educators can use to begin transforming their leadership programs, and thus institutions” (Jones et al., 2016, p. 19).

Instructional Pedagogy

Research providing an overview of best practices in culturally responsive teaching within a virtual learning environment provided insight into the possibilities of culturally responsive teaching strategies. This is critical in education as the pandemic and COVID-19 shifted education from traditional brick-and-mortar settings to virtual ones. A critical component was the need for teachers to establish the rapport necessary to foster an environment conducive to culturally responsive teaching strategies. A few suggestions from the authors are to establish welcome discussions to build rapport and provide the opportunity to interact with one another synchronously to build the class community (Woodley et al., 2017, pp. 472-473). More specifically, the teacher's actions are validating, comprehensive, multi-dimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory (Woodley et al., 2017, p. 470). Specifically, the evaluators were questioning what technology integration promotes a culturally responsive learning

environment where learning is encouraged and achieved for all. Research surrounding culturally responsive teaching pairs high expectations and a sense of “caring” or belonging to ensure students feel respected and put forth their best effort.

“As our country continues to grow as a multicultural nation, it is imperative that our early childhood classrooms embrace this rich diversity and provide experiences that affirm all students, families, and communities” (Bennett et al., 2018, p. 241). To this point, school leaders should ensure they equipped teachers with the knowledge to create a culturally responsive classroom is essential to student learning and achievement. Tony Wagner (2014) states that effective teaching and learning practices are nearly universal. While this may be true, teachers must understand the best pedagogical approach to supporting diverse learners (p. 255). This evaluation found the basic principles of high expectations and cultural competence critical in the classroom to cultivate student learning (Bennett et al., 2018, p. 247).

Culturally responsive pedagogy is a student-centered approach that nurtures students’ cultural differences to promote student achievement. However, research surrounding culturally responsive pedagogy questions how those strategies promote learning. When used in a college setting with pre-service (undergraduate) teachers, researchers evaluated the use of social media as a method to build relationships with students while also leveraging the use of collaborative web tools (WebQuests) to determine its impact (Chuang, 2016, p. 862). The study found that there are multiple roles of cloud computing assignments and the use of social media technologies for informal learning and that there are opportunities for teachers to leverage culturally responsive

teaching into their tasks (Chuang, 2016). This shows educators' willingness to understand and practice using these strategies to use them with fidelity.

When considering the mindset of educators in establishing a culturally responsive learning environment, it is essential to determine their ability to foster problem-solving skills in diverse learners. Researchers state, “Culturally responsive teaching begins with a teacher’s critical reflection on his/her values, assumptions, and beliefs” (Glazewski & Ertmer, 2020, p. 686). This highlights the need for educators to be self-reflective and proactive in their continuous reflection on their pedagogical skills in meeting the needs of their students. In addition, the evaluation found that “in order to assure that cultural responsiveness saturates our designs, we need to adopt an ethos of intentionality that supports—and builds on—linguistic and cultural diversity coupled with expanded pedagogies” (Glazewski & Ertmer, 2020, p. 696).

The Achievement Gap

As stated previously, the increase in diversity has also led to an apparent achievement gap for minority students. When evaluating this cause, research often points to a lack of relevance between content and students, leading to disengagement. The lack of culturally relevant learning experiences with culturally competent teachers can lead to a negative self-image and poor academic performance (Hawkins & Reeves, 2020, p. 40). The evaluators of this study highlight that Black male students come into school with interpersonal conflict, which can lead to poor academic outcomes. The evaluators concluded that the lack of Culturally Responsive environments for Black males hinders their educational experience. There is a significant need to establish culturally inclusive learning environments where Black male students feel confident and have positive

relationships with peers and teachers (Hawkins & Reeves, 2020, p. 45). Educational leaders must make cultural relevance and understanding of all students' cultural backgrounds of high importance to assist with the achievement gap seen in Black males and other minority groups.

Conclusion

The comparison between culturally relevant and responsive teaching continues to be a focal point of the discussion. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) coined the phrase culturally relevant teaching while conducting a field study to identify the characteristics that most impacted African American student achievement. Zaretta Hammond (2015) takes the pedagogical practice to the next level by identifying strategies for meeting all students' cultural needs. It is about understanding the barriers that could impact the learning experience for any student and putting the scaffolds or differentiation in place to ensure the student is successful. This surpasses race and ethnicity and requires educators to make significant efforts to build meaningful relationships to know when, how, and why they should provide specific support to students throughout a lesson or day. Although the terms have slightly different definitions and approaches, they are foundationally similar in the understanding that cultural differences impact student engagement and learning.

Teacher disposition is something many people do not consider when considering educators. A critical factor in implementing sustainable instructional adjustments is understanding who is on your team and their strengths. The characteristics that a person displays overall impact how that individual is received and, at times, can influence their willingness to be empathetic toward others. Self-reflection is critical for educators to

understand what impact life experiences or trauma may have on their approach to educating students. Teacher preparation programs should help future educators identify the barriers to building meaningful relationships and supporting student academic achievement.

Professional development and teacher training are essential components of implementing school change initiatives. Zaretta Hammond (2015) believes educators should embrace the “conscious incompetence” that comes from going through the process of learning a new idea or skill (p. 253). The foundation established by district and school leaders comes from the training and ongoing professional development accompanying any initiatives or new curriculum. If culturally responsive teaching is a possible solution to narrowing the achievement gap, it is essential that leaders provide adequate professional development and training to teachers to implement it appropriately. Once teachers have a foundational understanding of culturally responsive teaching, they must collaborate with all stakeholders to evaluate the adjustments necessary to meet student needs.

The achievement gap is a focal point in discussions surrounding equity and inclusion in education for all students. Years of research have provided insight into the factors that impact achievement gaps. It is time that districts and schools nationwide start finding ways to mitigate those factors' impact on student achievement. District and school leaders have to navigate the complexities brought on by the evolving education expectations while identifying ways to provide timely interventions to schools and students. Kowalski (2011) believes “administrators who do not understand diversity are at a distinct disadvantage to developing community relationships” (p. 156).

Understanding the achievement gap and identifying ways to overcome it comes down to the relationship-building that happens inside and outside the school. All stakeholders must work together to identify ways to narrow the achievement gap.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This program evaluation was mixed method and comprised of qualitative and quantitative data collection. In this chapter, I provided an overview of the methods by which I collected data for this program evaluation. Additionally, I identified participants of this study to understand better how stakeholders played a part in the evaluation of culturally responsive teaching. Finally, details about what data I captured and analyzed are provided.

Research Design Overview

The high school used in the program evaluation has a racial breakdown of 88% African American, 10.6% Hispanic, and 1.4% Caucasian. Over 70% of the students attending this school are considered economically disadvantaged and 100% received free lunch. During the 2021-2022 school year, select teachers received training on culturally responsive teaching. The district also provided a training series on culturally responsive teaching.

Patton (2012) states, “Evaluators need to work hard to overcome their tendency to dismiss certain kinds of data without first considering seriously and fairly the merits of those data” (p. 293). Mixed-method studies provide a comprehensive view of data built in precise numerical ideas or detailed observations. While there is a tendency to perceive quantitative data to be more reliable due to the “precise” idea of data output, both approaches are critical to understanding the complete picture of what is taking place within this program evaluation.

Using the quantitative data collected in this evaluation, I provided a numerical output of learning from the extant data collected. Evaluating the learning gains of African

American students in the school provided insight into how culturally responsive teaching can influence student learning and achievement. Using the qualitative data collected, I provide the perception of learning from the teacher and parent. Teachers could capture in their own words how the presence or lack thereof of culturally responsive teaching strategies impacted student learning through open-ended survey questions and focus group interviews, teachers. Parents were allowed to express student learning based on interactions from one year to the next and their overall academic performance through the open-ended questions in their survey.

Participants

There were three stakeholder groups in this program evaluation. The key participants in this evaluation were parents, teachers, and administrators. I selected the three participant groups based on the individuals who are in positions to support students within a school. Parents play an integral part in educating students due to the need for support once students leave a school campus. Parents can identify their child's needs and provide information to educators about their children. In addition, parents have a unique perspective, as they are engrained in the same culture as the students and can identify which teachers or classes create positive and negative academic experiences for the student. Parents will be encouraged to speak with their children while completing the survey. I provided this information on the recruitment flyer, and correspondence was sent to recruit parent participants.

Teachers are at the frontline of academic experiences and outcomes related to student achievement. John Hattie (2012) states in *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning* that teachers provide students opportunities and

alternatives for developing their learning strategies, which teachers and students can use in future learning. To this point, teachers serve as models and support students in building critical thinking or problem-solving skills, which support and maximize learning and achievement outcomes. I provided a survey to teachers to capture their perspective of student learning through a series of question stems and open-ended questions. Teachers volunteered to participate in a focus group, while administrators volunteered to participate in interviews.

Data Gathering Techniques

The data collection types incorporated within this evaluation included surveys, focus group interviews, and achievement scores on the English Language Arts (ELA) state assessments. Additionally, I evaluated student information regarding attendance, discipline records, and academic performance. I selected the following data collection tools to provide a comprehensive view of the impact of culturally responsive teaching on student achievement.

Teacher survey

I placed a flyer requesting teachers to participate in a survey in every teacher's mailbox at the school. The flyer contained a QR code that allowed individuals to scan and go to the informed consent form and survey. The survey consisted of a Likert scale and open-ended questions that captured both the interaction with culturally responsive teaching and the outcomes for learning and achievement. There is a total of twelve questions that should take teachers approximately ten minutes to complete. Additionally, teachers could provide identification information if they were interested in participating in the focus group interview.

Parent survey

A parent survey flyer was sent to the parents of the teacher participants of the evaluation. Teachers who participated in the study also shared the flyer with the parent contacts of students in their class. Parents volunteered to fill out the survey at their will. The flyer contained a QR code that would take parents to the informed consent form and survey. There is a total of eight questions that incorporate both the Likert scale and open-ended questions. Parents can have a dialogue with their children about perceptions and feelings related to the teacher(s) use of culturally responsive strategies and their learning.

Interviews

I conducted interviews in the form of a focus group for the teachers. Teachers volunteered to participate in the interview through the survey provided. I contacted teachers based on the information provided in the survey. There was one focus group consisting of teachers from the evaluation school site. The focus group lasted approximately 30 minutes outside of the participants' duty day. I provided an interview to an Administrator that captured how to support an environment where teachers are adequately culturally responsive. The interview took approximately thirty minutes to complete.

Extant Student Data

I collected data from ELA state assessment scores to capture the learning for African American students. Students have historical and current data selected from either the State Student Assessment or another state end-of-course exam. The purpose of this data collection is to identify any growth or decline for students in classrooms of teachers who received culturally responsive teaching professional development. Additionally,

using student data will provide insight into whether or not African American students are more likely to learn due to being in classrooms with a culturally responsive teacher.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis phase of this evaluation will start with analyzing the quantitative data captured through the Likert scale questions of the survey. The purpose of this data analysis will be to capture factors that encourage teachers and parents to believe they are learning more successfully. Additionally, how often or to what fidelity these strategies must be used can be captured based on how often teachers used these strategies. I reviewed the focus group interview to capture significant trends about the perception of learning that took place when they were or were not using culturally responsive teaching. The interviews will look for consistency or trends that detail how African American students learned and what culturally responsive strategies were needed to foster that learning. The administrator interview will also be evaluated for trends about what program supports should be in place to support changing culture to highlight the culturally responsive needs of African American students.

Ethical Considerations

There are no anticipated risks to participants in this program evaluation beyond that of everyday life. However, participants participating in this study may benefit by identifying strategies that maximize learning for African American students when using specific strategies to meet their cultural needs. Identifying these strategies can remove barriers in the classroom that hinder learning and narrow the achievement gap. Participants may also benefit by contributing to the data, which stakeholders can use to improve instruction and student achievement.

I provided all participants of this program evaluation with the informed consent form to identify their desire to participate. Participation in this study is voluntary, and no individuals will complete the survey or focus group against their will. The format of the survey, interview, and extant student achievement data will be free of names or other identifiers that make their participation public knowledge. The focus group and interviews will not reference individuals that would make their identity known to the public outside of demographic information that shows a trend such as race/ethnicity or years of service. Anonymity is essential and I protected all personal information and data from surveys and interviews. Data will be collected and stored for three years in a password-protected computer drive to serve as an additional safeguard to avoid ethical risks.

Limitations

The limitations that may impact the study results are sample size. I will evaluate one high school with a racial and ethnic makeup of predominately minority subgroups. I currently work at the evaluation high school in the study. I communicated in the correspondence asking for participants not to harm or communicate their personal information. Working in the evaluation school site, I know teacher participants generally, although I only captured identifiable information for those willing to participate in the interview focus group. Additionally, if the parent does not clearly understand their child's performance or achievement, it could lead to skewed data. Lastly, if parents lack understanding about culturally responsive teaching, it could cause individuals not to desire to participate or to answer in ways inconsistent with what is taking place with their child in the classroom.

Conclusion

Data for this evaluation will include surveys for parents and teachers and interviews through focus groups for teachers and the administrator. The purpose of the data collection methods chosen is to provide both quantitative and qualitative data to assist in making a realistic conclusion about the achievement of African American students. The next chapter will include the results obtained during data collection and the aggregation of that data to make conclusions and recommendations for the school moving forward.

Chapter Four: Results

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of culturally responsive teaching on the academic achievement of African American students within a Title I high school. I sought to capture the implications of culturally responsive teaching strategies on African American students' overall engagement and learning within racially similar and diverse groups. The rationale for selecting this school district was due to its diversity in student demographics. The racial breakdown of the over 200,000 students that attend this district are 64% White, 27% Black, 5% Asian, 1% Native Hawaiian, and 3% Multi-Racial. The ethnic breakdown for this district is 56% non-Hispanic and 44% Hispanic. The high school selected to participate in the study comprises an over 80% African American student population. Over the last decade, the school has had substantial student population growth and an increase in the Hispanic student population. Increasing standards for state assessments make identifying strategies to meet the needs of culturally diverse students a top priority for schools nationwide.

Findings

Data collection procedures included a teacher and parent survey, teacher focus group, administrator interview, and extant data captured through State ELA scores, attendance and discipline records, and academic course performance.

Extant Data

The district research team provided data for State ELA 10 scores for students at the evaluation school for the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 academic school years.

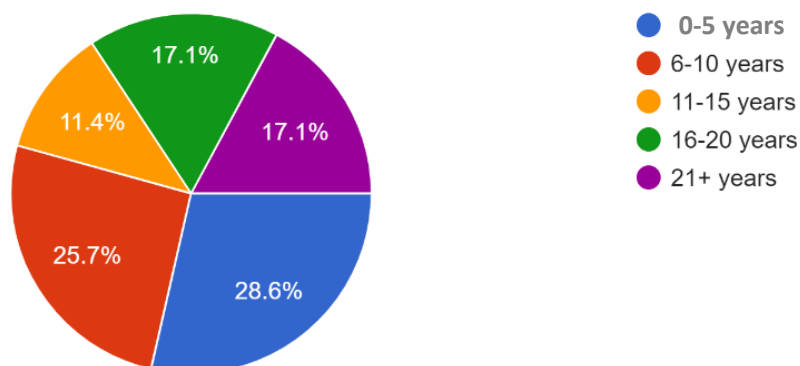
Additionally, the district research team provided me with student data for ethnic/racial demographics, attendance, discipline infractions, and course performance/outcomes for

students in the evaluation school for the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 academic school years. I analyzed these additional factors to determine the mutualistic impact of culturally responsive teaching on the barriers leading to a breakdown in students learning and achievement.

Survey Data

I created and administered one survey for teachers and one for parents at the participating school. There was a total of 12 questions provided in the teacher survey with multiple choice, Likert scale, and open-ended questions provided through Google forms (Appendix A). The parent survey contains seven multiple-choice and open-ended questions, which I provided by Google forms (Appendix B).

Teacher Survey Summary. In the first question of the teacher survey, I asked: How many years have you been teaching in the education field? This was a multiple-choice question that received 35 responses (Figure 1). Of the 35 teachers surveyed, 10 teachers (28.6%) had 0-5 years of teaching experience, nine teachers (25.7%) had 6-10 years, four teachers (11.4%) had 11-15 years, six teachers (17.1%) had 16-20 years, and six teachers (17.1%) had 21+ years of service. It is essential to highlight that the teachers surveyed at School A reflect a heterogeneous group regarding teacher experience.

Figure 1*Teacher Survey Question #1 Responses*

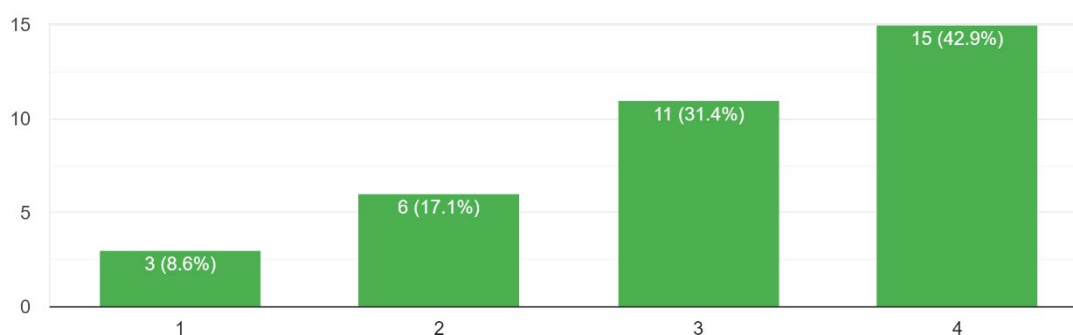
Note. Data show the number of years teaching (n=35).

In the second question provided in the teacher survey, I asked: My college/education preparation program prepared me for my educational journey and supporting students with varying cultural backgrounds? This was a Likert scale of 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, and 4=Strongly Agree. This question received 35 responses (Figure 2). Of the 35 teacher responses, a total of nine teachers (25.7%) expressed that they disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were prepared to support students of different cultural backgrounds, with three of those teachers (8.6%) strongly disagreeing and six teachers (17.1%) disagreeing. Eleven teachers (31.4%) agreed that their college preparation program prepared them, and 15 teachers (42.9%) strongly agreed that they were prepared to support students of different cultural backgrounds. For context, 22 of the 35 teachers surveyed did not receive their undergraduate degree in education. The fact that the majority of teachers surveyed (74.3%) believed their preparation programs prepared them to support students of

different cultures and cultural backgrounds indicates the emphasis placed on cultural responsiveness in education preparation programs over the years.

Figure 2

Teacher Survey Question #2 Responses

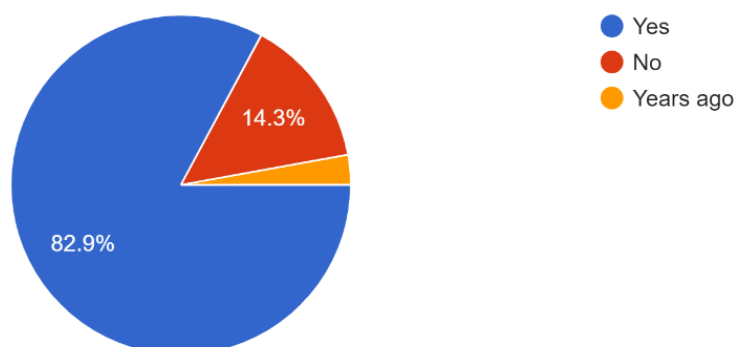


Note. Data show teachers' perceptions of whether their preparation program prepared them to support students of different cultural backgrounds. 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, and 4=Strongly Agree (n=35).

For the third question in the teacher survey, I asked: Have you been provided training/professional development on culturally responsive teaching? This was a multiple-choice question with 35 responses (Figure 3). 29 teachers surveyed (82.9%) expressed they had training or professional development on culturally responsive teaching. Five teachers (14.3%) have received no training on culturally responsive teaching. One teacher (2.9%) received training years ago on using culturally responsive teaching strategies. The school evaluation encourages teachers to attend culturally responsive teaching professional development to meet students' needs better.

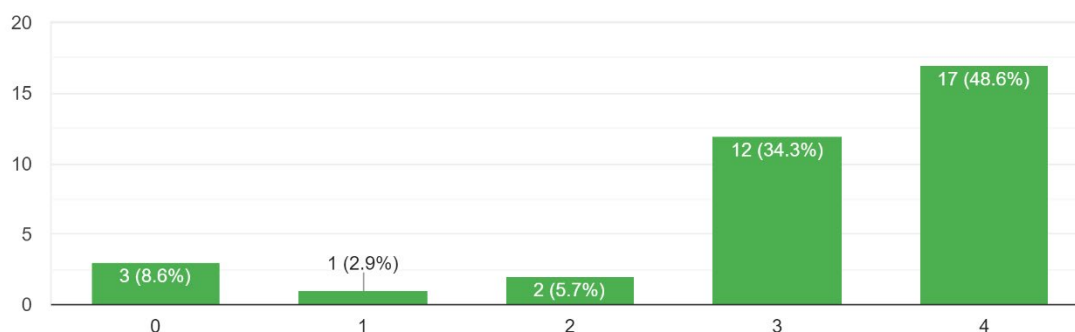
Figure 3

Teacher Survey Question #3 Responses



Note. Data show teachers that have had culturally responsive teaching training (n=35).

For the fourth question in the teacher survey, I asked: Students performed better due to culturally responsive teaching strategies. This was a Likert scale question where 0= Not Applicable (N/A), 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, and 4=Strongly Agree., and there were 35 responses (Figure 4). Three teachers (8.6%) from School A responded Not Applicable, one teacher (2.9%) strongly disagreed, and two teachers (5.7%) disagreed. On the contrary, 12 teachers (34.3%) agreed, and 17 teachers (48.6%) strongly agreed that their students performed better due to using culturally responsive teaching strategies. Most teachers surveyed (82.9%) agreed or strongly agreed that students performed better due to culturally responsive teaching.

Figure 4*Teacher Survey Question #4 Responses*

Note. Data show teachers' perceptions that students performed better due to culturally responsive teaching strategies. 0= Not Applicable (N/A), 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, and 4=Strongly Agree (n=35).

School Themes. In question five of the teacher survey, I asked: In what ways did the students in a culturally responsive classroom perform differently than students in a non-culturally responsive classroom? This was an open-ended question with 35 responses. Four major identified themes include trust, risk-taking, ownership of learning, and Not Applicable (N/A).

Trust. Fifteen teachers expressed that they established trust with students in culturally responsive classrooms versus non-culturally responsive classrooms. Teachers expressed the relationship-building strides they made from using culturally responsive strategies. Additionally, teachers expressed that the trust built due to culturally responsive strategies made their students put forth more effort and trust in the educational journey. Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs highlights the foundational need for individuals to feel safe/secure once they have established a sense of survival (Mcleod, 2023). The

trend of building relational trust with students helped students engage in the learning process and believe they could succeed.

Risk-Taking. Learning environments where students feel safe and have built positive relationships with peers and teachers are more conducive to risk-taking, often necessary for critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Six teachers provided responses that address the shift of students taking risks within the classroom. For example, one teacher responded that students were more comfortable with the productive struggle that accompanied learning. In learning environments where students are not open to risk-taking, there could be a breakdown in engagement and learning. Students building their capacity to think critically is a theme among students that are in classrooms where culturally responsive teaching strategies are used.

Engagement and Learning. Eleven teachers responded that their students were more engaged due to using culturally responsive teaching strategies. Additionally, teachers expressed that they feel more learning is taking place within the classroom. A teacher believes this is due to their efforts to make connections to the students' interests and background. The majority of the open-ended responses to this survey questions tied their relationship building with the students' efforts.

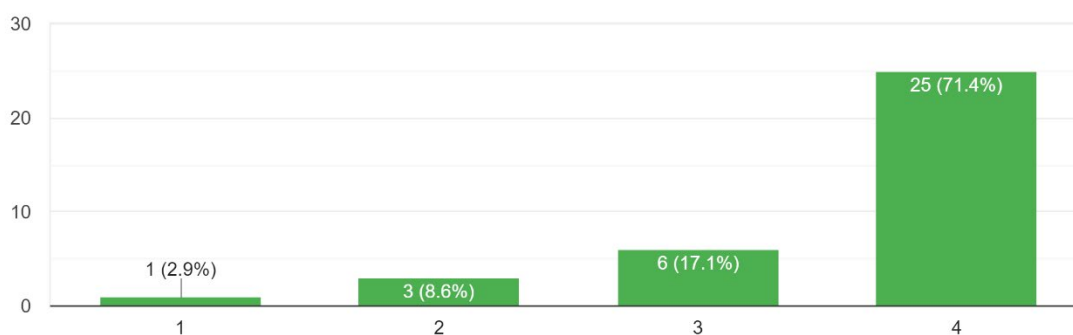
Ownership of Learning. Eight teachers responded that the significant difference they observed between classrooms where they used culturally responsive teaching strategies and those that they did not was the ability for students to take ownership of learning. In addition, there were responses that highlight the teacher's high expectations and understanding of the students' cultural background being a contributing factor to students being active partners and participants of their own learning.

Not Applicable. There were five responses where the theme highlighted having no understanding or idea of how culturally responsive teaching impacts students within a classroom setting. This was primarily communicated as a lack of training versus seeing culturally responsive teaching strategies as valuable instructional tools to meet all student's needs.

For the sixth question of the teacher survey, I asked: if I would likely use culturally responsive teaching strategies moving forward. This was a Likert scale question where 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, and 4=Strongly Agree. There were 35 responses (Figure #). One teacher (2.9%) responded strongly disagree, and three (8.6%) disagreed. These four teachers are unlikely to use culturally responsive teaching strategies moving forward. On the other hand, 31 teachers, six (17.1%), agree, and 25 (71.4%) strongly agree that they are likely to use these strategies moving forward.

Figure 5

Teacher Survey Question #6 Responses



Note. Data show teachers' likelihood to use culturally responsive teaching strategies moving forward. 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, and 4=Strongly Agree (n=35).

School Themes. In question seven of the teacher survey, I asked teachers to elaborate on the previous response of their likelihood to use culturally responsive teaching strategies moving forward. This was an open-ended question with 35 responses. There were three major themes identified in teacher responses. I connected these major themes to interests and backgrounds, well-rounded students, and a positive learning environment.

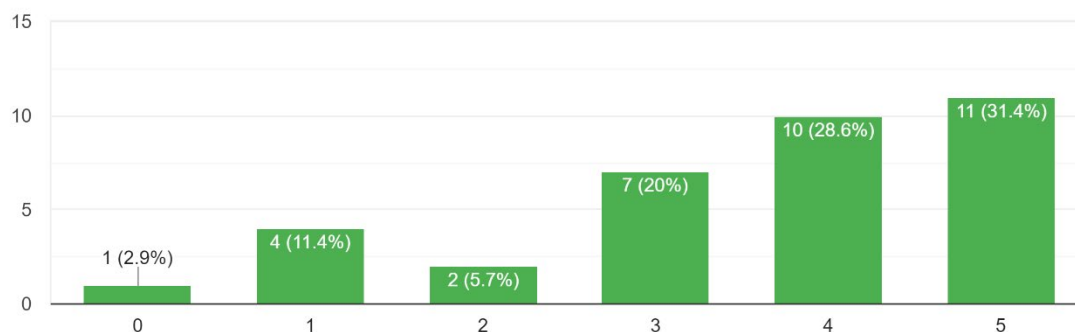
Connection to Interests and Backgrounds. Sixteen of the 35 teachers surveyed expressed culturally responsive teaching being a method to identify the interest and backgrounds of students. Research shows that understanding students' backgrounds and interest leads to community building in the learning environment. When teachers try to understand students' interests and backgrounds, they build meaningful relationships that serve as a partnership in the learning process. One teacher stated, "I love how involved my students become when they recognize that I am trying to understand and relate to their culture." Additionally, another teacher surveyed expressed they were more likely to use culturally responsive teaching strategies moving forward because "when the knowledge of learning stems from a student's background or everyday interactions, the students are more likely to make substantial connections and inferences."

Well-Rounded Students. Ten of the 35 teachers provided responses highlighting students' ability to become more well-rounded based on their ability to understand other cultures and backgrounds within the learning environment. The establishment of trust and high expectations for all students was attributed to students' openness to rise to the standards set in class. One teacher stated, "I will continue to use culturally responsive teaching because students who experience this form of teaching engage with academic

content in personally meaningful ways, build purpose, counter stereotypes, and develop their ability to connect across lines of difference.” Another teacher believes that students who can connect content and their environment are better equipped to learn and attain mastery.

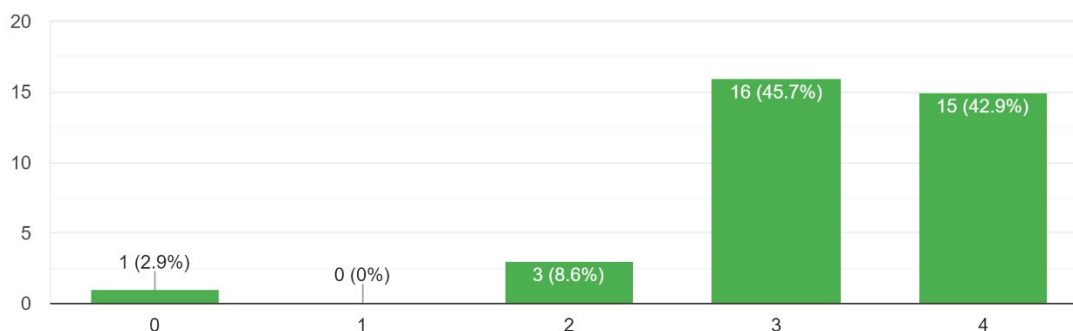
Positive Learning Environment. Four teachers provided responses that connected their desire to use culturally responsive teaching strategies to establish a positive learning environment. One teacher attributed their students’ attentiveness and decreased off-task behavior to culturally responsive teaching strategies. Another teacher responded, “Yes, I am likely to use culturally responsive teaching strategies in the classroom because it allows every student to be in a positive learning environment.” A teacher survey respondent expressed that culturally responsive teaching is worth the effort because it removes the barriers impacting their student’s ability to learn.

For question eight of the teacher survey, I asked a Likert scale question; I use culturally responsive teaching (strategies) to capture the frequency of the teacher using the strategies weekly. The Likert scale is 0-5 with 0=Not Using, 1= 1 Day, 2= 2 Days, 3= 3 Days, 4= 4 Days, and 5= 5 Days. There were 35 responses (Figure 6). One teacher (2.9%) said they do not use culturally responsive teaching strategies at any time during the school week. Four teachers (11.4%) use strategies once a week, and two teachers (5.7%) use strategies twice a week. The remaining teachers surveyed provided culturally responsive teaching strategies for most of the school week (three days or more). Seven teachers (20%) used strategies three days a week, 10 teachers (28.6%) used strategies four days a week, and 11 teachers (31.4%) used culturally responsive teaching strategies five days per week.

Figure 6*Teacher Survey Question #8 Responses*

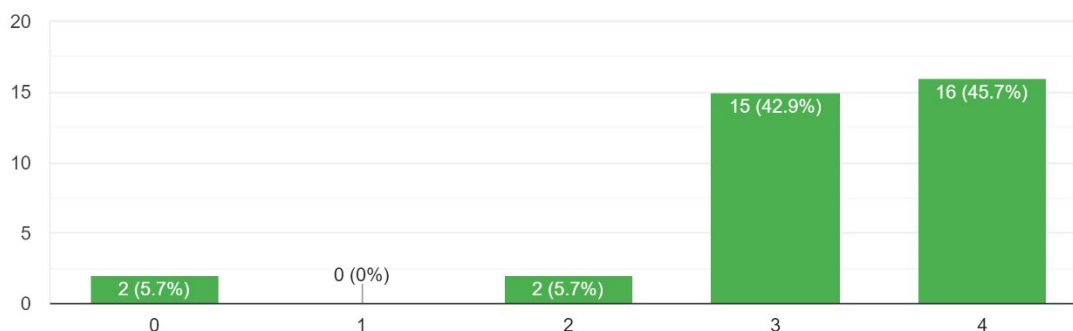
Note. Data shows the number of days per week teachers use culturally responsive teaching strategies. 0=Not Using, 1= 1 Day, 2= 2 Days, 3= 3 Days, 4= 4 Days, 5= 5 Days, (n=35).

In question nine of the teacher survey, I asked, my students were engaged with the content while implementing culturally responsive teaching practices. This was a Likert scale question where 0= Not Applicable (N/A), 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, and 4=Strongly Agree., and there were 35 responses (Figure 7). One teacher (2.9%) responded Not Applicable to this question. Three teachers (8.6%) disagree that students were engaged when using Culturally Responsive strategies. It is plausible that the three teachers who disagree responded this way due to not understanding/training on using these strategies. Sixteen (45.7%) of teachers agree, and fifteen (42.9%) strongly agree that students were academically engaged with content while culturally responsive teaching strategies were used.

Figure 7*Teacher Survey Question #9 Responses*

Note. Data show teachers' perception that students were engaged with content while implementing culturally responsive teaching practices. 0= Not Applicable (N/A), 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, and 4=Strongly Agree (n=35).

In question 10 of the teacher survey, I asked if I felt successful in my instructional pedagogy while using culturally responsive strategies. This was a Likert scale question where 0= Not Applicable (N/A), 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, and 4=Strongly Agree, and there were 35 responses (Figure. 8). Two teachers (5.7%) responded Not Applicable. Additionally, two teachers disagreed that they felt successful in their instructional pedagogy while using culturally responsive strategies. Fifteen teachers (42.9%) responded that they agree with feeling successful in their pedagogy while using culturally responsive strategies. Lastly, 16 teachers (45.7%) strongly agree that they felt successful in their instructional pedagogy while using culturally responsive strategies.

Figure 8*Teacher Survey Question #10 Responses*

Note. Data show teachers' success while implementing culturally responsive teaching strategies. 0= Not Applicable (N/A), 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, and 4=Strongly Agree (n=35).

School Themes. For question 11 of the teacher survey, I asked teachers to list reasons they feel culturally responsive teaching was or was not successful in increasing student achievement among African American students. This was an open-ended question with 35 responses. I identified two major themes in teacher responses. These themes were a sense of being and promoting community—the other typical response was none or not applicable.

Sense of Being. Fifteen of the 35 teachers that responded to this open-ended question expressed that culturally responsive teaching is successful for teaching African American students because it establishes a foundation of understanding, which impacts students' efforts in the learning process. One teacher expressed that using culturally responsive teaching strategies allowed students to “feel a sense of pride in themselves and their community and thus want to improve upon and achieve even greater success.” Another teacher responded that culturally responsive teaching was successful because the

students were willing to learn about other cultures and respected the values of other students. Students were able to see their differences celebrated in the learning environment. One teacher elaborated, “Some students historically have not been able to "see themselves" in their education, nor have they felt "seen" and embedding culturally responsive teaching gives African American students a greater chance of success and achievement. By teacher observation, students reached their full potential with their support.

Promotes Community. There were six teachers that provided responses specifically addressing the fostering of community that is established as a result of using culturally responsive teaching strategies for African American students. Teachers attributed the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies for promoting community and helping to reach consensus or a state of understanding. Teachers used words and phrases like “collaboratively” or “cooperatively” to identify students' engagement methods throughout a lesson or class period. One teacher expressed that embracing diverse cultures helped to “strengthen the connections” cultivated in the learning environment.

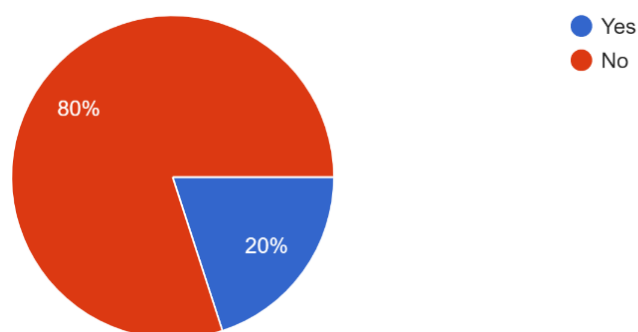
None. Three teachers provided responses outlining a lack of knowledge about how culturally responsive teaching was or was not impactful to the achievement of African American students. In addition, teachers responded to absenteeism, impacting their ability to understand how using culturally responsive teaching strategies impacted student academics. One teacher responded, “Culturally responsive teaching does not completely resolve the issues of absenteeism and is not easy to implement with prescribed curriculum constraints.” To this point, teachers may find it challenging to use

culturally responsive teaching strategies to meet the needs of students due to their lack of consistent presence in the learning environment. This could create additional barriers for teachers considering the expectations of curriculum delivery.

In question 12, I asked teachers if they would be willing to participate in a 30-minute interview. This was a multiple-choice question with 35 responses (Figure. 9). 28 teachers (80%) selected no, and seven teachers (20%) selected yes to participate in the interview. I will analyze the focus group responses in the interview section.

Figure 9

Teacher Survey Question #12 Responses



Note. n=35

Parent Survey Summary. For the first question of the parent survey, I asked: how old is your high school child/children? There were four parent responses to question one. Parent one responded that they had one child 15-16 years old and one child 17-18 years old. Parent two responded that they have a child that is 17-18 years old and another that is 19-20 years old. Parent three responded that they have a child aged 15-16 years old. Finally, parent four responded that they have one child aged 17-18.

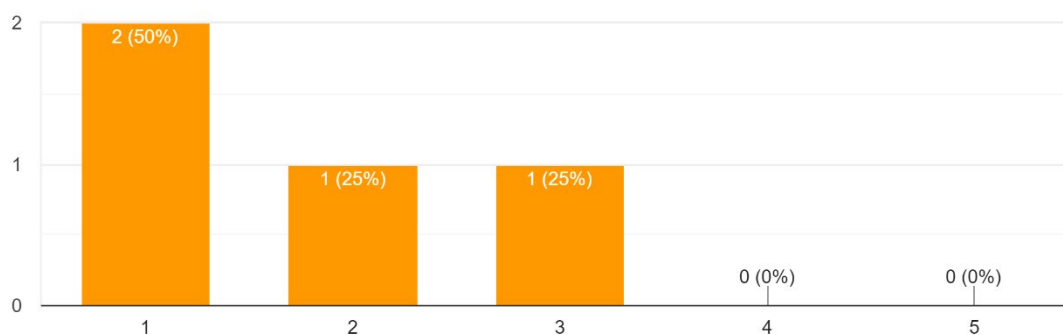
I asked for parents to provide the grade level of their child during the 2021-2022 academic school year for question two of the parent survey. Parent one responded that

they have a child that is a sophomore (10th grade) and a child that is a senior (12th grade). Parent two answered that they have two children who are seniors (12th grade). Parent three responded that their child is a sophomore (10th grade). Lastly, parent four responded that their child was a junior (11th grader).

For question three of the parent survey, I asked: During the week, culturally responsive teaching is used in my child/children's classroom. On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being 1 day and 5 being 5 days, please provide feedback ... 1= 1 Day, 2 = 2 Days, 3 = 3 Days, 4 = 4 Days, 5= 5 Days. This Likert-scale question captures the number of days per week their children were in classrooms where culturally responsive teaching strategies were used.

Figure 10

Parent Survey Question #3 Responses



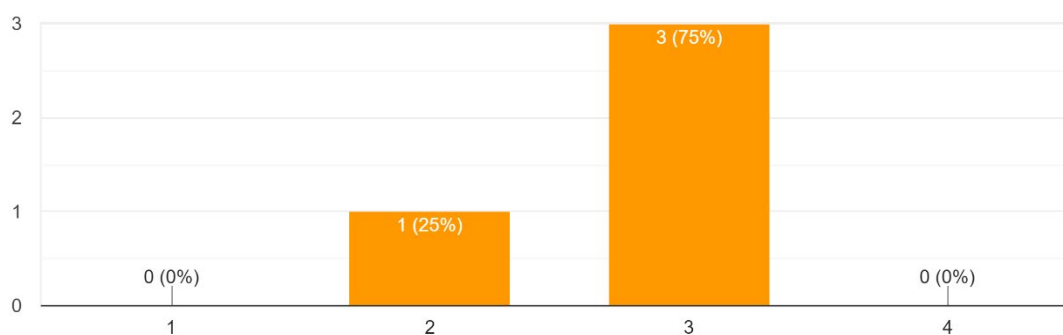
Note. Data shows how many days per week parents believed teachers use culturally responsive teaching strategies. 1= 1 Day, 2= 2 Days, 3= 3 Days, 4= 4 Days, 5= 5 Days, (n=4).

In question four of the parent survey, I asked: My child/children had increased academic performance while culturally responsive strategies were used. One parent

(25%) responded they disagreed that their child performed better academically due to culturally responsive teaching strategies. On the other hand, three parents (75%) agreed that their children had an increasing academic performance.

Figure 11

Parent Survey Question #4 Responses



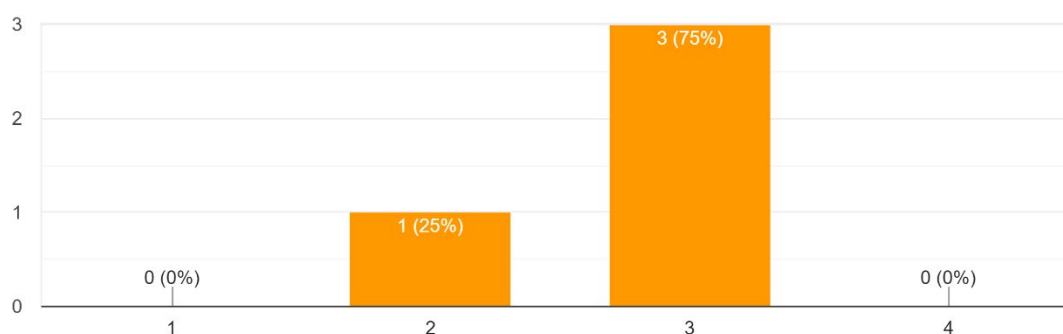
Note. Data show parents' perception of increasing academic performance due to culturally responsive teaching strategies. 0= Not Applicable (N/A), 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, and 4=Strongly Agree (n=4).

For question five of the parent survey, I asked: what evidence supports the idea that your child's academic performance improved due to culturally responsive teaching strategies? This was an open-ended question with four parent/guardian responses. Parent one states, "Her grades were higher, and she could relate to the cultural references used by the teacher. Parent two responded, "Sadly, racial profiling comes with cultural teachers through levels of aggression and non-caring. Parent two was likely the respondent who did not believe their child had favorable academic outcomes due to culturally responsive teaching strategies. Parent three articulated their child "feels better when all students are considered and included." Parent four responded that her child improved in grades and assessments.

For question six of the parent survey, I asked; if my child/children have increased engagement with the content while culturally responsive teaching strategies are being used. Again, this was an open-ended question with four responses. One parent (25%) responded that they disagree that their child is more engaged while using culturally responsive teaching strategies. The three remaining parent participants (75%) responded that their child/children were more engaged when teachers used these strategies.

Figure 12

Parent Survey Question #6 Responses



Note. Data show parents' perception of increasing engagement due to culturally responsive teaching strategies. 0= Not Applicable (N/A), 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, and 4=Strongly Agree (n=4).

Parent Survey Themes. For question seven of the parent survey, I asked: List reasons you (your child) feel culturally responsive teaching was or was not successful in increasing student achievement among African American students. This was an open-ended question, capturing three parent responses and one not-applicable response. However, two themes emerged in parent/guardian responses in influencing culture and none.

Influencing Culture. Two parents provided responses that directly relates to culturally responsive teaching having a positive impact on the overall learning environment culture. One parent stated they feel their child has higher self-esteem and a sense of belonging. Another parent believes culturally responsive teaching should be a course that teachers take based on its impact on the student's overall well-being and academic performance.

None. Two parents provided responses that were either not applicable or had no impact. While asking previous questions of the parent survey, there was one consistent response that culturally responsive teaching was not improving their child's academics. This parent responded, "judgmental, rude, and disrespectful." The parent may have other grievances impacting their response to the survey questions.

Teacher Interview Data

I conducted a teacher focus group which consisted of three participants. Correspondence was sent to all teacher survey participants that expressed interest in participating in a focus group. Invitation to the focus group was sent to the seven individuals who provided contact information. Three individuals responded with their informed consent and joined the focus group interview. The interview was scheduled to last thirty minutes with a total of five questions being asked.

Three teachers agreed to participate in the teacher focus group. My first question to the participants was briefly sharing their teacher background. Participant A started as a paraprofessional in an autism unit for kindergarten through fifth grade. Following this role, they taught two years of science at a Title I middle school in a large urban district. This educator went on to teach a year of environmental science in another district before

returning to work at the participating evaluation school for three years, teaching agriculture. Currently, they work as a community partnership manager for charter schools within the school district, focusing on dropout prevention. Participant B is in their 14th year of teaching. They have a dual certification in English and social studies and reading endorsed. This educator has worked in small rural and large urban school districts teaching social studies. Participant C has taught for 9 years. Their certification is in math, and they also have an ESE certification and reading endorsement. For the past five years, they have supported students with Individual Education Plans (IEP) and other behavioral support needs.

Next, for question two, I asked: what type of professional development have you had related to culturally responsive teaching? Participant A served as a school representative for the district for the culturally responsive teaching series. It was a series of courses regarding culturally responsive teaching, but the participant also had some previous training. The participant also selected a focus teaching element in the past related to understanding students' backgrounds and interests. Participant B has previous experience with culturally responsive teaching from a large school district up north, where it was an initiative of the school district. They would meet weekly for professional development and training surrounding the initiative and improving student academic outcomes. Participant C has had no formal training in culturally responsive teaching. However, the participant did note that they believe culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogy that is learned through experience and supporting diverse learners.

For question three, I asked; how would you compare your experiences with using culturally responsive teaching strategies versus traditional strategies when teaching

African American students? Participant A responded that they have observed with the African American student population that traditional scaffolding doesn't necessarily consider the factors such as trauma or poverty, which may impact their ability to learn. Participant A says, "culturally responsive teaching is more about the whole student, you know their social, emotional, academic, all of that with regards to like how they learn instead of just outcomes." Participant B considers "culturally responsive teaching to be more of a holistic approach to education than just using scaffolding or the strategies for students to achieve in one area. Participant B continues, "For students, we know that if we can't meet those basic needs, we can't ever get them to those higher levels. In addition, Participant B explains that "if we are looking at the whole student, we have to become familiar with the things they may bring into the classroom with them so we can assist them in differentiating what they should leave outside the learning environment."

Participant C agreed with what had been shared by Participants A and B and added that beyond addressing student needs is the collaboration that takes place in a work environment that supports or uses culturally responsive teaching. It makes you "more aware of your colleague's backgrounds and appreciating what they bring to the table."

Participant C encourages "making space" to build those relationships as colleagues may also have experiences that could assist with barriers others have in the classroom.

For question four of the focus group interview, I asked: can you describe the culturally responsive teaching procedures and routines you have established in your classroom that you feel have positively impacted student achievement? Participant A started off addressing the visual impact of the classroom and trying to make students feel it was a safe space. In addition to this, Participant A said it was essential to be at the door

greeting each student by name, so it was a welcoming space from the beginning.

Participant A also addressed the organization and structure of the class. “People do not realize, predictability, removes a lot of stress from the learning environment.” Students never had to wonder about expectations because they did not change. Lastly, Participant A addressed being responsive to students when they needed support. This could be responding to student emails or addressing when you have witnessed a change in student behavior.

Participant B said similarly, “It starts at the door”; checking in with students and bringing up things you want to show them is crucial. Participant B goes on to say that by focusing on creating a welcoming space and connecting to students, you build relationships, not always knowing the positive impact you are having on students. Students also desire the predictability and structure of classroom routines because they may not always have that outside the classroom. Students do not need any favors done for them by not holding them to the same standards as others. Participant B states in their experience, “If educators have high expectations, students will rise to meet those standards.” Participant A provides a follow-up response to Participant B: “It’s important to celebrate the small successes.” It may not look the same for every student, and what is success for one student may not translate the same for another student. Participant A says that students would start off frustrated in class because instead of just giving a zero or letting students off the hook, they would get feedback about how to attain a mastery grade and the opportunity to meet that expectation. Students had a safe space to go through the learning process while being assisted in meeting the mastery standards. Participant B responded that it is essential to address and reward students for modifying

their behavior to be more successful academically. Participant C addresses the importance of teaching students at the rigor of the standard and providing the appropriate scaffolds. It is common for beginning teachers to believe the solution is to make the instruction and aligned tasks easier for students. Participant C highlights that building relationships were meaningful because students were willing to try even when it was hard because they knew they had a supportive teacher who would ensure they knew what they needed to know. Students could be risk-takers because they knew they received instruction at the level they should perform, which made meeting the standard more accessible.

For question five, I asked participants if there was anything else they would like to add from the teachers' point of view regarding culturally responsive teaching. All three participants said they might never be able to make certain connections with students based on their cultural backgrounds and generational gap. As a result, it is vital to be aware that every person comes to the learning environment with different experiences and frames of reference that impact our ability to engage in the learning process. For example, participant A says, "You have to be willing to have uncomfortable or tough conversations with your students." The participant says, "I think we really need to understand that children today live a completely different life than children 10 years ago and just because I didn't experience a childhood like that doesn't mean that they do not." Participant B adds that teachers have to understand that it is not something they should be afraid of or that it adds to their workload. Finally, participant C says ultimately, we have to own the impact our race or cultural references have on our view of the world and find ways to use that understanding to be responsive to all students.

Principal Interview Data

The first question I asked the principal was how long they had been in the education field as a teacher and administrator. The principal responded that they started teaching in 1996 and became an administrator in 2003. Principalship for the administrator began in 2009 after serving as an Assistant Principal for six years.

The second question I asked was, how has teacher use of culturally responsive teaching strategies impacted student learning in school? The principal stated they had experience in schools in at least two states with culturally and socioeconomically diverse environments. At the evaluation school, there was considerable effort to create pathways for students to enter advanced and honors courses so that all classes reflected the student population. The principal stated that the critical component was ensuring teachers had training to be respectful and inclusive of different cultures. The principal stated that students “needed to feel heard, seen, and respected to take advantage of teachers' instructional decisions.” Not only did it include various cultural viewpoints in the classroom to shift the culture of the classroom environment, but it also led to more robust discussions and learning.

The principal shared a previous experience at a school in a different state than the evaluation site, which was minority-majority. As an Assistant Principal at the time, the Administration team established a Professional Development series focused on culturally responsive teaching. Teachers were trained on the selection of course materials that were relevant to students, how to facilitate meaningful discussions, and how to form relationships with students. The training was established so it was accessible to all faculty/staff and did not overwhelm participants. The participating Principal goes on to

share that they may have played it too safe then as they considered the feelings and reception of the training by teachers, while students expressed that they did not feel they had a voice at school. Nevertheless, students were appreciative of the efforts shown, and there were improvements in attendance and student grades.

The principal talked about the contrasting experiences at the participating evaluation high school. The historically African American high school has existed for over 120 years and has a well-established culture and climate. As a result, any disturbance or changes to the established culture led to other challenges. For example, when there was a rezoning to bring more students into the high school, the principal and school had to adjust and do activities specifically focused on celebrating different cultures and backgrounds. They state, "It's always hard to tie culture and those specific strategies to student achievement, but giving the students and staff members a sense of purpose, belonging, and pride makes them want to do better in all areas."

For question three of the interview, I asked, how can you, as an administrator, make a difference in using culturally responsive teaching strategies? The principal responded, "be a role model and walk the walk." They elaborated that students need Administrators to be genuine to build meaningful relationships. "It is common to believe that you can only relate to your students if you come from similar backgrounds. "Students want sincerity, commitment, and true interest in who they are." They conclude by saying, "I like to think I was an example of meeting students where they are and helping them become better by respecting who they are, where they come from, and leading others to do the same."

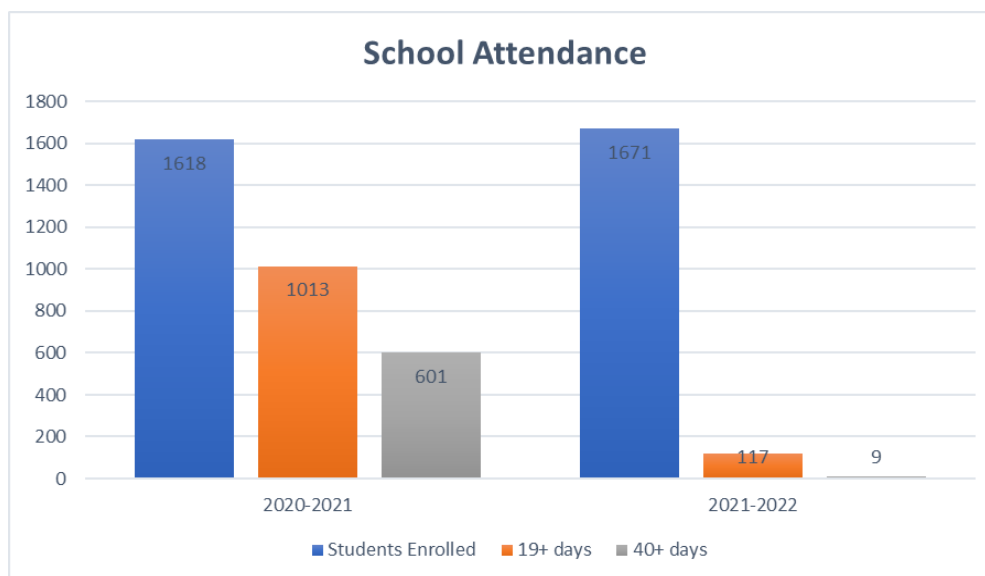
On question four, I asked what strategies you have put in place to monitor the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies and their impact on student achievement at your school. The principal responded that frequent formal and informal check-ins were a priority. Additionally, ensuring teachers and administrators had a seat at the table in the planning process of district lesson plans and assessments was essential to understanding standard alignment and high-yield instructional strategies. The principal states, “Having a voice led to a foundational understanding amongst leadership personnel of supporting teachers so that monitoring instruction and data analysis was more efficient, which allowed for needed adjustments.” Creating professional development that reflects culturally responsive teaching and giving teachers the space and security to practice those strategies with no punitive outcomes was extremely important. The Curriculum Resource Teacher (CRT), who wrote and facilitated professional development, also ensured teachers knew how to pull and analyze data to make informed decisions about how they support students in the classroom.

For the interview’s final question, I asked if you feel culturally responsive teaching is an attainable focus in schools to meet the needs of African American students. The principal responded, “With the teacher shortage and even more so, the African American teacher shortage, we need to give current and future educators the tools to reach our students.” Additionally, it is an attainable focus because culturally responsive teaching helps teachers reach students, support them academically, and feel the satisfaction of narrowing the achievement gap within their classrooms and school-wide. “Many barriers that impact an African American student’s learning are no fault or control

of their own. We must remove the judgment and disconnect, and foster respect and cultural responsiveness so students can thrive.”

Extant Data

Attendance. The 2020-2021 academic school year was the return to school following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The district and school provided parents and guardians with the decision to enroll students in a virtual innovation model (digital learning) or brick-and-mortar. Approximately 700/1618 actively enrolled students attended brick-and-mortar school for the evaluation school during the 2020-2021 academic year. Data show that there were 1,013 students with 19 or more absences and 601 students with 40 or more absences from school. This could be attributed to students not signing into digital learning or missing school due to sickness or exposure to COVID-19. In comparison, during the 2021-2022 academic school year, only three students of the same 601 students missed 40 or more school days. In total, during the 2021-2022 school year, 117/1671 students missed 19 or more days, and only nine students were absent for 40 or more days.

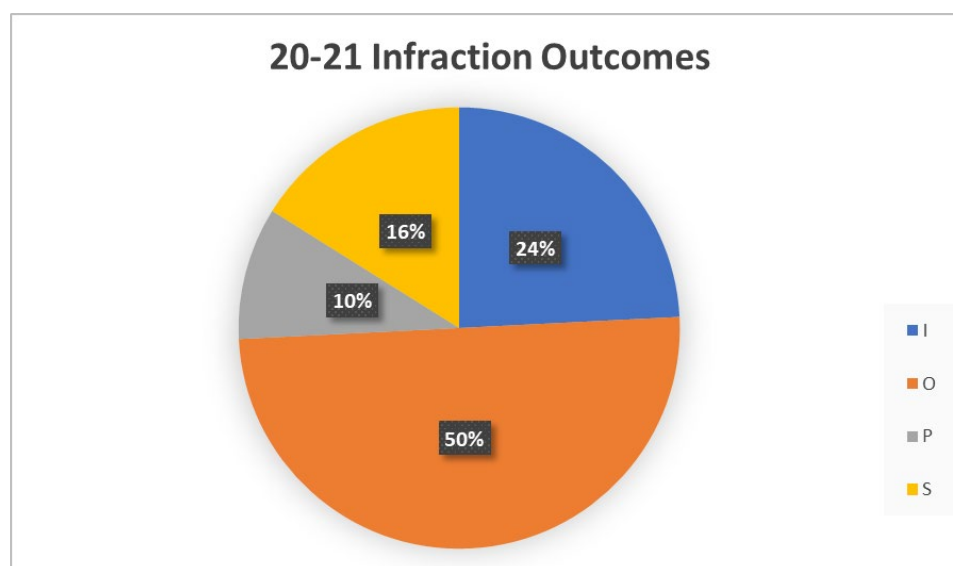
Figure 13*School Attendance*

Note. n=1618 for 2020-2021 and n=1671 for 2021-2022

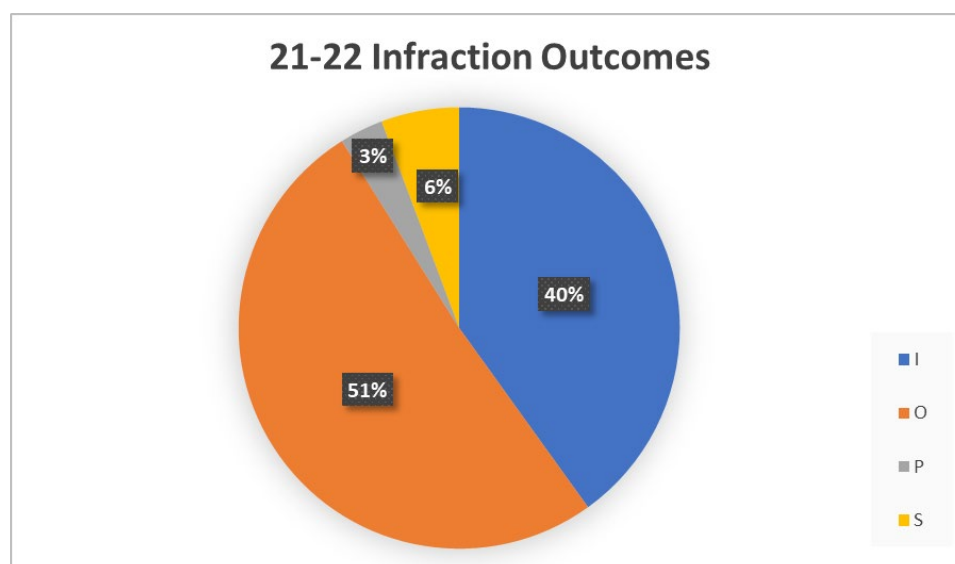
Course Outcomes. During the 2020-2021 school year, there were 322 failed courses out of the 12,076 courses (2.7%) taken at the evaluation school. A total of 232 students earned the 322 failed courses. This means the majority of students were passing classes. In contrast, during the 2021-2022 school year, the schools provided 989 failed courses out of 10,989 courses (9%) that school year. Notably, many students earned one or more failing (F) grades during the two academic years evaluated. Data provided showed only 519 students who received one or more F grades during the 2021-2022 school year. This means that most students who received failure grades comprised approximately 31% of the entire student population at the evaluation school site. The failed courses evaluated by grade level provided a clear depiction of where most courses failed. During the 2020-2021 school year, a total of 164 failure grades (50.9%) were earned by a freshman, 73 by sophomores (22.7%), 63 by juniors (19.6%), and 22 by

seniors (6.8%). During the 2021-2022 school year a total of 360 failure grades (36.4%) were earned by freshmen, 332 by sophomores (33.6%), 232 by juniors (23.4%), and 65 by seniors (6.6%). Most failed courses occurred for underclassmen (first- and second-year students).

Discipline. A total of 62 level three or higher infractions were given to students during the 2020-2021 school year resulting in consequences. Fifteen of those infractions resulted in In School Suspension (ISS)/(I), 31 resulted in out-of-school suspension (O), six infractions were identified as “placement in alternative education setting” (P), and ten were defined as School Environmental Safety Incident Reporting (SESIR)/(S) incidents. The SESIR “S” code clearly defines actions that fall within this category. It may require students to attend additional activities to continue their regular course of studies, such as drug prevention programs or community service. It is important to note that there were only 12 infractions that resulted in a student receiving more than ten days out of school during the 2020-2021 school year—six of those infractions (P) required students to be placed in an alternative learning setting. The remaining six infractions were categorized as SESIR infractions and would have encompassed the entire duration of the condition even if students were back in school. The customary practice is to assign a consequence of no more than ten days while a student can return to school while completing the S-defined conditions.

Figure 14*2020-2021 Discipline Infractions**Note. n=62*

During the 2021-2022 school year, there were 617 level three or higher infractions. 247 of the 617 infractions resulted in In School Suspension (ISS), 314 resulted in out-of-school suspension, 20 infractions resulted in alternate education placement, 35 S infractions, and one Expulsion. A total of 27 offenses resulted in more than ten days out of traditional school placement or an extended conditional requirement for the infraction. The 35 infractions identified as SESIR ranged from 14 to 90 days, with the majority being in the 30-day range. The 20 infractions coded to have placement in an alternative education setting (P) ranged in sanction days from 16 to 99 days. The final infraction resulting in an extended consequence was the one student expulsion resulting in a 195-day consequence.

Figure 15*2021-2022 Discipline Infractions**Note.* n=617

ELA Achievement. During the Spring 2020 test administration for the English Language Arts (ELA) assessment, there were a total of 447 students identified to take the ELA 9 test with scores. There was a total of 370 students (82.8%) who took the assessment and received scores. 81 (21.9%) of 9th-grade students scored a level three or higher on the assessment. Additionally, 184 (49.7%) 9th graders were at level one, and 105 (28.4%) students were at level two. There were 399 10th graders slated to take the ELA 10 assessment during 2020-2021. A total of 337 students (84.5%) took the assessment and received a score. 92 (27.3%) students were proficient on the ELA 10 assessment, scoring a level three or higher. The remaining breakdown for ELA 10 achievement during the 2020-2021 ELA 10 assessment was 160 (47.5%) ELA 10 students identified as level one and 85 (25.2%) ELA 10 students were identified as level two.

Table 1*2020-2021 ELA Assessment Data*

Assessment	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3+
ELA 9	184 students (49.7%)	105 students (28.4%)	81 students (21.9%)
ELA 10	160 students (47.5%)	85 students (25.2%)	92 students (27.3%)

Note. Assessment data n=370 for ELA 9 and n=337 for ELA 10

During the 2021- 2022 school year, there were 431 students slated to take the ELA 9 assessment with 403 students (93.5%) having scores. Ninety-five students (23.6%) were proficient with a level three or higher on the ELA 9 state assessment during the 2021-2022 school year. There were 192 students (47.6%) who scored level one on the ELA 9 assessment and 116 (28.8%) who scored level two. 451 students were slated to take the ELA 10 assessment with 404 students (89.6%) sitting for the 2021-2022 assessment and receiving a score. On the ELA 10 assessment, 85 students (21%) were proficient with a level three or higher. The remaining student outcomes on the ELA 10 assessment were 227 students (56.2%) who earned level one and 92 students (22.8%) earning a level two. 10.4 % of students expected to take the ELA 10 assessment had no scores and did not sit for the test administration.

Table 2*2021-2022 ELA Assessment Data*

Assessment	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3+
ELA 9	192 students (47.6%)	116 students (28.8%)	95 students (23.6%)
ELA 10	227 students (56.2%)	92 students (22.8%)	85 students (21%)

Note. Assessment data n=403 for ELA 9 and n=404 for ELA 10

Of the 312 students with ELA assessment scores for the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years, 77 showed a decline in scale scores. While this did not always impact students' proficiency level, it does reflect that the 2024 cohort had evidence that some students had learning loss from the 2020-2021 to 2021-2022 school year. During the 2021-2022 Spring ELA 10 administration, 68 of the 312 students (21.8%) passed the assessment with a level three or higher, thus satisfying a graduation requirement. During the 2020-2021 ELA assessment, 46 of the 68 students (67.6%) who were proficient on the 2021-2022 ELA 10 assessment were proficient on the ELA 9 assessment. This means 22 students (32.4%) with available data for both years had learning gains and increased their ELA achievement scores to become proficient from 2020-2021 to 2021-2022. One of the 68 students was not African American, and all 46 students who were proficient on their ELA 9 (2020-2021) and ELA 10 (2021-2022) assessments were African American.

Interpretation

Through the teacher and parent survey, I gained insight into the perception those stakeholders have about culturally responsive teaching and its impact on the engagement and achievement of African American students. The majority (82.9%) of the teachers surveyed believed students performed better academically because of culturally responsive teaching strategies. Similarly, three parents (75%) that filled out the parent survey believe their child performed better academically because of culturally responsive teaching strategies. Both teachers and parents expanded their viewpoint by addressing students performing better in class and on assessments. 88.6% of the teachers surveyed, 16 agree and 15 strongly agree, believed students were engaged while they used culturally responsive teaching strategies and approaches to learning. Three parents (75%)

also responded that students had more engagement due to culturally responsive teaching strategies.

The significance of the themes emerging from the surveys and interviews shows the consistency of ideas outlined from the foundation of culturally responsive teaching. Hammond (2015) states, “At the core of positive relationships is trust, and caring is the way we generate trust to build relationships” (p. 73). Zaretta Hammond reinforces the idea established by Geneva Gay (2010) that “positive relationships exemplified as ‘caring’ is one of the major pillars of culturally responsive teaching” (Hammond, 2015, p. 72). The responses provided by teachers and parents are evidence that using culturally responsive teaching strategies establishes relational trust, leading to student satisfaction that could positively encourage achievement. Due to the secondary school structure in this district, students see seven teachers throughout the day to receive core and elective instruction. Additionally, students are toward the end of their public high school education, meaning some of the at-risk indicators associated with the achievement gap have likely been engrained by teachers into who they perceive themselves to be. The evaluation data indicate an education setting where teachers have to differentiate their approach to reach every student authentically.

The COVID-19 pandemic played a significant part in the overall culture and climate of education since 2020. With conflicting opinions about students being in traditional brick-and-mortar settings versus virtual learning, there is no disagreement that students have faced a significant learning loss over the last few years. Additionally, the impact of the pandemic on the social and emotional well-being of students could have contributed to the increase or decline in student performance. As a result, teachers made

an intentional effort to support the needs of their students while also going through a pandemic themselves.

The primary research question; How does culturally responsive teaching impact African American students' ability to learn, was directly addressed in the teacher and parent responses on the survey about student engagement and academic performance. The results were positive, as the majority of both stakeholder groups believed students were more engaged and performed better when culturally responsive teaching strategies were used. While the research question specifically addressed racial demographics, the teacher and parent responses made it evident that culturally responsive teaching strategies improve relationships and academic outcomes for most students.

The secondary research question; to what extent does culturally responsive teaching improve the achievement on state assessments for African American students, is addressed in the extant data for the English Language Arts (ELA) 9 and 10 state assessment. During the 2020-2021 academic school year, ELA for ninth and tenth grade at the evaluation school had 26% of students who were proficient and scored a three or higher on the state assessment. During the 2021-2022 academic school year 24% of ELA 9 and 10 students were proficient with 34% of students achieving a learning gain and 31% of lowest quartile (25%) earning a learning gain. Although there was a 2% decrease in overall proficiency between the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 academic school year, there was a 1% increase in students earning a learning gain from 33% to 34% and a 5% increase in ELA 9 and 10 learning gains for the lowest quartile from 26% to 31%. This is an indicator that culturally responsive teaching was tapping into the potential of students by seeing these learning gains for all students and the lowest 25%.

When addressing the following research question about what differences happen for classroom students when culturally responsive teaching strategies are used, I needed to evaluate the teacher and parent surveys. The teachers who used culturally responsive teaching strategies in their classrooms shared students' willingness to be engaged in the learning process. This relates to the overall culture established by the teachers and students feeling safe in the learning environment to go through the learning experience. Parents also addressed their children's willingness to participate and better academic outcomes when teachers used culturally responsive teaching strategies. Both stakeholder groups believe culturally responsive teaching strategies allow students to feel comfortable with risk-taking, ultimately leading to favorable achievement outcomes.

When evaluating how culturally responsive teaching explicitly supports the teaching and learning (achievement) of African American students, I gained insight from the ELA assessment data provided by the district research team. Apparently, teachers made learning gains with the lowest 25% of students. While most students remain in the same level and bucket for assessments consistently, those provided interventions increase the chance of moving up in achievement. While the achievement scores vary slightly from 2020-2021 to 2021-2022, it is essential to address the impact attendance may have had on the overall achievement outcomes of students.

Research shows that missing 10% or roughly 18 days (about 2 and a half weeks) constitutes chronic absenteeism. Missing 10% to 15% of school during the school year could negatively impact students' academic performance (Gottfried, 2015). During the 2020-2021 school year, 1,013/1618 students (62.6%) missed 19 or more days. Based on this data, it is probable most students entered the 2021-2022 school year with more

significant achievement gaps and increased academic deficiencies than the norm. The introduction of this new educational barrier and the onset of increased social and emotional needs of students could have been a cause for culturally responsive teaching strategies not producing more significant outcomes in the achievement data.

The following research question is, what characteristics of culturally responsive teaching significantly impact student learning and achievement? This question could be answered by my analysis of the teacher interviews. The four participants of the teacher focus group spoke to the idea that “students do not care what you know until they know that you care.” Each participant addressed the significant changes they saw in students when they tried to understand their interests and backgrounds. Additionally, two participants in the focus group spoke on being aware of the cultural values they bring into the classroom setting. Understanding the values and beliefs you bring into the classroom assists in identifying how those actions may act as a barrier when educating students of culturally diverse backgrounds. Teacher participants in the survey and focus group also addressed that communicating high expectations led students to grow in their ability to meet those expectations.

The final research question, examples of culturally responsive pedagogy when used with fidelity in action, was directly addressed during the teacher focus group and Principal interview. High expectations indicate that you believe students can rise to the occasion. While high expectations may not always encompass meeting proficiency, it requires substantial student effort to meet a measurable target. Teachers said having specific requirements for classroom rules and procedures and academic expectations took the “guessing” away from students. They helped remove unnecessary barriers like

knowing when assignments are due or methods to get a higher grade on a project.

Maintaining student-driven or centered classrooms is essential for culturally responsive teaching as it puts students into the driver's seat of their learning experience. As students take on this responsibility of establishing meaningful learning experiences, they begin to commit to reaching the goals set for them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I analyzed data to evaluate the impact of culturally responsive teaching on the academic achievement of African American students. I identified that teachers at the evaluation school believed students improved academic performance as a result of culturally responsive strategies being used in the classroom. The data collected from the parent and teacher surveys were both consistent in the belief that students performed better academically while culturally responsive teaching strategies were used. Although achievement outcomes did not show significant gains for ELA 9 and 10 from the 2020-2021 to 2021-2022 academic school year, there were significant strides made with the lower quartile of students taking those assessments.

The data collected from other indicators like attendance and discipline records showed some improvement from the 2020-2021 to 2021-2022 school year. This is indicative of students who are establishing a sense of belonging and intrinsic motivation to show up and do their best. Additionally, all teachers did not receive the culturally responsive teaching training which could display some inconsistencies in performance outcomes in academic courses. Nevertheless, data is headed in a positive trajectory, which could further enhance student achievement. In Chapter 5, I will encompass my

vision for future actions necessary based on the four arenas of change as outlined by the work of Wagner et al. (2006).

Chapter Five: To-Be Framework

Through the evaluation data, I was provided insight into the overall impact of culturally responsive teaching on the learning environment and associated achievement outcomes of students within the evaluation school. Through the findings, I revealed when culturally responsive teaching strategies are used, students find a sense of belonging and have positive results in multiple stages of the learning experience. In addition, it is apparent that culturally responsive teaching strategies made both teachers and parents (students) feel more favorably about the overall learning experience.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on education. By April 2020, most schools started to see the transition from traditional brick-and-mortar learning to virtual experiences. This impacted schools across the nation differently, as some schools and districts had the foundational infrastructure to support students outside of the traditional learning environment and others did not. Digital platforms allowed teachers and schools to provide synchronous and asynchronous learning experiences although access to some resources such as electricity or internet made reaching some students and neighborhoods difficult.

Researchers contend that without mitigation, children could lose more than a year's learning from a three-month school closure (Kaffenberger, 2021). The district of the evaluation school was already in the midst of a pilot digital device one-to-one program which was approved by the district's school board in 2013. The district's eight phase pilot program was committed to having all students and teachers in K-12 with digital devices by 2021. Although in this district the infrastructure was in place to virtually support most students during the pandemic, there were learning curves that

came with supporting students through solely digital means. Teachers would report the lack of attendance and participation for students whose parents elected for them to attend all or some portion of the 2020-2021 academic school year virtually. As a result of these contributing factors, it is possible some achievement outcomes are tied to the learning loss associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research into learning loss associated with the pandemic expresses the need for the narrative and framing of students to shift positively to tap into student capacities to meet learning mastery benchmarks (Mitchell & Greer, 2022). During the pandemic, some secondary students received waivers and exemptions to meet graduation requirements. This has led to a sense of apathy toward learning in many schools. Considering the achievement gap already present for minority students, this apathy could lead to substantial learning gaps for minority students and predominately minority schools. The extant data collected for this evaluation compared the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 academic school years for a list of factors that could indicate any level of impact the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies had on student achievement.

As-Is

The current data of the district and school of evaluation require problem solving and shared decision making. While all stakeholders may have different priorities, the lens they should be looking through is student learning and achievement. The district has made great efforts to meet the needs of its diverse learners. The foundation of the district provided curriculum and resources models grade-level tasks. It will take all stakeholders to come together to identify the different access points teachers and school-based leaders can use to encourage students while narrowing the achievement gap.

Contexts

The authors of *Change Leadership: A Practical Guide to Transforming Our Schools* define context as the “demands and expectations, formal and informal,” of the more extensive organizational system (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 104). The foundation of the context of my evaluation is the achievement of African American students. With the introduction of high-stakes testing, African American students were a focal subgroup in their inability to meet the standards or expectations set forth with high-stakes testing. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was established in response to the “National Commission on Excellence in Education’s release of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* of 1983” (Kubiszyn & Borich, 2013, p. 14). No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was enacted in 2001 to ensure equitable achievement amongst students in the United States public school system. Two subgroups identified in No Child Left Behind, economically disadvantaged students and students from major racial and ethnic groups, were highlighted for needing support to narrow the achievement gap.

The related research question of this study was; to what extent does culturally responsive teaching improve the achievement on state assessments for African American students? This question relates to the ongoing challenge of poor test scores on state assessments. Students performing poorly on assessments present a more significant contextual issue, as grade-level promotion and graduation requirements are based on state assessment outcomes. The participating high school of this study reflects an environment that serves predominately African American students. In addition, 70% of the population served at the school are identified as socioeconomically disadvantaged. Race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status are two indicators that impact student achievement in schools.

I wanted to know if culturally responsive strategies would impact the achievement of African American students, ultimately narrowing the achievement gap. During the 2020-2021 academic school year, 61% of Caucasian students in the state, 46% of Hispanic students in the state, and 33% of African American students in the state were proficient (level 3 or higher) on the State ELA 9-10. When evaluating the African American and Caucasian population across the state, there is a significant achievement gap. Achievement data by subgroup is consistent for the district and Title I high school participating in the study. I will provide the schools and district information about the impact of the use of culturally responsive teaching on closing the achievement gap for African American students in hopes of making strides to meet the needs of those students and other minority subgroups alike.

Culture

An organization's culture is identified by the “invisible but powerful meanings and mindsets held individually and collectively throughout the system (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 102). The participating schools are within a district whose vision commits to ensuring every student is successful through diversified career and education pathways and family/community partnerships. The department tasked with supporting underperforming schools within the district was established to ensure those schools and students were provided the necessary support and monitoring to narrow the achievement gap. The primary research question is; How does culturally responsive teaching impact African American students’ learning ability? Zaretta Hammond (2015) identifies culturally responsive teaching as a “serious and powerful tool for accelerating student

learning” (p. 3). This requires educators to see the pedagogical practice as a method to build students' brain power versus simply making connections to culture.

In a secondary research question of this study, I asked how culturally responsive teaching explicitly supports the teaching/learning (achievement) of African American students. In the capturing of extant student data related to attendance, discipline, and course performance, I provide data on what, if any, factors are directly related to the use of culturally responsive pedagogy and what implications that could have on student achievement. Hoy and Miskel (2013 expressed that there is no quick or simple way to change the culture and climate of an organization (p. 200). To this point, school leaders must continually evaluate their organizational structure to determine if their instructional practices meet the needs of all students.

The current culture of the school district is one where student achievement is a focal point. The same is true for meeting the needs of racial/ethnic subgroups, as these schools often receive tier two and tier three support to meet academic goals. The Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) approach provides interventions and support to schools based on a criterion. As stated, tier two and three schools within this district are identified based on poor school grades, low or declining student achievement, and inconsistent teacher performance. The district established the process responsible for identifying schools needing support by evaluating students' academic achievement yearly. As a result, schools receive intervention support to improve instruction and student learning with consistent monitoring. This shows a commitment to meeting the needs of all students. Through my program evaluation, I would like to raise awareness

about culturally responsive teaching as a possible solution to narrowing the achievement gap for African American students at some tier-two and three schools.

Conditions

Conditions can be defined as the time, space, and resources that surround and impact student learning (Wagner et al., 2006). My research question: What differences happen in classrooms for students when culturally responsive teaching strategies are used, is directly impacted by the conditions of the district and school. Culturally responsive teaching is a new initiative in the district where each school should have a “champion” who is provided training by the district and can take that knowledge back to schools. If school leaders have prioritized this initiative, there should be a foundational knowledge of culturally responsive teaching at each school. Professional development is a critical component and should be an embedded condition to ensure the understanding and appropriate use of strategies at the school level along with continuous monitoring.

My next related research question is: What characteristics of culturally responsive teaching have the most significant impact on student learning and achievement? This is especially impacted by district conditions as culturally responsive teaching strategies are not a focus when supporting schools that are underperforming although many of these schools serve predominately minority students. This is partly due to the focus on real-time data analysis and ensuring instruction appropriately meets the rigor of the standard and instructional decisions are made with intentionality. In addition, school and district leaders must be intentional with time and streamline efforts for educators to avoid burnout and turnover. This is even more true with the current morale of educators as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Competencies

Competencies can be defined as the collection of knowledge and skills teachers and administrators should possess which impacts student learning (Wagner et al., 2006). My research question: What are examples of culturally responsive pedagogy when used with fidelity in action, explored the competency of educators and school leaders to understand culturally responsive teaching strategies and how they impact learning. As stated previously, culturally responsive teaching was identified as a district initiative where individuals could be trained in pedagogical practice. With the controversy attached to the topic, it will take a change agent to prioritize building the capacity of educators in this pedagogical practice. Zaretta Hammond (2015) notes school leaders should “create safe spaces for teachers to expand their instructional repertoire to be more culturally responsive” (p. 153). To this point, building the competencies of teachers requires a learning environment that is psychologically safe.

Envisioning the Success To-Be

Establishing a district and culture climate that empowers and supports all students’ success surpasses simply desiring for students to be successful. The ideal setting would be where the desire for students to be successful becomes a reality for all students. A culture and climate shift require all stakeholders working collaboratively together to accomplish goals.

Contexts

The district is the fourth largest in its state with students from over 208 countries and speaking 166 languages and dialects during the 2021-2022 academic school year. With a population of over 200,000 students, leaders must be cognizant of how the diverse

student population served is impacted by increasing academic requirements and the factors that could lead to student disengagement or declining performance. The diverse composition of this district highlights the importance of all school and district policies being reflective of the stakeholders they serve. School and district leaders must prioritize community partnerships and initiatives that consider the needs of every student regardless of their overall denominator in the school or district demographics. The composition of the district increases the chance that students come from families and homes where English is not the primary or native language. As such, educators must be equipped with the tools necessary to support culturally diverse populations within the learning environment (Glatthorn et al., 2019, p. 202).

The evaluation school and district are in the transition phase of new leadership, with the current Superintendent and Principal starting at the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year. As a result, there should be some reflection and evaluation of initiatives and change approaches to determine if they adequately support culturally diverse students. The district's school board voted and approved the 2025 strategic plan in 2019. To meet the district's current vision and mission, leaders must efficiently and effectively evaluate current operations and how they meet the needs of diverse learners. The district's vision of ensuring every student is successful starts by understanding the unique needs of diverse student populations. Researchers express the common belief that "school reform efforts are linked directly and indirectly to the perception that teaching and learning will improve based on directives, legislative action, and administrative regulations" (Thornton et al., 2019, p. 131). To this point, district and school leaders must be change agents prioritizing improving student achievement by putting the necessary safeguards in place

to ensure schools adequately meet every student's needs. Explicit and clear communication is necessary for all stakeholders to understand the data driving the need for any anticipated change directives or initiatives.

As stated previously, the COVID-19 pandemic played a major role in the overall learning loss students experienced. As a result, district and school leaders have to evaluate how interventions and remediation are provided to students to fill any achievement gaps. The pandemic has also been a contributing factor in educators leaving the profession resulting in classrooms without certified teachers. Declining student achievement paired with teacher burnout can be potentially disastrous to any change initiative attempts. School leaders will need to be transparent and explicit in how culturally responsive teaching could meet the needs of students with supporting data, making sure that stakeholders do not erroneously make connections to the Critical Race Theory. "Leaders should clearly define and articulate the needed changes and establish an appropriate strategic plan to accomplish these changes" (Thornton et. al., 2019, p. 134).

Culture

Culturally responsive teaching requires a district and school culture committed to understanding how cultural differences impact a student's ability to learn. Additionally, leaders must be cognizant that educators may also be on a continuum of content competency and instructional pedagogy. Individuals approach life through the lens of their cultural norms and life experiences. That being said, it is imperative to establish a collaborative culture with all stakeholders to ensure the curriculum and instructional design and delivery adequately meet the needs of all students to be successful.

Considering the high diversity of the district, parental and community involvement will assist in identifying the best approach for educating a variety of backgrounds.

Learning environments that are supported by stakeholders committed to building meaningful relationships are crucial to implementing sustainable change initiatives. Culturally responsive teaching as a pedagogical practice requires full implementation within the learning environment to see consistent results. This requires district and school leadership to prioritize this approach to educating students. Additionally, thorough training and ongoing professional development are necessary to ensure all educators understand the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies and how they can improve meeting all students' needs. Gay (2002) states that educators need to move beyond the general knowledge or facts about different ethnic groups and “acquire a detailed understanding about particularities of specific ethnic groups” (p. 107). The challenge in schools could be attributed to the lack of foundational knowledge educators have about ethnic and racial backgrounds different from their own. Establishing a partnership with families and the community could help bridge the gap and identify strategies to successfully remediate and provide intervention to students.

Leading a school and district committed to using culturally responsive teaching strategies requires a leader with a growth mindset. Encouraging and implementing this change initiative can be viewed as controversial, while many simply align the pedagogical approach with “good teaching”. Regardless of an individual's position, educating the necessary stakeholders about culturally responsive teaching and what this looks like in a learning environment is crucial. Culturally responsive teachers “know how to determine the multicultural strengths and weaknesses of curriculum designs and

instructional materials and make the changes necessary to improve their overall quality for students” (Gay, 2002, p. 108). Improving curriculum design requires a level of vulnerability from multiple stakeholders (students, teachers, parents) working together to make learning and mastery accessible for all students.

District and school leaders are aware that no two students are exactly alike in terms of innate intellectual abilities, aptitude for learning, or intrinsic motivation. With this understanding comes the need for teachers to have a toolkit to support students from diverse backgrounds. In addition, teachers must understand how to differentiate instruction to meet the varying needs of students and make that content relevant to them. “Culturally knowledgeable teachers are better able to challenge the structural barriers that inhibit student success” (Glatthorn et al., 2019, p. 261). That is, teachers that understand how to be culturally responsive to their students, have a more likely chance of understanding what barriers may impede on a student’s ability to learn and intervene in ways that allow students to meet mastery standards regardless of possible achievement gaps.

There is a tendency for the political climate to dictate the priorities and actions that are taken in education. As a result, pedagogical practices or theories such as culturally responsive teaching can be viewed in a negative light by some stakeholders. However, when prioritizing student academic excellence, it is imperative to consider all approaches that could build relationships or motivate students to excel. Michael Lubelfeld and Nick Polyak (2017) who authored the *Unlearning Leader: Leading for Tomorrow’s Schools Today*, highlight the importance of letting go of or “unlearning commonly held beliefs to make room for uncommon beliefs and practices” (p. 19). The

authors say that “it is incumbent upon leaders to unlearn culturally and historically ingrained models of schools, schooling, and classroom set up” since the 1800s (Lubelfeld & Polyak, 2017, p. 20). To this point, educators must look past the political ideology and “way things have always been done” and begin to evaluate new initiatives and theories based on what is best for students.

Conditions

Jim Collins (2005) in his book *Good to Great* highlights the need for organizations to “get the right people in the right seats on the bus” to implement change (p. 13). The district will need to evaluate current operations to determine if they are affording all students an opportunity to be successful. In addition, the district will need to evaluate how effective educators are at meeting the needs of ethnically and culturally diverse students. Similar to safeguards put in place to ensure educators are prepared to support students with exceptionalities (e.g., Exceptional Student Education [ESE], and English Language Learner [ELL]), school leaders will need to ensure the proper training for supporting minority or ethnically diverse students is provided to their faculty and staff. The educators unwilling to approach teaching and learning in the framework of culturally responsive teaching will eventually be phased out. Educators who align themselves with this pedagogical approach to educating all students will willingly participate in professional development and recertification expectations to maintain employment. Training on culturally responsive teaching will be mandatory as a part of the new teacher induction program which takes place when teachers are hired or onboarded for district employment. In addition, there will be refresher courses and

professional development provided to educators as a condition of their annual employment contract.

The diverse composition of this large school district requires leaders to diversify their hiring practices. This in part is due to the fact that many preservice and teacher preparation programs are still not providing explicit instruction or training on supporting culturally diverse populations. The district can establish community partnerships with local colleges or universities to ensure they have a pool of applicants to support the diversity needs. Additionally, the district will establish partnerships with satellite diverse institutions or Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) where incentives can be provided for pre-service teachers committing to becoming employed in the district or Title I school.

The previous implementation of culturally responsive teaching for the district was built in a “train the trainer” model. Although each school was asked to provide a leader who was responsible for training and providing support at the school site, there was no solidified expectation of how the professional development would be provided at each site. Moving forward, there should be an expectation of teacher leaders and future school or district leaders to be provided training on supporting diverse learners and culturally responsive teaching. Making this a requirement for job promotion ensures the district and school prioritizes meeting the needs of all the students.

Lastly, the involvement of parents, families, and community partners is essential to implementing culturally responsive teaching within each classroom. District leaders must ensure all stakeholders understand what culturally responsive teaching is and how it is meant to better meet the needs of all students whether they identify as minority or not.

District and school leaders will deploy initiative campaigns during parent engagement events such as School Advisory Council (SAC) meetings, parent academies, or town hall meetings to ensure all stakeholders have a voice and an opportunity to address how the use of culturally responsive teaching could be better structured to provide all students and families optimal achievement success.

Competencies

One of the top priorities of establishing district-wide systems for the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies will be the introduction and training of all leadership personnel and top stakeholders. The only way to truly embed this way of educating children is to ensure all parties understand what culturally responsive teaching is and how it is aimed at supporting the varying needs of any and all students. Once district and school leaders are trained, it will be necessary to communicate this new requirement in the teacher induction program.

The evaluation district hosts a two-day training where new teachers and new hires learn how the district approaches instructional delivery (part one and part two), classroom management, and standards-based instruction. The model requires those educators to take the two-day training before the start of pre-planning for the upcoming school year. If teachers are hired after this or cannot attend during the summer, they can attend induction courses throughout the school year. One day of the two-day training should be focused solely on culturally responsive teaching strategies. This relates to understanding implicit bias and microaggressions and finding ways to build meaningful relationships with students. The district only requires teachers with four years or more of experience to

participate in the induction program. However, this training shall be mandatory for all employees hired and working in the district.

With the foundational expectation for district and school leaders to *prioritize learning (of students)*, there is no other approach in such a racial and ethnically diverse district other than to educate the teachers on how to meet their students' needs. While there may be controversy surrounding the expectation for educators who *know what their students need* to attend a new approach to teaching and learning, district and school leaders must highlight this training, establishing pedagogical practices that make them better at meeting the needs of all students. While introducing this expectation, leaders must find ways to build collective teacher efficacy and ensure teachers understand that culturally responsive teaching professional development will provide insight into building meaningful relationships, which provide the foundation for risk-taking in the learning environment.

Schools classified as minority-majority should have school-based instructional systems and focuses on culturally responsive teaching strategies yearly. Teachers should be involved in the planning process of this school-based training to ensure it is appropriately addressing the areas of weakness and opportunity within instructional pedagogy. In the novel *Rac(e)ing to Class: Confronting Poverty and Race in Schools and Classrooms*, author Richard Milner IV (2015) says district and school leaders must “shift the ethos to focus on those most vulnerable (students) requiring leaders to embrace principles expressed throughout the district” (p. 31). This goes beyond what they say and the expectations of those employed in the district. If district and school leaders say they

desire to close the achievement gap for minority students, they would willingly invest in their training as outlined by the district and school expectations.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided a more in-depth view into the change leadership steps necessary to establish a district and school culture where personnel prioritize understanding how to educate diverse learners. This encompasses ethnicity or race and could relate to non-native English speakers or students with unique learning styles. In the next chapter, I will explore the strategies and actions necessary to accomplish the desired goals.

Chapter Six: Strategies and Actions, Implications, Policy Recommendations

An organization's climate and culture often influence the establishment and successful implementation of change initiatives. At times, the factors driving the organization's culture can conflict with the change initiative, regardless of the effort put in by stakeholders. School leaders should be aware of the barriers that may impact the success of a change initiative and identify ways to mitigate those problems. The obstacles plaguing teachers and classrooms surpass the achievement gap, including each student's social and emotional needs.

The ideal expectation within a district or school should be that leaders adequately train all educators to meet all children's needs. Transforming the perception of Title I, or minority-majority schools, starts with providing all educators in the district with the necessary tools to educate culturally diverse students successfully. Richard Milner (2015) stated, "Schools (leaders) must understand the neighborhoods where their students live to work with families to improve communities in ways that advance student learning and social development" (p. 39). In addition, school and district leaders must realize that teachers are leaving the education profession due to a lack of preparedness to face the increasing demands of being in traditional classrooms.

Strategies and Actions

In his novel *Leading Change*, John Kotter (2012) identified a process for leading organizational change. The process includes (1) establishing a sense of urgency, (2) creating a guiding coalition, (3) developing a vision and strategy, (4) communicating the change vision, (5) empowering broad-based action, (6) generating short-term wins, (7) consolidating gains and producing more change, and (8) anchoring new approaches in the

culture. For this evaluation, I adjusted the process to the following strategies (1) establishing a sense of urgency, (2) creating the team for change, (3) developing a vision and strategy, (4) communicating the vision, (5) empowering action, (6) generating success, (7) being a change agent, and (8) sustainable change.

Establishing a Sense of Urgency

Kotter (2012) identified that establishing a sense of urgency is the top priority for any change effort. District and school leaders should prioritize student learning and achievement. While this may look different at each school, leaders will use a criterion to evaluate the overall needs of specific subgroups. The curriculum and instruction department will capture how students perform across all schools to determine academic deficiencies. Making teachers use district-prepared instructional curricula and materials is controversial due to the loss of instructional autonomy. While I understand the desire for teachers to use their resources, it is counterproductive and challenging to know if the instructional materials are suitable when only a tiny fraction of schools are required to use them.

Creating a sense of urgency starts with accurate achievement data analysis. Leaders at schools with students facing the most significant achievement gaps must provide clear and transparent school data. Additionally, leaders must support teachers and have systems to ensure they are meeting the needs of all students. In *Curriculum Leadership: Strategies for Development and Implementation*, Glatthorn et al. (2019) state, “Teachers, students, administrators, and the external community need to see that teaching is having a positive impact on student achievement and students are performing better because of the changes enacted at the school” (p. 342). With this in mind, schools

should provide multiple opportunities to not only give context to the academic challenges at the school but allow stakeholders to provide suggestions to address them.

Creating the Team for Change

Kotter (2012) states that “building a team with the right composition, level of trust, and shared objective is essential to the early stages of restructuring, reengineering, or retooling a set of strategies” (p. 54). Evaluating the overall approach to supporting minority subgroups and how teachers are trained to support them academically. Creating culturally responsive teaching training will be embedded into the district induction program. Establishing these training and action items should include the district and school leaders' appropriate communication and post-training monitoring. The team established should be reflective of the community served and have a plethora of talents and expertise that can move the district and school forward.

The authors of *Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement* articulate that trust discernment is impacted by the belief an individual can achieve the desired outcomes (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, pp. 23-24). Stakeholders continually evaluate this competence based on their experience with those district or school leaders. Leaders must know that the team composition established to push the change initiative forward is vital to its success. The priority while setting the team should focus on competence and people skills. Ensuring that the team is reflective of all stakeholders will ensure all voices are heard in efforts to implement a change effort without opposition.

Developing a Vision and Strategy

Once I have solidified a team, developing a clear vision and strategy to approach the weaknesses impacting student learning is a priority. Firm leaders should lead with

clear intentions and action steps necessary to achieve a goal. Kotter (2012) states, “With clarity of direction, inappropriate projects can be identified and terminated, even if they have political support” (p. 71). Within an organizational structure like education, multiple stakeholders and moving pieces impact decisions, regardless of their overall relation to student achievement. School leaders must be change agents who prioritize what is best for students and their learning. This will require school and district leaders to check their egos at the door and enter into courageous conversations with all stakeholders about adequately meeting students’ needs. Once the team can clearly define what culturally responsive teaching is and how they will incorporate it into the district culture, it will be necessary for them also to evaluate any current practices in the district that compete with this change effort. This includes but is not limited to programs or curricula that compete with culturally responsive teaching strategies or supervisors who do not hold teachers accountable for the required training and implementation.

Kotter (2012) states, “Great leaders know how to make ambitious goals look doable” (p. 78). This will require district and school leaders to evaluate the costs of the change efforts while considering their overall goals. If presented incorrectly by leaders, narrowing the achievement gap can be intimidating. Culturally responsive teaching aims to remove the barriers between teacher and student to encourage more engagement, trust, and, thus, mastery. Once the team outlines a clear vision, embedding culturally responsive teaching strategies into our “way of doing” next, the team will need to establish the strategy to accomplish the change effort. Ensuring the proper training for district and school-based leaders is vital to establishing the shared efficacy necessary to combat something as challenging as the achievement gap.

Communicating the Vision

Once district and school leaders have identified their team and established the necessary vision and goals, the change vision must be communicated by leaders appropriately. John Kotter (2012) goes as far as to say, “The real power of a vision is unleashed only when most of those involved in an enterprise or activity have a common understanding of its goals and direction” (p. 87). By this definition, if, and only if, there is a shared understanding of the goals and approach to an initiative, will it foster sustainable change? The communication of culturally responsive teaching is required in the district and will require attention to detail and clearly defined expectations and outcomes. Educators throughout the district should be prepared to teach and support students from various backgrounds and experiences.

District and school-based leaders must be trained in culturally responsive teaching before correspondence with the larger stakeholder groups. Kotter (2012) states, “Developing a transformational vision often requires those on the team to spend hundreds of hours collecting information, digesting it, considering alternatives, and eventually making decisions” (p. 89). By this definition, district and school leaders should do the foundational work to ensure they understand in-depth culturally responsive teaching and the impact these strategies have on student achievement. Due to the controversial undertone of culturally responsive teaching, it will be vital to clearly articulate what culturally responsive teaching is and what it is not. This can only happen if leaders are competent in the pedagogical approach and its necessity for the district. Teachers will receive the roll-out expectations for the district and school-based training in culturally responsive teaching. Hence, there is no misconception about their role in the process.

There will be several town hall meetings with district and school-based staff, so teachers receive the data supporting the need for this change effort and address their questions or concerns.

The final step in the communication plan will be with the students, parents or guardians, and community stakeholders. As with teachers, clear communication and expectations of culturally responsive teaching in the classroom are crucial. Town hall meetings for parents and students to understand how culturally responsive teaching strategies can impact their education and to ask questions is crucial. In addition, quarterly town hall meetings should address the progress of culturally responsive teaching strategies to narrow the achievement gap. “Communication of a vision can quickly turn into a one-way broadcast in which user feedback is ignored, and stakeholders are inadvertently made to feel unimportant” (Kotter, 2012, p. 101). Avoiding this one-way approach to communication can hold school and district leaders accountable for addressing the possible threats to the change effort and student learning in general.

Empowering Action

Empowering is foundational when evaluating the team expected to accomplish the change initiative. Empowering the team starts with clearly communicating the vision and each individual's role in achieving that goal. Once individuals have received the proper communication, it will be the responsibility of the district and school leader to remove unnecessary barriers. Barriers could include bosses discouraging actions aimed at the new vision, lack of needed skills, or personnel and information systems competing with the change effort (Kotter, 2012, p. 106). An example of removing a barrier in the education or classroom setting would be to appropriately support behavior concerns by establishing

clear rules and procedures for students, allowing teachers to focus on instruction.

Additionally, ensure that teachers receive the appropriate training and time to prepare for the change initiative. The more prepared teachers feel, the more empowered they are to accomplish the change initiative.

District and school leaders must be mindful of the organizational systems and ensure they do not compete with the change initiative. This could require focus groups or working teams to evaluate discipline policies and other embedded practices that could make it difficult for culturally responsive teaching to be engrained into the district culture. Kotter (2012,) states, “systems are easier to move, but if you tried to iron out every little inconsistency between the new vision and the current systems, you’d simply fail” (p. 115). District and school leaders should do their part to mitigate as many inconsistencies as feasible for the team. Lastly, appropriately addressing supervisors whose actions conflict with the change initiative. Those individuals must be managed to avoid sabotage or distraction from the vision and goal. Leaders must have grit and be willing to have rich conversations about the implications of the supervisors' opposition to holding teachers accountable for culturally responsive teaching.

Generating Success

Imposing any change initiative requires the appropriate monitoring of the change initiative. School and district leaders must acknowledge and communicate the short-term wins accomplished while implementing the culturally responsive teaching initiative. The characteristics of short-term wins are that they are easily visible to all stakeholders, unambiguous, and related to the change effort (Kotter, 2012, p. 126). By this definition, school leaders must be strategic in what wins they share, ensuring they are clear and

visible to stakeholders and closely related to the change effort goals and action steps. Short-term wins indicate that the effort is worth it, celebrate the individuals leading change, help to adjust strategy based on need, and build momentum to reach the goal of the change effort (Kotter, 2012, p. 127).

Kotter (2012) states, “All successful transformation efforts combine good leadership with good management” (p. 134). Leaders should possess the necessary management skills to ensure the culturally responsive teaching initiative is being implemented efficiently and moving on the trajectory of success. Momentum is built as stakeholders experience and see the short-term wins. As the change effort progresses, leaders must ensure all faculty and staff are adequately trained in using culturally responsive teaching strategies and appropriately using those strategies to narrow the achievement gap.

Being a Change Agent

Being a change agent in an organization that needs to prepare for change can create a disconnect between leaders and those expected to accomplish the change effort. Leaders must foster an environment where change efforts increase frequency as short-term wins occur. Kotter (2012) believes “short-term wins are essential to keep the momentum going, but celebrating those wins can be lethal if urgency is lost” (p. 138). With this consideration, leaders should ensure they appropriately communicate the state of the culturally responsive teaching initiative as they progress. “Whenever you let up before the job is done, critical momentum can be lost, and regression may follow” (Kotter, 2012, p. 139). Leaders should remain steadfast and committed to the goal regardless of the minor term wins experienced throughout the process.

Relational trust is crucial to being a change agent who consolidates gains and produces more change. Bryk and Schneider (2002) stress that collective decision-making with broad teacher buy-in occurs more readily in schools with strong relational trust (p. 122). District leaders must establish trust with all stakeholders. School leaders must establish trust with their specific stakeholders to cultivate a culture of trust ready for such an undertaking as school reform. Being a change agent in a highly political climate can lead some leaders to overly celebrate small-term wins, leading to disengagement from the actions that were celebrated. Leaders must ensure all stakeholders know that while those wins are significant to our efforts, they do not signal that the battle has been won.

Sustainable Change

Kotter (2012) believes “shallow roots require constant watering” (p. 155). On this premise, all change agents within an organization should actively engage in the change efforts to ensure they do not lose momentum or begin competing with conflicting agendas. The district culture can be identified by the norms of behavior and shared values among all stakeholders. “Culture is important because it can powerfully influence human behavior because it can be difficult to change and because its near invisibility makes it hard to address directly” (Kotter, 2012, p. 156). Therefore, the district and school will need to shift the culture toward innovative methods of providing instruction while considering students' individual needs (culturally and academically).

“The challenge is to graft the new practices onto the old roots while killing off the inconsistent pieces” (Kotter, 2012, p. 160). This means leaders must find the right approach to embedding culturally responsive teaching into the foundational layers of the district culture. Embedding the culturally responsive teaching foundation training during

an existing training structure for new hires ensures that the initial training on culturally responsive teaching strategies is presented seamlessly with the district's "way of work." While initially needing an increase in the training offerings by the district to ensure all school faculty and staff are trained, the effort will be worth the reward of providing consistent messaging about culturally responsive teaching strategies and educating the students that are served.

Policy Statement

I am recommending a policy change requiring culturally responsive teaching strategy training for all employees within each validity period of the teaching certificate. Much like other factors that are required to be recertified, it should be a district-imposed requirement for teachers to be trained in ways to support cultural backgrounds different from their own. For example, it is commonly misinterpreted that culturally responsive teaching is only geared toward educating African American or Hispanic students when it is geared to bridge the gap between teachers and students regardless of race or ethnicity. This policy change will be monitored by school-based leaders who serve as teacher evaluators. The district currently uses the Marzano evaluation model. The district formulates a teachers' evaluation score with a "deliberate practice" element. The deliberate practice element will incorporate the monitoring of culturally responsive teaching strategies through evaluations and required teacher reflections. School-based coaches will further monitor this initiative while providing more formative based classroom observations and actionable feedback.

I recommend this policy due to the current achievement gaps witnessed for minority students within the district. School settings with high instructional expectations

could cause students with deficiencies to shut down and disengage from the learning process. By building meaningful relationships with students from the beginning, teachers can identify the support they may need to be academically challenged and supported. Introducing a required culturally responsive teaching training would provide teachers, no matter what population they serve, with the tools necessary to reach students. This relates to overcoming generational divides as well as ethnic or racial. The more teachers are prepared for their students' social, emotional, and academic needs, the more likely they are to commit fully to this initiative and approach to teaching.

Considerations for Decision Makers

When implementing a change effort, leaders must consider the implications of the change before moving forward. This includes a self-reflection on the motives for implementing the change. Additionally, leaders must consider the problems involved with the policy recommendation. Finally, adaptive change must be expected for schools within the district to live up to the vision of ensuring every student has a promising and prosperous future.

Economic Analysis

Evaluating the “cost of change” requires leaders to review the personal costs, changes in organizational capabilities, and economic impact of any change effort (Herold & Fedor, 2008, p. 9). Personal costs refer to the implications of implementing the change initiative on the person. This could include but is not limited to the time it requires teachers to prepare outside of work hours or how emotionally taxing the change effort is. For example, embedding culturally responsive teaching strategies into the district’s way of educating students could encourage opposition because of the time and effort

necessary for all individuals to be adequately trained. However, while initially having a higher personal cost, as teachers practice culturally responsive pedagogy, the actions and approach will become easier.

Due to legislation at the state level, schools have all but abandoned any efforts related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. As a result, many departments have abandoned most initiatives related to those efforts. This provides some freedom in the organizational capacity to bring on a change effort. The district currently has a summer (two-day) or school year (4 mini-sessions or two Saturdays) model for the new-teacher induction program. As a result, the infrastructure to incorporate culturally responsive teaching will not pose a long-term financial burden. The district has over 20,000 employees, of which approximately 12,000 are teachers. With such a large workforce, there will be an initial increase in training costs as there will need to be more offerings to accommodate all teachers and to compensate facilitators.

Currently, teachers within the district receive hours for common planning and paid professional development over the summer. However, the two-day training traditionally does not pay any funds to the teachers that attend. Considering the scope of the policy change, faculty and staff will need some incentive for these initiatives overall impact on their current expectations. Herold and Fedor (2008) discuss the need for employees to feel they are treated fairly and identify with the organizations goal (p. 81). The authors elaborate that employee's perception of fair treatment includes both the allocation of reward, such as pay, and the general treatment of people within the organization (Herold & Fedor, 2008, p. 81). To this point, it will be critical to be very

clear about what culturally responsive teaching is so there are no misconceptions about the work they will take on, and be strategic about how it will be accomplished.

Teachers will have a two-year window to get the training and a one-year window where the frequency of offering the training happens more often. Teachers and staff will be paid \$25 per hour to attend a two-day training during the summer equivalent to 12 hours or 6 hours per day. For the over 20,000 employees, it will cost the district at least \$6 million dollars to pay for every individual to receive compensation. There are currently no mainstream culturally responsive teaching training or professional development that can be purchased for its employees. As a result, the district will need to rely heavily on the professional learning department to establish this training with the guide of experts who provide support. This cost will vary based on who the district identifies to serve as a consultant through this process, however, it can be anticipated to cost approximately \$90,000-\$100,000 dollars. The district leaders will need to ensure the training is streamlined and consistent regardless of facilitator as well as have the appropriate monitoring systems in place to ensure the district is moving toward the goal of all employees being trained within a two-year window. Overall, this initiative will cost approximately \$6.5 million dollars during the first two years. Following the first two years, the school-based leaders control the monitoring and continuous training. The Curriculum Resource Teacher will receive continuous training from the district with no significant costs expected due to the ability of these individuals to attend training off-site with no required substitute.

Political Analysis

The leaders of government for the state where the evaluation school is located have introduced several legislative acts that precisely control how minority subgroups are educated and treated. Access to certain books and curricula and organizations specific to marginalized groups could be lost due to this legislation. As a result of the controversy surrounding specific approaches or topics, there may be some pushback to a district-wide culturally responsive teaching requirement. District and school leaders should do their due diligence to ensure those in power understand culturally responsive teaching.

Introducing a change effort such as culturally responsive teaching practices requires stakeholders to look in the mirror. Stakeholders must understand how their bias can encourage their opinion about this new approach. Stakeholders having open discussions about inclusion and how the shifts in academic promotion requirements impact minority subgroups must be evaluated before the problem is out of hand. Stakeholder views will vary based on their belief in centralized state control versus local control. The ideal “strategic approach” is to engage educators, parents, and other stakeholders in setting school-improvement goals locally (Kowalski, 2011, p. 37).

Legal Analysis

The legal implications of the culturally responsive teaching requirement for all district and school faculty and staff are the analysis of requiring the training is determined to violate the teacher contract or individual rights. As stated throughout this study, the goal is to prepare educators to support ethnically diverse students. District leaders will have to establish the implications of not satisfying this requirement. If this will eventually lead to disciplinary action if an employee is not trained, then there will need to be funds

earmarked to support this effort. Additionally, the district will need to work with the teacher union to determine the specifics related to the culturally responsive teaching required training. Due to this expectation requiring teachers to work outside of contract hours and traditional work calendar parameters, it will be critical for the logistics to be worked through beforehand and strategized into the change plan to avoid unnecessary legal action (Herold & Fedor, 2008).

Under the current proposed laws, districts and schools will be penalized for providing instruction on race relations or diversity, equity, and inclusion. Culturally responsive teaching can be wrapped up into this legislation due to the discussion around race and minority groups needing specific supports based on a number of factors. The common misconception surrounding culturally responsive teaching is that it is synonymous with critical race theory or the idea of racism shaping public policy. In fact, culturally responsive teaching is in no way divisive or aimed at magnifying differences as much as it is about understanding differences.

Moral and Ethical Analysis

The moral and ethical considerations when it comes to incorporating a mandatory culturally responsive teaching training requirement would primarily impact the individuals with personal conflicts with the pedagogical approach. Individuals have a right to be treated somewhat based on their views and beliefs. However, as educators, there is a duty to educate students who are culturally diverse authentically. Nevertheless, the lines between legal and ethical concerns are blurred (Kowalski, 2011, p. 59). District and school leaders should set attainable goals for personnel so they understand what they are accomplishing and where they ultimately must go. The “ethics code or set of

standards and guidelines aimed at promoting the ideals of social responsibility” must be communicated up front to eliminate the problems that may arise later (Kowalski, 2011, p. 60).

Conclusion

The program evaluation aimed to determine the impact of culturally responsive teaching on the achievement of African American students. While the overall achievement scores varied only slightly for proficiency, it was clear that the lower quartile achievement students performed better from 2020-2021 to 2021-22022. This process has provided context to the constraints that political leaders may impose on the local, state, and national levels. Doing what is best for children still outweighs any political pushback that may arise from a pedagogical approach such as culturally responsive teaching. I got insight from the survey data, and interviews about the positive outcomes culturally responsive teaching has on student achievement. Without the added weight of learning loss experienced following the COVID-19 pandemic, data would have been more of a reflection of the observation's teachers, parents, and the principal had regarding the positive impact on students learning.

The organizational change plan considers the foundational needs of district and school leaders to be trained adequately before expecting culturally responsive teaching strategies district-wide. This starts with analyzing the data and identifying where the district and schools still have strides to make. For example, the achievement gap for minority students is experienced throughout the country. Though consistent with the norm around the United States, the district needs to make an additional effort to meet the needs of students with gaps in learning. Addressing how instruction is provided and how

teachers see their students forces teachers to look past curriculum and identify what barriers with students keep them from tapping into their fullest potential.

Requiring culturally responsive teaching training for all district and school employees is significant for a district this size. The effort will need district and school leaders to be trained to fully buy into narrowing the achievement gap. Leaders and teachers will observe the foundational pillars of culturally responsive teaching and how the pedagogical approach can be used to encourage the best from students on a basis other than race, such as socioeconomic status. My research shows a palpable shift in student feelings and behavior when culturally responsive teaching strategies are used. Teachers, parents, and the principal could attest to the positive behaviors and effort put forth by students when they used culturally responsive teaching strategies. If captured without the factors of a global pandemic, the achievement results would be more consistent with what teachers observed in their classrooms. Hammond (2015) states, “the power of culturally responsive teaching is in its ability to help students deepen their understanding of core concepts as well as build automaticity and fluency with core facts” (p. 138). The better the teachers use these strategies, the more intellectually prepared students are to learn and excel.

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Appendix A

Survey Questions: Teacher

On a scale of 1-4, with 1 being strongly disagree and 4 being strongly agree, please provide feedback ...

0=Not Applicable 1= Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree

Please provide written responses to questions 4, 7, 10, and 12.

1. How many years have you been teaching in the education field?
Dropdown: 1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years, 21+
2. My college preparation program prepared me for my educational journey and supporting students with varying cultural backgrounds.
3. Students performed better as a result of culturally responsive strategies.
4. In what ways did the students in a culturally responsive classroom perform differently than students in a non-culturally responsive classroom?
5. I am likely to use culturally responsive strategies moving forward.
6. Explain your response to question 5.
7. I use culturally responsive teaching.
On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being 1 day and 5 being 5 days, please provide feedback ...
1= 1 Day, 2 = 2 Days, 3 = 3 Days, 4 = 4 Days, 5= 5 Days
8. My students were engaged with the content while implementing culturally responsive teaching.
9. I felt successful in my instructional pedagogy while using culturally responsive strategies.
10. List reasons you feel culturally responsive teaching was or was not successful in increasing student achievement among African American students.
11. Would you be willing to participate in a 30-minute interview?
Multiple Choice: Yes No
12. Thank you! If you answered YES to participating in an interview, please provide your contact information and someone will be in contact with you soon.
Name: _____
Phone number: _____
Email: _____

Appendix B

Survey Questions: Parent

On a scale of 1-4, with 1 being strongly disagree and 4 being strongly agree, please provide feedback ...

1= Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree

Please provide written responses to question 5

1. How old is your child/children?
Dropdown: 12-14 years, 15-16 years, 17-18 years, 19-22 years
2. What grade is your child/children in?
Dropdown: 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th
3. During the week, culturally responsive teaching is used in my child/children's classroom:

On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being 1 day and 5 being 5 days, please provide feedback ...

1= 1 Day, 2 = 2 Days, 3 = 3 Days, 4 = 4 Days, 5= 5 Days

4. My child/children had an increase in academic performance while culturally responsive strategies were being used.
5. What evidence supports the idea that your child's academic performance improved as a result of culturally responsive teaching strategies?
6. My child/children were engaged with the content while culturally responsive teaching was being used.
7. List reasons you feel culturally responsive teaching was or was not successful in increasing student achievement among African American students.

Thank you!

Appendix C

As-Is Chart

AS-IS 4 Cs Analysis			
Problem: An achievement gap is present for African American students within a predominately African American public high school.			
Context	Conditions	Competencies	Culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minority-majority public high schools • Located in a large urban school district 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish teams/teachers trained in culturally responsive teaching. • Working to prepare future leaders/teachers • Need to diversify hiring practices • Shift in mindset about student ability/meeting needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional Development • Responsiveness of leaders to cultural needs • Training on culturally responsive teaching and its impact on closing the achievement gap. • Curriculum alignment embedded with engagement and processing strategies for all learners needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on Culture Responsiveness • Growth mindset • District/school staff provide tiered support to low-performing schools

Appendix D

To-Be Chart

TO-BE 4 Cs Analysis			
Problem: Minority students have inequitable academic outcomes.			
Context	Conditions	Competencies	Culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse District • Change in leadership • Covid-19 impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get the right people “on the bus.” • Training is mandatory • Diversify hiring practices • Prepare future leaders/teachers • Community involvement (parents buying in) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional Development/ Culturally responsive teaching training for stakeholders • Vertical/horizontal curriculum alignment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move to a collaborative culture. • Growth mindset • District/school staff create learning experiences reflective of the students they serve • Prioritize student learning in a politically sensitive climate.

Appendix E

Strategies and Action Chart

Strategies	Actions
Establish a Sense of Urgency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a conversation with District leaders regarding the disparity in the student achievement data for Minority students based on the state assessment test, end-of-course exams, and the school's letter grade for minority-majority schools • Share this information with the district and school-based leadership team of the district. • Share achievement data by ethnic and racial subgroup with all stakeholders so they are aware of the achievement gaps for minority students.
Creating the Team for Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify stakeholders who should serve on the guiding coalition. • Stakeholders should have representatives from leaders, teachers, parents, and community members. • Select individuals who are both a reflection of the diversity of the district and have a level of expertise that could serve as useful to the approach of narrowing the achievement gap
Develop a Vision and Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The guiding coalition (team) will develop an action plan that clearly defines culturally responsive teaching and its impact on student learning. • This vision will outline the expectations for required culturally responsive teaching professional development. • School and district-based leaders will go through extensive training on culturally responsive teaching

	<p>to ensure they understand the approach and what this requirement will expect of leadership.</p>
Communicate the Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The guiding coalition will share the vision of required culturally responsive teaching strategies to all district and school-based leadership. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Leaders can explore what monitoring this initiative will look like and how they can have optimal outcomes. • The guiding coalition will share the culturally responsive teaching training requirement with school faculty and staff. This is where district staff will share the expectations of them as educators. • The guiding coalition will work to share with families during town hall meetings the roll out of the culturally responsive teaching strategies. This will serve as a follow-up to the town hall meetings that communicated achievement data by subgroup.
Empowering Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The team should provide the support needed by all stakeholders to efficiently accomplish this goal. • Remove any barriers that may serve to distract or deter individuals from investing into the culturally responsive teaching training requirement.
Generating Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The guiding coalition will establish specific checkpoints which are short-term goals along the path of narrowing the achievement gap. • The guiding coalition will celebrate schools when a goal is met along the road to change. This should happen in a way that does not distract from the ultimate goal

	and encourages teachers to keep the momentum going.
Be a Change Agent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The leaders must take ownership of how things are communicated about culturally responsive teaching. • Leaders must ensure relational trust is built with all stakeholders. • Leaders must consider goals and ensure their behavior agrees with the set action steps for the change effort.
Sustainable Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The guiding coalition should use data throughout the district to identify schools with favorable outcomes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Those with outcomes that show an improvement for any student as a result of culturally responsive teaching strategies should be highlighted for their success and serve for instructional rounds as agreed upon and needed. • The school-based leaders must find a way to engrain this initiative to the foundational structure of the school culture and climate. • Encourage educators to be innovative and do what is best for all students. • Due to the incorporation of this initiative into an established two-day training, there should be no long-term costs. There will be an increase at the start of the change effort as more teachers will need to be trained initially.