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White Racial Framing in the Principalship: Implications for Culturally Responsive School Leadership

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The history of the American educational system is rife with examples of racism and denial of equal access and opportunity to students of color. Despite efforts to close the opportunity gap, inequity remains. In this action research study, I explored my own leadership, utilizing surveys of stakeholders and focus group conversations to gain perspective on how my leadership impacts the school community. I compared these experiences with the tenets of culturally responsive school leadership that is a path toward greater equity. Concurrently, I reflected deeply upon my leadership, enlisting critical colleagues to help uncover ways in which my leadership toward culturally responsive practice is limited by my white racial framing. I found a need for greater engagement of all stakeholders, and that I was most obviously influenced by white racial framing when I neglected to engage all stakeholders or when I focused on my own actions rather than the impacts of such actions. I created a plan to begin implementing CRSL in collaboration with the community and to continue working to uncover, unpack, and confront WRF through critically reflecting and sharing reflection with critical colleagues and school stakeholders.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the students of Mountain Top Charter School, who are the inspiration for this work. I am honored to lead your school, and I am confident that as you grow, you will become the leaders that our society needs. Keep REACHing Up, In, and Out!

This work is also dedicated to Iris Gray. I hope that it can help you in some small way to grow up in a world with more equity, kindness, and love. May your positive energy and enthusiasm continue to guide your journey through the world.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Looking at the landscape of US public education, students of color comprise close to half (49%) of the enrolled population, while teachers (82%) and principals (80%) are overwhelmingly white (US Department of Education, 2016). Teacher education programs offer only a minor difference, enrolling students at a rate of 74% white. Essentially, at every level of education, huge disparity exists between the racial identity of students and those who are charged with serving students. Analysis of funding in different communities, preschool access, school-based disciplinary measures, availability of specialized courses, and high school graduation rates (Brown, 2015; Office for Civil Rights, 2016; Kettler, Russell, & Puryear 2015; US Department of Education, 2016) all show a pronounced lack of equity within the structures of public education. In each of these areas, opportunity, availability of, and access to resources is less for students of color than for their white peers. Though educational inequity can be viewed by disaggregating data in many ways (e.g. gender, wealth, dis/ability, sexual identity, etc.), it is called into strong focus when looking at disparities between racial groups.

A report from The US Department of Education (2016) named a dedication to "increasing the diversity of our educator workforce, recognizing that teachers and leaders of color will play a critical role in ensuring equity in our educational system" (p. 1). This statement is an admission by Department of Education officials that public education is inequitable, and proposes one solution, that of increasing the diversity of educators, to

build more equitable schools. Highlighting the racial composition of the current education workforce seems to be an attempt to frame and provide a simple solution for the issues arising in education. However, this view denies that historical realities in educational policy and racial stratification in the US have led to the disparity in outcomes (Darby & Rury 2018) and can also be seen to imply that people of color need to "step up" to fix the problems as they exist.

The problem needs to be framed differently if any improvement is to be made within the present state of public education. Instead of blaming inequity upon the passive metric of diversity in schools, it is helpful to look at what *actions* take place in schools that perpetuate inequity. What do teachers and school leaders do, even unknowingly, that allows inequity to flourish and recreate itself? What in the system perpetuates the current system? If educational outcomes as they exist are systemic and structural, focus must then shift to confronting, and ultimately rebuilding the system to create equity.

The following study has arisen from my own attempts to better understand and create greater equity within the school in which I serve. Through looking at my own practice as a white leader in a school that serves predominantly students of color, I hope to both improve my own practices and provide evidence that can be used by other leaders to increase racial equity in public education. This chapter of the study contains a description of the problem that I addressed.

Background to the Problem

Mountain Top Charter School (MTCS) sits in a far-flung neighborhood of a large city in the Mountain West of the United States. The school initially opened to fill a district-identified need for a high-quality school in this part of the city. Most of the

school population comes from two adjacent neighborhoods, and the students represent a highly diverse student population. The diversity is seen in both socio-cultural and socio-economic groupings. Approximately 68% of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and 82% of students are students of color, with 8% of students identifying as Asian, 26% as Black, 39% as Latinx, 9% from multiple races, and 18% as White. The school currently serves approximately 550 students in grades pre-K through fifth and reports over 22 different home languages spoken in students' families. The MTCS mission states that the school "exists to foster a diverse and equitable community of youth and adults striving together for academic, personal, and civic excellence." MTCS leaders and staff work to create a mission-driven school with hiring practices, governance, academic programming, and internal procedures designed to respond to the stated mission.

Despite the intention to build for greater inclusivity and equity, MTCS falls short of its mission. I would like to highlight an anecdote that revealed the need for this reflective research journey and illustrated the problem I hoped to address. In 2019 MTCS celebrated "Read Across America Day" at the request of and through the organizational work of the school librarian. The librarian explained to me that the holiday celebrates the importance of reading and had traditionally related to Dr. Seuss' birthday. In the preceding months, there had been recognition of racist imagery and messaging in Dr. Seuss' work (Ishizuka & Stephens, 2019), and because of this, I reflected upon the role that this day should play in our school. Additionally, the National Education Association (NEA) has moved its emphasis from Dr. Seuss toward creating a "nation of diverse readers" (readacrossamerica.org). After conversation with the librarian

about how we should proceed, I followed her recommendation to de-emphasize the Seuss connection to this day and to focus the celebrations upon reading for all kids. The day included a few small activities, including a "hat day" (retaining what had been traditionally a nod to Dr. Seuss' birthday and the book *The Cat in the Hat*), giving teachers books focused on multiculturalism that could be read to the students that day and my own reading of a statement about the importance of reading over the morning announcements. I felt that these activities sufficiently shifted the focus from a single individual whose work had recently come into question (and whom several teachers had expressed reservations about promoting) and onto our students for whom reading is an important focus of their educational lives. Since MTCS is founded upon a belief in the importance of diversity and a need to provide excellent, equitable education to its students, this seemed to fall in line with our values.

Of notable importance is that this day falls at the beginning of March, closely following Black History Month in February. Throughout the previous month, MTCS students had studied the people and events of black history. Pictures of Sojourner Truth, Dr. King, and many other heroes appeared on the school walls, while students' writing and drawing explored the history and contributions of African Americans in the United States. In a few cases, teachers asked me to view their students' work or to listen to performances of the poems and stories that they had written.

One of our teachers, an African American woman, stated to a fellow administrator that she couldn't understand why the school made such a big deal of Dr. Seuss, but that we hadn't done anything about Black History month. The administrator, whom I will call Laura, came to me to pass along the message:

"So, in my coaching today, Janiece (also a pseudonym) told me that she is really frustrated."

"Really? Why?"

"Well, we are making such a big deal out of Dr. Seuss day, and she said that we didn't even recognize Black History Month.

"What? Are you kidding me? Has she not been in the hallways and looked around? Doesn't she know that *everyone* did something for Black History Month? What does she expect? Should we shut down the whole curriculum and just focus on Black History? I mean, we do *so much* to focus on Black History! That is ridiculous! We also cancelled all the Dr. Seuss stuff. What does she want?"

Janiece's frustration was communicated to me, and I reacted predictably – with incredulity and defensiveness. In that moment of speaking with Laura (a white woman), I was contemptuous of the teacher's opinion and created a false extreme in my head. I stated that we had cancelled all mention of a writer with ties to racist imagery (which we had not) and that we had done everything we could to honor Black History month (which shows a level of self-assured ignorance of the holiday). In hindsight, such sentiments are at the same time embarrassing and indicative of the problem that this study will focus upon. As a critical researcher actively involved in trying to understand the impacts of racism, as a school leader seeking to create a more equitable school, and as a person conscious of the role that race and privilege play in society, my own racial framing took over. I reacted how I have been conditioned to react over years of benefitting from privilege, and in doing so I minimized the weight and value of this teacher's experience as a black woman in the school that I lead.

Thankfully, I was able to catch myself, apologized to Laura, and arranged a meeting with the teacher to talk through her experiences. In discussion with Janiece, she expressed that she had been hoping for a more unified and school-wide celebration of the path of African Americans through history. She viewed what we had done as more piecemeal and carried out without thought for the larger message that we were sending students about the contributions of African Americans in the US. We agreed that she would help frame a more complete and school-wide celebration for the following school year and parted after a deep conversation about our experiences in the school.

This anecdote illustrates a few salient points in the development of this study. First, it shows the ease with which I, acting as a leader in a school that names equity as part of its reason for existence was able to dismiss the ideas and experience of a member of the community. In this scenario I can be seen to fall directly into the equity trap of racial erasure (McKenzie & Scheurich 2004) and failing to recognize that my point of view as a white man of privilege was not definitive. Using my own lens to determine that we had done enough to celebrate a holiday that is itself a signifier of marginalization both exemplifies racism and is detrimental to the creation of an equitable community within the school. My initial response diminished the validity of Janiece's concerns and represented a conclusion that Janiece's understanding of the school was not valued.

The second point is that though I took steps to rectify my initial response and to learn more about Janiece's experience, my actions were not enough. I was able, at first, to question my own thinking and my own assessment of the situation. This reflection led to a less destructive outcome, but at the close of that conversation, I considered the matter closed and was self-congratulatory about having reached out to Janiece to fix the

problem. Deeper reflection would have revealed that my actions in resolving the problem served to help me maintain power over the situation, to dismiss Janiece's concerns, and to essentially do nothing to address the marginalization that she had felt through my leadership around the two holidays. In the end, I did not confront any aspect of my identity compared to Janiece nor did I take any steps to prevent similar marginalization from occurring later. Though I had "settled" an internal issue, I had done so at the expense of an opportunity to create a more inclusive and welcoming environment and to center the experience of an African American teacher in my thinking about Black History month. In doing this, I was allowing institutional racist policy to persist and was acting as a racist.

Problem Statement

The history of public education in the US is rife with racism that denies equal access and opportunity to students of color (Darby & Rury 2018). This can clearly be seen in pre-*Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) segregation policy and continues through acts of racial humiliation (Cobb 2017) and minimization of the experiences of marginalized students today. Such inequity is so endemic within education that it has been identified and tracked since the Coleman report in 1966. Researchers have noted that this so-called achievement gap can be seen by looking at any measure of educational progress and disaggregating it by racialized groups (Jeynes 2015). In fact, by identifying the inequity so clearly, some schools focus on the gap to a fault, thereby recreating the same outcomes that they may be working to undo (Seaton & Douglas 2014). Researchers and educational visionaries have highlighted this problem and have provided myriad solutions to closing the gap in outcomes.

For my part, as a white school leader serving in a school populated predominantly by children of color and charged with ensuring their educational needs are met, I spend a great deal of time thinking about inequity within the school and how the work of teachers can better meet the needs of each enrolled student. MTCS is founded upon the ideals of diversity and equity, and the belief all children should have access to the tools to reach success. Despite these foci, we continue to produce inequitable results for our students. As illustrated above, I can get so tangled into traditional white-dominant ways of leadership that I am unable to understand the ways that I inhibit the growth of equity in the school. Though our ostensible focus is to create conditions for all students to succeed, some aspect of the school seems to fall short in this area. The way that I practice my leadership within the school is limited by the way I view leadership overall and the way that I view race within that leadership. It has become clear that I need to both explore how to develop greater cultural responsiveness within the school and confront my own racialized and privileged framing of school leadership.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative action research study was to uncover the ways in which my white racial framing (WRF) serves as a barrier to culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL). For my own practice, the study was designed to show how my practice impacts stakeholders and to call out where WRF influences my thinking and actions. The outcomes of the study also created a process by which I could continue to confront and dismantle the impacts of WRF upon my leadership. To impact the school, the study was designed to uncover the culturally responsive practice in the school while also highlighting the areas in which greater cultural responsiveness was needed. Finally,

the outcomes of the study created a process to build stronger culturally responsive practice within the school community.

Conceptual Frameworks: WRF and CRSL

In this study, I utilize a conceptual framework that considers the tension between two separate concepts. Each of these concepts are seen to be in opposition to each other. If one is prominent, the other will be lessened. If the other is prominent, the first will necessarily be diminished.

White Racial Framing. Feagin (2013) defined WRF as "an overarching white worldview that encompasses a *broad and persisting set of racial stereotypes, prejudices, ideologies, images, interpretations and narratives, emotions, and reactions to language accents, as well as racialized inclinations to discriminate* [emphasis original]" (p. 3). The lineage of WRF is traced from early 13th century Europe through colonization and slavery, through the Jim Crow South, desegregation, and into contemporary society. Today's frame is often presented as post-racial, or colorblind, denying the dominance of whiteness in thought. The language of colorblindness often hides what is racist thinking allowed to flourish through the pervasiveness of WRF.

Applebaum (2016) further stated that white norms are so prevalent that they may be normal, or neutral to white people. Through its permeation of society, whiteness appears to be correct, and white ways of thinking about and organizing the world to be the natural ways of society. Fitzgerald (2014) brought this sense of whiteness back to framing, and posited that "The White racial frame generates a set of racialized ideas and stereotypes that have the power to induce strong emotions and thus capture the imagination of members of the society in which it operates" (p. 15)

Feagin (2013) pointed out that structural racism is the byproduct of WRF. In describing the prevalence of WRF throughout society, he named education as one of the systems that is impacted by and perpetuates the white racial frame. The lack of equitable educational outcomes can be described as the result of an educational system mired in structural racism or perhaps as one of the most visible symptoms of such racism. Through this line of thinking, a relationship between (both historical and contemporary) WRF and failure to create greater equity in schools emerges. Further, the relationship between personal WRF of leaders and the creation of structural WRF is exposed. When seeking to implement CRSL, white school leaders should account for how WRF impacts their planning and this contributes to the reproduction of racism even when they are seeking to undermine the structures that elevate whiteness and maintain racism in society. To ensure school leadership successfully enhances equity within the school, a critical exploration of the role of WRF will remain central to the data collection and reflection process within this project.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership. CRSL is a way of thinking about and practicing school leadership to create greater equity within schools. Broadly, CRSL consists of four main behaviors by school leaders: critical self-reflection, promoting an inclusive environment, promoting culturally responsive curriculum and instruction, and engaging student's local contexts (Khalifa 2018). CRSL differs from more traditional forms of leadership in that it includes "a commitment to advocating for the inclusion of traditionally marginalized students" (p. 24) and to creating a school environment that welcomes and responds to the needs of all students and their families. In implementing CRSL, leaders are placing value upon what mainstream education tends to marginalize.

Namely, culturally responsive school leaders recognize that students' lived experience and the needs, history, and knowledge of the community served by the school are fundamental to successful programming. Such understanding must be carried into the physical and programmatic design of the school, the curriculum, and the instruction that teachers provide. Five indicators of the presence of CRSL are: an inclusive, culturally responsive environment; recognition of students' lived experience; understanding of community context; collaboration between the school and community; and empowerment of students and communities. The aim of CRSL is to lessen oppression through critical self-awareness, ensuring a culturally responsive environment along with culturally responsive curricula and teacher preparation, and fostering true community engagement in the school while embracing the community context. Through collaboration with teachers, students, families, and members of the broader school community, leaders build stronger culturally responsive practices to help develop schools that are able to more equitably respond to the needs of marginalized students and communities.

Conceptual Framework. The intersection of WRF and CRSL and the tension between them when placed in context of public education creates the conceptual framework that organizes this study. WRF works in opposition to CRSL as it centers whiteness through discriminatory actions and ways of thinking that increase racial oppression. Because of this adversarial relationship, WRF continues to be a barrier and an equity trap (McKenzie & Scheurich 2004) that reinforces racism because it limits an

educator's ability to see the true impacts of how racist leadership actions marginalize students and school community.

Figure 1 below shows three illustrations of the conceptual framework, and the tension between WRF and CRSL. The upper left is the most simplistic, and shows that as WRF increases, the influence of CRSL diminishes. Inversely, as cultural responsiveness increases, the influence of WRF is lessened.

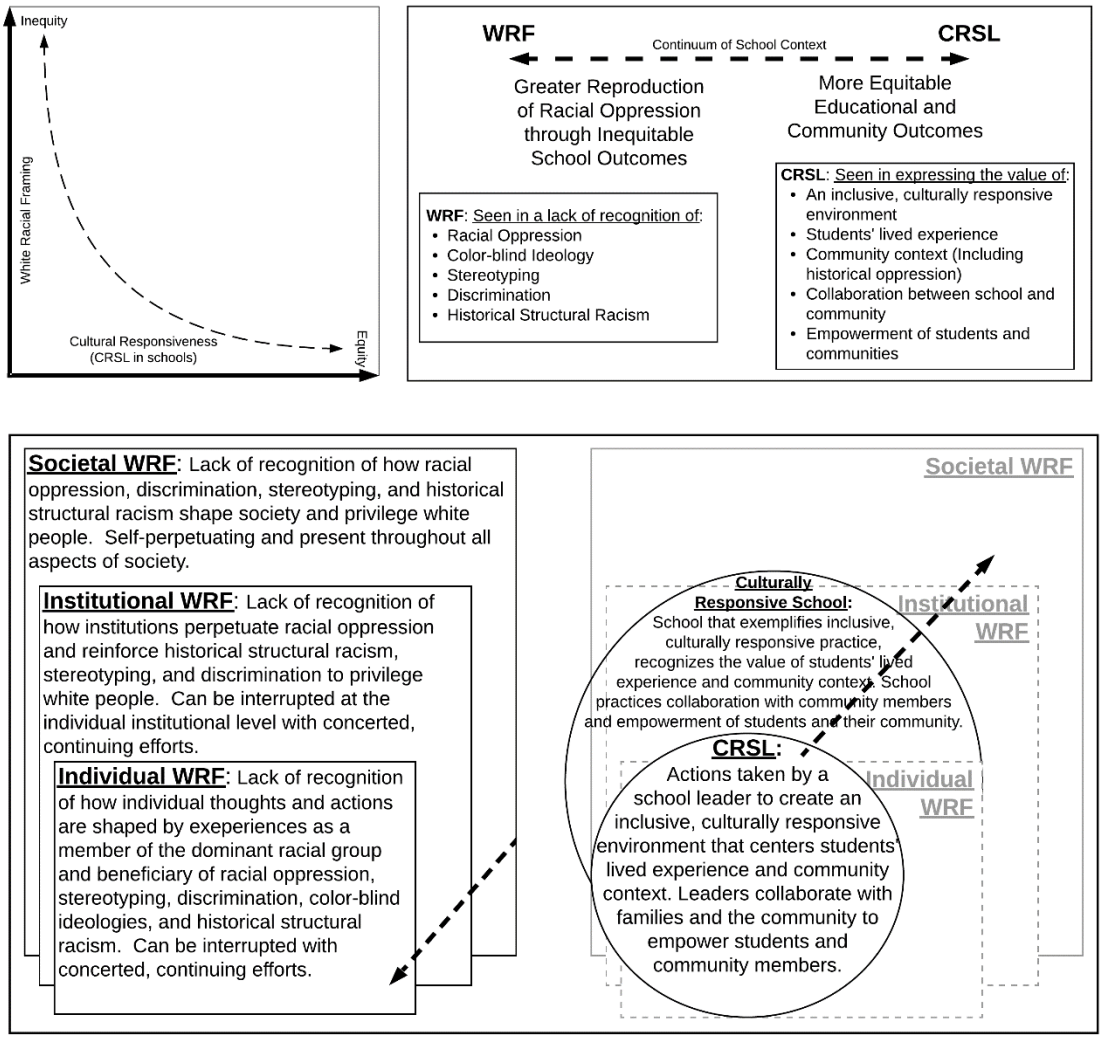

Figure 1: Conceptual framework: the tension between WRF and CRSL.

Note that the curve will never reach the axis, however, as the influence of WRF will never fully disappear, nor will a school ever be completely culturally responsive. The second image shows the curve as a flat line of tension, showing that the more WRF, the greater reproduction of oppression and inequity, while the more CRSL, the more equitable school and community outcomes.

The third image shows a view of the multiple levels of WRF and cultural responsiveness. Feagin (2006, 2013) described WRF as existing on three levels: societal, institutional, and individual. As seen in the bottom image in figure 1, the broadest level of WRF influences each of the narrower levels, and individual WRF lies within societal and institutional WRF. CRSL serves to interrupt WRF. Though school leadership is commonly seen as the actions of one leader, the impacts of CRSL empower a school community to serve its students more equitably (Khalifa 2018). The chart below shows these concepts in tension with each other, and how the prevalence of one indicates a lessening of the other. In this study, I focus on my individual WRF. I transparently document my critical reflection of and lessons learned from the ways my WRF influences my beliefs, behaviors, and leadership practice.

Research Questions

The central research question that the study aims to answer is:

- In what ways can I, as a school leader confront my white racial framing as a barrier to the development of impactful culturally responsive leadership practice?

In seeking to look more closely at the process of school-based and personal change needed by school leaders seeking greater equity, the study will also utilize the following research sub-questions:

- How might better understanding stakeholders' experiences of my leadership help highlight relevant action steps toward effective implementation of culturally responsive school leadership?
- How can reflection upon the impacts of my leadership with a circle of critical colleagues expose how white racial framing manifests within my leadership practice and highlight next steps in the eradication of my white racial framing?

To answer these questions, I studied an elementary school located on the northeast edge of a large urban school district in the Mountain West. Since I serve as principal of this school, I studied my own leadership and invited a group of critical colleagues to help me critically reflect upon the ways in I can eliminate my WRF by developing a strong anti-racist counter-frame and worldview.

Definition of Terms

In this section, I define seven terms that undergird this study.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership. According to Johnson (2014), CRSL consists of leadership philosophies and practices that lead to schools that are inclusive for students and families from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds. Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016) name the key practices of culturally responsive leaders: use of critical self-awareness, ensuring a culturally responsive environment along with culturally responsive curricula and teacher preparation, and engaging parents to

better understand the community context. Overall, culturally responsive school leadership points to ways that leaders value the cultural and historical knowledge that students and families bring to the school community, as well as the community's knowledge about its own needs and values. As explored in this work, CRSL can be se

Equity. There is no clear, singular definition for equity that emerges from the research. For purposes of this work, the definition posited by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (www.dpi.wi.gov) will be utilized. This definition states that "Educational equity means that every student has access to the resources and educational rigor they need at the right moment in their education, across race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background, and/or family income" (Equity, 2019). It is important to note that this definition does not state that all outcomes must be the same, but rather points to access to both resources and educational rigor. When the term equity is utilized in this work, it is should be seen to represent such access based upon students' unique identities and needs.

Racism. As explored and utilized throughout this text, racism is well defined by Kendi (2019). He called racism a "marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalizes racist ideas" (p. 22). He explained that "a racist policy is any measure that produces or sustains racial inequity between racial groups" (p. 24) and "a racist idea is any idea that suggests one racial group is inferior or superior to another racial group" (p. 27).

Relevant to the work herein, Kendi named that "the only way to undo racism is to consistently identify and describe it—and then dismantle it" (p. 9), which I hope to achieve in part through my own examination of both MTCS and my own practice.

Applebaum's (2005) warning to school leaders and reformers to be aware of how racism may impact their thinking, even when trying to undo structures of racism is also pertinent to this study. She stated, "racism can be maintained even when whites believe themselves to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem…it is especially when white people believe themselves to be good and moral antiracist citizens that they may be contributing to the perpetuation of systemic injustice" (Applebaum 2005, p. 278).

White Racial Framing. Feagin (2013) termed WRF as the way that white people's privilege and position in society allows them to construct meaning in the world. He named that white people espouse a worldview that includes a "*broad and persisting set of racial stereotypes, prejudices, ideologies, images, interpretations and narratives, emotions, and reactions to language accents, as well as racialized inclinations to discriminate* [emphasis original]" (p. 3). Fitzgerald (2014) stated that WRF can dilute even earnest searches for equity, and that WRF can lead to white teachers' outright denial of the impact of race on schools, and resentment of focus on racial issues. Lack of attention to the influences of WRF leads to re-creation of racist systems that prohibit equity in schools.

Limitations

Before embarking upon this project, it is important to name the limitations within the design of the project. The project does not represent and is not designed to represent full implementation of CRSL, neither as prescribed by Khalifa (2018), nor by other definitions. Instead, the work should be seen as digging into the initial steps needed as a school leader moves toward implementation of CRSL. This project does not represent a one-and-done process that will lead one to complete understanding of equity, CRSL, or

WRF. As described by the research, for an ongoing and successful move into culturally responsive practice, one must utilize an ongoing process of looking at data, reflecting on meaning, and taking steps to course-correct in the name of school-wide equity. The need for ongoing reflection, analysis, and collection of data is inherent to this work, as a one-time fix for the multi-faceted and compound problems of racism does not exist.

The procedure presented within this project does not attempt to individually unpack all aspects of school or society in which students might experience inequity. Instead, based on seeking to uncover instances of WRF in leadership, the work focuses on aspects of CRSL, and where further action may be needed on the part of the school leader. Additionally, the principal is not the only member of a school community needed to make real, culturally responsive change. Though the focus of this work is upon the principal, a wider network of change agents including families, community members, teachers, students, and more will be needed to successfully implement CRSL.

Finally, the methodology described in chapter three should not be a simple checklist by which other leaders can begin to explore their own schools. The rough outline of the procedure can certainly be utilized by others, but many of the tools used will likely need to be altered and developed based upon the details of each school. School leaders should think deeply about their school, the community they serve, and the outcomes that they hope the school can achieve; then they can adapt the process presented by this project to meet those ends.

Delimitations

The scope of this study is purposefully narrow. Though the concepts of CRSL and WRF are large, and the implications of race within the public education system are

vast, in this study I focused on my professional practice and the singular context of my own school. Though systemic change is needed to increase equity, on a practical level, school leaders must examine the immediacy of their own racialized identity, worldview, and practice to begin creating such change.

The results will not be presented as a simple checklist for other leaders to follow, as that denies the unique and important aspects of each school community. Instead, in presenting a process to examine one's leadership, I provided tools that can be used to take steps toward implementation of a form of leadership for equity. Reliance upon the work done within a single school exemplifies belief that schools are the unit of change within public education. As school leaders learn to confront their own identities and the systems in which they lead and learn to work in resistance to the traditional outcomes of public schooling, that way of working can spread to the larger system, and to more of the students and communities for whom all of the work of education can provide benefit.

Significance to the Field

My study contributes to the field of educational leadership in several ways. To begin with, a first-person documentation of the initial steps toward implementation of CRSL as outlined in the work of Khalifa (2018) is presented. This work will help describe some of the challenges other leaders might face in their own contexts. Additionally, it is unique to the field that I illuminated my personal experiences as a white principal grappling with how my WRF has impacted my school community. I provided an outline of the steps taken to illuminate and disrupt WRF in my professional practice. Such documentation will be useful to school leaders who would like to critically interrogate their WRF in their own contexts and who want to understand how

the process evolves in the context of day-to-day leadership. Through the implementation of an action research cycle that reflects a systematic approach to critical self-reflection of my WRF, I contribute to both the concrete aspects of undertaking CRSL and to the theoretical understanding of the impacts of WRF on leadership.

It is my sincere hope that through presenting this self-reflective process of examining my own racist tendencies in a transparent and systematic approach, I can both improve my own practice and provide an example and encouragement for other leaders to do the same. I hope that other leaders, particularly white leaders, can find the path to engage in building toward more culturally responsive, antiracist leadership while shattering the power of the white racial frame and its hold over public education. I am hopeful that this work represents a strong step in my lifelong commitment to antiracism and that it will help me lead more effectively toward equity.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have provided a brief outline of the problem of WRF in school leadership practice that I will address in this study. I introduced the concepts of WRF and CRSL as important to understanding how the project will proceed. Research questions around the persistence of WRF that is a barrier for equity, the need to expose WRF to effective practice CRSL were presented, and the intentional scope and process of the study were explained. In the following chapter, I explored the extant literature and described a base of knowledge from which the research study proceeded. In chapter three, I provided a detailed description of the research site and the procedure that was followed in exploring my own practice and how WRF has limited my ability to implement effective CRSL. In chapter four, I provided my findings of the study. In

chapter five, I presented the valuable lessons learned and conclusions drawn based on my findings.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

In the following review of literature, I explored the question: "How has school leadership been defined as it relates to equitable student outcomes?" Based on a review of the extant literature, I share why I hold Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) as one of the most impactful ways to improve equitable educational outcomes for young people and name some of the steps needed to successfully implement CRSL. The organization of this review is an illustration of the evolution of my thinking and how I have ultimately come to elevate CRSL in this way. I began the review by first looking at how achievement has been generally defined in the US, and the ahistorical, deficit-based, and racialized roots of this definition. I then delineated how different forms of school leadership are needed to directly address diversity within the US public school system and create more equitable schools. Several alternate ways to view impactful educational leadership are named specifically, all of which point to a general need for more holistic understanding of the work of schools. CRSL is defined and theorized as a method for school-based changes in professional practice. Finally, I discussed the limitations that impact implementation of CRSL, particularly by a white, male educator.

Methodology of the Literature Review

The initial roots of this study lie in Skrla, McKenzie, and Scheurich's (2009) work on Equity Audits. Utilizing this work, I conducted several forward searches that gave me a much wider perspective of the researchers and studies that had been influenced

by Skrla et al. From the texts that I uncovered on those initial forward searches, I was able to glean many further topics, concepts, keywords, and researchers to deepen my own understanding of inequity and school leadership.

At about the same time I was also introduced to the theoretical perspectives of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), which caused me to question how systemic racism impedes school change efforts. From this perspective, I began to dive into critical race theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Gillborn, 2006; Capper, 2015; Howard & Novarro, 2016), critical whiteness (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997; Leonardo, 2009; Wise, 2011), and eventually White Racial Framing (Feagin, 2013) alongside culturally relevant educational practice. Additionally, as I continued my research, the work of Khalifa (2012; et al, 2016; 2018) continued to appear as a reference point.

List of keywords searched. Several different search avenues and terms were utilized. The following terms were utilized in keyword searches: Achievement Gap, Educational Achievement Gap, White Racial Framing, White Racial Frame, Racism, Antiracism, Antiracist Leadership, School Leadership, Educational Leadership, Culturally Responsive Leadership, The Coleman Report, Equity Leadership, Equity Audit, Equity Trap. Articles were utilized that related to school leadership, equitable practice in school leadership, provided historical context, and culturally responsive practice. Generally, if articles referred to teacher or pedagogical practice, higher education, or to leadership development programs, they were excluded. This helped narrow focus on active leadership practice in schools.

Indexes and non-indexed sources. Indexed and non-indexed sources were used to confirm and clarify best paths to acquire source material. Searches were mostly

completed between April 2016 and December 2019. My search relied upon two primary search tools, which led to a host of differing databases: both Google Scholar (as a way to read briefly about studies, books, and other research articles in the extant literature) and the University of Denver Compass search engine were used. Through Compass, JSTOR, ERIC, EBSCO, and ProQuest were accessed as indicated by searches. Additionally, at times the SAGE Journals database (through either University of Denver or University Council on Educational Administration) was accessed. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) was also accessed, mostly to look for studies of data related to the topics of this research (see Musu-Gillette et al, 2016). Generally, filters were utilized to limit search results to more recent studies (since 2000), search within the field of education, and to narrow results to focus on leadership practice (from leadership training, teacher pedagogical practice, or district leadership, e.g.) based on preliminary results. This was to ensure that studies were pulled from current, salient, and widely accepted literature. When backwards searches indicated, such filters were not utilized (especially regarding time frame). Finally, it should be noted that the roots of this study sprang from coursework throughout my graduate study, and some articles were brought to my attention through this coursework.

Scope of the review. In this review of the literature, I focused mainly upon defining and delineating leadership that seeks to build for more equitable outcomes for students across different racial groups. To begin, I will look briefly at the literature and historical foundations of defining inequity with the term "achievement gap." From this exploration, it became clear that different forms of school leadership were needed to create more equitable schools, and these were explored. Specifically, a deeper look at

CRSL will outline its power as a potential agent of change in schools and challenges that may be associated with CRSL. To be sure, this will not be a full measurement of the achievement gap as it exists, its implications for educational policy, or development of a step by step process to eliminate the gap. Nor will I explain how differing forms of leadership respond directly to the gap. Rather, I will utilize extant literature to describe how defining the achievement gap does not lead to greater equity and how adoption of leadership models that respond to historical racism in schools is needed to create equity. Then I will delineate areas where more study is warranted.

Key construct: school leadership for equity. The ways in which school leaders think about and enact their practice within schools is a deeply rooted and evolving topic. In this review, I examined common change-based leadership styles based upon desired student outcomes. In this review, I intended to trace a line from leadership styles to student outcomes, and to illuminate how contemporary leaders can view their leadership in hoping to impact more equitable outcomes. During this review, I developed a greater understanding of transformational leadership and several forms of equity-focused leadership that extend from the transformational style: transformative leadership, social justice leadership, antiracist leadership, and finally, CRSL. CRSL will be described as a highly impactful form of leadership for greater equity, and associated aptitudes and challenges will also be described.

Sub-construct: the achievement gap. To delve into the literature surrounding leadership toward greater equity, I began by looking at the most common way that the lack of equity is measured. Within this work, the term achievement gap refers to a commonly cited difference in educational outcomes between white students and their

peers of color. The review of the literature indicates that the foundations and forms of this measurement are inherently flawed and utilize deficit-based perspectives to define the US educational system (Ladson-Billings 2006). Ironically, through focus on the achievement gap, schools are enabled to monitor biased, racialized results of standardized testing to recreate the historically based outcomes that many seek to undo (Seaton & Douglas 2014). For an examination of the extant literature, it is understood that until school leaders can look beyond just "fixing" the achievement gap, inequity will persist.

Review of the Literature

There are many measures that can be used to identify inequity in schooling across the nation. From preschool access to rate of graduation (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), levels of funding in differing communities (Brown, 2015), disciplinary measures (Office for Civil Rights, 2016), and access to advanced or specialized courses (Kettler, Russell, & Puryear 2015), it is clear that American public schools do not provide an equitable space for the education of all students. Educational theorists and researchers have carried out countless studies to determine the "fixes" that will bring change to this fact (see Carter & Welner 2013; Leithwood 2010; Williams 2014; Khalifa 2016). However, after so much energy dedicated to building equity, and despite the development of many seemingly successful methods for increasing equity, the disparity in outcomes based on the racialized experiences of students continue to grow (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Often, these inequities are termed as an *achievement gap*.

The "achievement gap". Jeynes (2015) contended that the achievement gap, a difference in outcomes between white students and students of color, "exists in virtually every measure of educational progress" (p. 524). Several researchers (Anderson 2012;

Noguera, 2008; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2009) have sought to assign cause as to why the gap exists, and their conclusions cover a range. Factors external to the school such as neighborhood influence, concentrations of urban poverty for many students of color (Anderson, 2012), parental involvement, religious belief (Jeynes 2015), structural societal racism (Noguera 2008), and even falsely held social beliefs about the abilities and intelligence of different racial groups (Noguera 2008, Torff 2014), have all been theorized to play a role in this gap. Additionally, some studies have shown how school practices deny equity to many students of color (Pollack & Zirkel, 2013), and how school leaders' attitudes and implicit biases tend to limit the success of certain students (Brooks & Jean-Marie 2007).

Naming the gap: the Coleman Report. In 1966, The Equality of Educational Opportunity study (EEOS) was released as a requirement of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Commonly referred to as the Coleman Report, EEOS noted that, "the average minority pupil scores distinctly lower on [achievement] tests at every level than the average white pupil" (p. 21). The term *achievement gap* is likely derived from the following assertion within Coleman (1966): "It appears that in some areas of the country there are experiences over the period of school that serve to widen the *gap in achievement* [emphasis added] between Negroes and whites – while there are in none of the regions experiences that decrease the difference over the period of school" (p. 220). Meyers (2012) posited that news outlets popularized the term and stated that "the speed at which achievement gap has come to pervade education policy, relevant conversation, and material at national, state, and local levels is remarkable. A term seldom used from 1940 until nearly 2000 has grown into one of the most unavoidable terms in American

education" (p. 474). As the source of the term achievement gap, there is a distinct note of bias within the Coleman report, and a deficit view of communities of color, labeled as inferior by the Coleman team. The conclusions in Coleman's (1966) report seemed to implicate communities of color as deficient, and his corollary degradation of the societal values of these communities place causality for the inequity in US schools at the feet of the underserved. More nuanced research has often led to differing and alternative theories regarding the gap.

Continuing inequities: contemporary measurement. Currently, debate continues in academic and social science circles regarding how to name and measure inequities in schooling outcomes. However, the achievement gap is commonly cited, and its most simplistic form is often measured using the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). NAEP is "an assessment program conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to inform the public of what elementary and secondary students in the United States know and can do in various subject areas" (Bohrnstedt, Kitmitto, Ogut, Sherman, & Chan 2015, contents). The data collected from NAEP are used to measure educational progress across the nation and are also used to measure differences in progress across subgroups. Though this program has existed for decades, with the advent of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law's reliance upon "official" achievement gap data, the study of inequitable school outcomes has increased (Carter &Welner, 2013).

Factors theorized to impact equity. It is clear that current educational inequity has deep roots based in deliberate racial stratification of society and racist policies designed to prevent equitable education for minoritized groups. Darby and Rury (2018)

pointed to the ways historical racism serves as the cornerstone of denial of opportunity for people of color. Warikoo and Carter (2009) pointed out that stereotypical or discriminatory descriptions of culture or race regularly form the basis for contemporary discussion regarding the achievement gap. Along with these conclusions, several studies of current outcome data in American schools point to structural and historical racism as the root problem.

Societal, systemic factors. Ladson-Billings (2006) declined the idea of an achievement gap, and by approaching the historical realities of racial inequality, suggested that we ought to look at the gap as more of a debt. This debt is built upon years of racist denial of equitable education, creating an annual deficit of unmet educational need which is exacerbated by lack of attention to the economic, sociopolitical, and moral needs of communities of color. Because of this debt, and refusal to address the racist roots of public policies that create such deficits, we find our nation unable to reduce the gap in student outcomes. That is, inequitable school outcomes are seen as the symptom of larger societal ills: "addressing the achievement gap is not the most important inequality to attend to… inequalities in health, early childhood experiences, out-of-school experiences, and economic security are also contributory and cumulative and make it near-impossible for us to reify the achievement gap as the source and cause of social inequality" (p. 10). However, educators must play a vital role in eradication of the education debt by choosing to address the racism present within the education system.

Fitzgerald (2014) built upon Ladson-Billings (2006), further stating that as school or district leaders and politicians attempt to blame each other for inadequate educational

outcomes, they ignore the role of racism upon education. He continued that one must address racism, discrimination, and oppression to address the system. Lozenski (2017) agreed with both researchers, stating, "The premise that the achievement gap is a 'logical outcome' of a historical accumulation of inequity should be part of the national discourse around racialized educational disparities" (p. 163).

The opportunity gap. Scholars such as Carter and Welner (2013) also rejected the notion of the achievement gap, suggesting that by looking at the inputs of the educational system, one can instead utilize the term *opportunity gap*:

> The "opportunity gap" frame…shifts our attention from outcomes to inputs—to the deficiencies in the foundational components of societies, schools, and communities that produce significant differences in educational—and ultimately socioeconomic—outcomes. Thinking in terms of "achievement gaps" emphasizes the symptoms; thinking about unequal opportunity highlights the causes. (p. 4)

Use of the term opportunity gap serves to maintain focus upon what is not equitably offered to students of color, rather than place blame upon the students for a lack of outcomes.

How to define achievement. Milner (2013) shifted focus from the achievement gap as a measure and called into question the definition of achievement. Basing our understanding of achievement on standardized test scores, such as NAEP may be problematic, as "standardization, in many ways, is antithetical to the diversity that communities of people possess because it suggests that all students live and operate in homogeneous environments with equality and equity of opportunity afforded to them" (p. 5). By relying so heavily on such standardized measures, "Unfortunately the knowledge and skills that students of color, those living in poverty, and English language learners possess are often seen as substandard or not as essential" (p. 6) That the instruments used

in defining and measuring the achievement gap may be faulty and even the value placed upon certain forms of achievement may represent inequitable thinking should lead to deep questioning of the entirety of the US educational system. Additionally, these questions point to the need for a shift in thinking about differences in outcomes. Instead of seeking to better align data, leaders of diverse students must think about the diverse ways they can serve their communities, and the ways that achievement might be measured beyond oversimplified discussion of "the achievement gap."

Empirical research evidence: What can the "achievement gap" tell us? As concluded above, over-reliance upon achievement gap data can lead to oversimplification of theories about how to reduce inequity. However, it is helpful to consider empirical research around the achievement gap, as it may illuminate leadership practices that are impactful across diverse groups.

As an educational researcher, Leithwood (et al, 2004) is best known for his conclusions that leadership is second only to instructional practice in determining student success. In a later study, Leithwood (2010) reviewed 31 separate research studies and identified the characteristics of districts that have successfully closed the achievement gap, while noting that "reducing disparities or gaps in the achievement of students from different social, cultural, and economic backgrounds has proven to be largely elusive" (p. 246). From these studies, he named the characteristics attributable to districts with a record of closing the gap. These included: a district-wide focus on closing the achievement gap; data-driven and research-driven approaches to curriculum and instruction; building the efficacy of teachers and leaders; maintaining strong internal and external relationships with school community; investing in instructional leadership,

creating targeted and phased plans for school improvement; use of job embedded professional development; and utilization of resources tied to governmental change initiatives. Overall, Leithwood's study points to many of the same leadership attributes highlighted by Khalifa (2018) in defining CRSL but does not explicitly name the impacts of racism upon schools and communities.

A study by Hanushek and Rivkin (2009) in Texas explored another institutional-level impact upon students: the relationship in schools between the homogeneity of student population and levels of teacher experience. Their results indicated that black students tend to have less experienced teachers than their white peers. Increasing the diversity of the student bodies and decreasing the proportion of black students who have teachers "with little or no experience to the state averages… would eliminate between 15 and 20 percent of the growth in the achievement differential between grades four and eight" (p. 386). This finding also shows that hiring practices can substantially impact student outcomes.

Schofield (2010) uncovered evidence that mixed-ability groups are beneficial for overall achievement levels, and that ability groupings with differentiated instruction (commonly known as curricular tracking) widen the gap in achievement overall. She found that "having high-ability classmates is associated with increased achievement gains" (p. 1518). Therefore, since the educational system tends to create inequitable outcomes, the students typically underserved by the system will be served even more poorly if placed into ability groups that include differentiation of curriculum. The implication is that schools should be organized to increase mixed-ability groups, and should not create groups that are homogeneous. Neither of these results are conclusive

regarding what definitively will close gaps in student outcomes; however, each point to leadership and organizational moves that could show some success in creating greater equity.

Though there is inequity within the public-school system, it is also clear is that this problem can be defined and understood in multiple ways. Even attempting to define inequity succinctly often results in biased or racialized conclusions (Ladson-Billings & Tate 1995). The complexity of this problem in American education will not likely retreat through further implementation of reductionist, deficit-based leadership styles. Nor can the problem be solved by continuing to operate schools under assumptions around deficits within the communities that schools serve, as highlighted in the conclusions of the Coleman (1966) Report. Instead, a new form of leadership is needed, one that seeks to provide for equity while pushing back against the racist policies and structural factors that continue to limit equity in schools. By looking at contemporary, antiracist efforts to refine leadership practice, we can hopefully define a style of leadership that is more likely to counteract racism and societal inequity, and that can provide a positive, supportive community of learning for students of all backgrounds.

Developing Leadership that leads to Equity. What arises from the studies cited above is that in order to affect real change in outcomes for diverse students, leaders must be willing to discuss, and by corollary, to think about and act as leaders for drastic change to schools and for real exploration of how to reach equity. One form of leadership that calls for such drastic change can be seen in transformational leadership.

Transformational leadership: organizing for change. Transformational Leadership is sometimes seen as one of the most important and widely studied leadership

approaches (Northouse, 2016). In the field of education, this importance is pronounced, and according to Berkovich (2016), "Since the mid-2000s, transformational leadership makes up approximately 30-45 percent of school documents published containing the term 'school leadership,'" (p. 613). It has been "embraced as an ideal model for school leadership" and has great "relevance…to the contemporary challenges encountered by principals," (p. 609). Northouse (2016) surmised that the theory has grown so popular because it meets the needs of contemporary organizations so well (p.161).

Transformational leadership "describes how leaders can initiate, develop, and carry out significant changes in organizations" (Northouse, 2016, p. 175). It is first defined by its difference from the antithetical and much simpler leadership style of transactional leadership. The theory provides a definition of leadership beyond the transactional exchanges that occur in all leader-follower relationships and reflects a framework in which the leader motivates followers to achieve a greater, more moral end to the work of the organization (Northouse, 2016). To move beyond transaction, the leader seeks to *transform* the organization.

In looking to define transformational leadership, Mora (2012) named four elements (adapted from Avolio and Bass) that make up the characteristics of a transformational leader:

> (a) Idealized influence: earned respect and trust from followers, charisma; (b) Inspirational motivation: both motivating followers and setting an optimistic vision; (c) Intellectual stimulation: driving followers to be creative and work for creative solutions; and (d) Individual consideration: sees differing needs of followers, and makes adjustments accordingly (p. 188).

After comparing 79 studies on transformational school leadership, Leithwood and Sun (2012) named four categories of practices that transformational school leaders carry

out: setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organization, and improving the instructional program (of the school)(p. 399). Each of these categories, along with their subdivisions, point to the purpose of changing the organization to a higher purpose and a further end than currently employed.

Finally, it is important to note that inherent in the definition of transformational leadership is an aspect of morality and raising the ethical practice of the organization. Northouse (2016) contended that transformational leadership, "positively affects followers' moral identities and moral emotions (e.g., empathy and guilt) and this, in turn, leads to moral decision making and moral action by followers" (p. 163). This moral component separates agents of positive change from charismatic, effective, but ultimately unethical or immoral leaders with megalomaniacal aims. Additionally, this moral footing links transformational leadership most closely with culturally responsive leadership, and in some ways the moral aspirations of transformational leaders lend themselves to culturally responsive practice.

The development of transformational leadership, with a focus on morals and ethics seems to lead naturally into forms of leadership that address educational inequity directly. In seeking to further define leadership that would serve as transformational, several researchers have developed theories around creating schools and systems that more adequately create equity for students. A few of these, including transformative leadership, social justice leadership, and antiracist leadership are addressed below, leading into discussion of CRSL.

Transformative leadership. Distinct from the more broadly focused Transformational Leadership, Shields (2010) presented a definition of transformative

leadership based on the work and words of Freire (2000), citing education as the catalyst for social change. Her definition continued, "Transformative leadership begins with questions of justice and democracy; it critiques inequitable practices and offers the promise not only of greater individual achievement but of a better life lived in common with others" (p. 559). Khalifa et al (2016), stated that practitioners of this type of leadership "challenge teaching and environments that marginalize students of color, and they will also identify, protect, institutionalize, and celebrate all cultural practices from these students" (p. 7). Transformative leaders see their place within the wider society, and then seek to create change in society through their leadership within an organization.

Shields (2013) further clarified this theory by naming the tenets of transformative leadership, several of which prove relevant to leadership for greater equity: "the mandate to effect deep and equitable change; the need to deconstruct and reconstruct knowledge frameworks that perpetuate inequity and injustice; a focus on emancipation, democracy, equity, and justice; the need to address the inequitable distribution of power…; the call to exhibit moral courage" (p. 21). All these ideas seem to go hand in hand with leading for equity. However, in seeking to build case studies for leaders to utilize in learning how to become transformative leaders specifically surrounding racial inequity, Briscoe (2013) noted that, "Unfortunately, transformative learning that supports antiracism is nonexistent, underdeveloped, or misdirected" (p. 141). Transformative leadership can be said to be an introduction to the ideas that must be in place for leadership for equity.

Social justice leadership. Perhaps, in looking to close gaps in student outcomes, leadership should be framed as a practice of increasing outputs that align with the aims of social justice. Theoharis and Scanlan (2015) stated that such leadership should point to

the creation of socially just schooling in which "one dimension of identity (such as one's race or home language or gender or sexual orientation) does not directly correlate with undesirable aspects of schooling (such as being bullied, struggling academically, or dropping out of school)" (p. 3). McKenzie et al (2008) stated that preparing leaders for social justice would, "improve schooling for literally all of our children" (p. 130). Theoharis (2007) named that to create a school rooted in social justice, leaders should look to raise student achievement across the school, align school structures to social justice, build the capacity for social justice in school staff, and strengthen the school culture to create a greater sense of community. He also acknowledged that such changes are likely to meet resistance during implementation.

Regarding questions of race within the social justice framework, Horsford and Clark (2013) cited a need to create opportunities to advance racially inclusive leadership. The researchers suggested that such opportunities could come in the form of dialogue about race, film screenings, book circles, multicultural curriculum transformation seminars, and parent involvement in the school.

Capper and Young (2014) named several of what they termed ironies and limitations of social justice leadership. First of these is a lack of clarity around defining inclusion, and how inclusion impacts achievement. Instead, the authors explained "stories of success in closing achievement gaps between different student populations are often told with little or no explicit consideration given to inclusion…Only a few scholars draw a direct connection between the inclusion/ integration of all students (beyond disability and race) and academic achievement (p. 159). Additionally, they pointed to a dearth of examples of research to study the intersectionality of experience for students

belonging to more than one identified group, a lack of clear definitions of achievement, and a lack of equitable practice coherence. To respond to such limitations, they suggested that "social justice educators and scholars must provide unambiguous evidence and develop persuasive arguments for how tracking and separate programs often demanded by White middle/upper class families harms their children and how…heterogeneous settings will, in fact, extend their children's opportunities" (p. 163). Additionally, the researchers conclude that school leaders should become expert in a range of student differences and how to serve them, should always seek to increase student learning, and must see the efforts of multiple stakeholders as vital to successful social justice schools.

The ideas of social justice leadership stand in service of creating fully equitable schools. The idealistic vision of schools for all is certainly inspiring, and the ideas and methods of introducing such leadership can inform antiracist leadership. However, by focusing on all exclusive practices in a school, focus on race and cultural inequities might be lost. By first seeking to rectify the inequities perpetuated by colorblindness, school leaders can open the doors to greater overall inclusion.

Antiracist leadership. By distilling the many foci of social justice leadership into a singular focus on race and racial inequity both at the school and societal level, leaders can implement antiracist leadership. Simply put, antiracist leadership seeks to undo racism through implementation of antiracist practices and policies in schools. Kendi (2019) named antiracist policy as "any measure that produces or sustains racial equity between racial groups" (p. 24). The antiracist leadership model serves as an antidote to institutionalized racism, which Jones (2000) stated "must be addressed for important

change to occur" (p. 1214). Antiracist leadership is a way to create change in the racist structures of schooling.

Young and Laible (2000) defined antiracism as a series of actions undertaken to remake oneself in the face of racism and then to carry out antiracist practice. Therefore, one must work to counteract the forces of racism present in society. Pollock (2008) termed *everyday antiracism* as a series of actions "educators could take, every day, to help counteract racial inequality and racism in schools and society" (p. xvii).

The descriptions of antiracism lead to clear questions regarding how antiracism presents as a form of school leadership. Theoharis and Haddix (2013) used the example of six white principals to outline the actions of antiracist leaders, who "recognize the powerful ways that race and racism shape and impact access to equity in schooling and can impede efforts toward closing the achievement gap" (p. 15). In concluding their study, the researchers pointed to the need to recognize racism as a singular factor among many intersectional factors that impact equitable education. To turn the practice of leadership toward student outcomes, Jean-Marie and Cumings Mansfield (2013) stated that leaders must "fully deconstruct the realities of students' lives and the ways their leadership practices may or may not reproduce marginalizing practices" (p. 28).

A study by Blumer and Tatum (1999) focused on the need for leaders to create a community of antiracism. The researchers cautioned against prescriptive, one-size-fits-all ways of creating antiracist schools. Their findings point to a need for leaders to respond to the circumstances that racism presents, and, most importantly, to persist in their commitment to creating long-term success. Radd and Grosland (2019) built upon this idea and added that it is impossible to undo the deep-rooted racism of educational

systems with simple fixes. School leaders should "reject initiatives that promise to solve complex, historic and systemic issues by way of technically oriented strategies that leave existing systems and structures intact and unexamined," (p. 16). Instead, change oriented leaders should seek to understand where *systems* create inequity and then change those systems where needed.

Gooden and Dantley (2012) proposed a framework for leadership preparation that holds race at its center, utilizing what is termed a prophetic voice, or a refusal to allow the impacts of racism to continue. Through use of this voice, the researchers state that their framework both "centers on the specificity of race within a broader context of social justice" and "holds all of the players in the educational process accountable for creating equitable spaces for children and youth to learn" (p. 241). The prophetic voice must be loud and strong, and never fear to seek answers to tough questions about inequity. In addition, leaders must understand critical theories and practice pragmatism, so that they are free "to become subversive in their professional practices as organic intellectuals who see their work as being wider and deeper than getting teachers to prepare students to take a regimen of standardized tests" (p. 243) – in other words, preparing students for the realities of life as members of their communities. Finally, these leaders must learn the language and history of racism so that they are able to confront racism directly and honestly. Many of the tenets of antiracism and antiracist leadership lie at the heart of CRSL, but the CRSL model does not seek as much to undo systemic racism as it seeks to be responsive to the needs presented by the diversity of stakeholders within the school. The theories both seek to achieve more equitable outcomes for students of color but rely upon differing methods to achieve such outcomes.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership – leading for equity. In seeking to define the tenets of CRSL, Johnson (2014) explained, "Culturally responsive leadership, derived from the concept of culturally responsive pedagogy, involves those leadership philosophies, practices, and policies that create inclusive schooling environments for students and families from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds" (p. 148). Lopez (2015) expanded on this definition to include that culturally responsive leaders must ensure traditionally underserved students "(a) have the opportunity to achieve academic excellence; (b) engage in learning that raises their awareness of injustices in society; (c) [have their] experiences and ways of knowing…included in the teaching and learning process; and (d) engage in curricula that disrupt dominant privilege and power" (p. 172). In an exhaustive review of the literature regarding CRSL, Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016) identified four behaviors that culturally responsive leaders espouse. Each of these is addressed below.

Critical self-awareness. Critical self-awareness is the ability to see and reflect upon the level of understanding of inequity present in ones' leadership. This includes the ability to see where hegemony influences ways of thinking and acting in leadership. "Critical reflection, which is also important to culturally responsive leadership, is foundational and actually precedes any actions in leadership. Yet, it must also be ongoing" (Khalifa et al 2016, p. 14). The first step toward building inclusive practices is to see the causes, even if they point to the leader or leadership actions as problematic.

Culturally responsive curricula and teacher preparation. An important aspect of culturally responsive leadership is ensuring that teachers embrace culturally responsive practices and that educational vision espouses responsiveness. As Khalifa et al (2016)

stated, leaders must ensure that individual classroom practices are culturally responsive: "culturally responsive teachers not only center students' cultural norms but also their very beings, proclivities, languages, understandings, interests, families, and spaces…it is the duty of the principal to ensure this is a priority for individual teachers in their instruction as well in the overall school culture" (p. 17).

Culturally responsive and inclusive school environments. Leaders must personally welcome all students but must also advocate for and create a school environment that welcomes all students and families into the environment. However, Khalifa et al (2016) warned "this is not easy given that student marginalization is often historic, normalized, and 'invisiblized' in most educational contexts" (p. 18). Through critical self-reflection, leaders can ensure they are not reproducing racism or systemic oppression and are instead remaining culturally responsive.

Engaging students and parents in community contexts. This refers to a leader's ability to "understand, address, and even advocate for community-based issues" (Khalifa et al, 2016, p. 11). Additionally, leaders must validate the cultural identity of families as well as see the value in the home-based cultural knowledge that students bring into the school each day. As the researchers stated, **"**although receiving a good education and having highly qualified teachers is paramount, these benefits do not transcend the need for Indigenous identities and communities to be valued in school—in their authentic expressions—and the principal is central in constructing these spaces" (p. 19).

Overall, culturally responsive school leadership points to ways that leaders can value what is often undervalued in contemporary public education. The cultural and historical knowledge that students and families bring to the school community, as well as

the community's knowledge about its own needs and values should be foundational to the school. Principals must ensure that their personal thoughts and action, as well as curriculum, instruction, school environment, and community voice all reflect the values of cultural responsiveness. When looking for CRSL in practice, schools with strong CRSL should contain all of the following: an inclusive, culturally responsive environment; recognition of students' lived experience; understanding of community context; collaboration between the school and community; and empowerment of students and communities.

Implementation of CRSL. Khalifa (2018), wrote extensively upon how school leaders can implement CRSL in their own contexts. Specifically, he explained that reliance upon a traditional, school-centered approach to education will serve to recreate the inequitable outcomes traditionally produced by schools, while CRSL will lead to more equitable outcomes. To achieve the hopeful outcomes of CRSL, a three-year checklist is presented to highlight the actions that school leaders should undertake, and a checklist regarding how to respond to likely pushback is also given. To begin each year, leaders are recommended to complete an equity audit, "that makes visible any inequities, identifies the sources of inequities, and connects the inequities to appropriate reforms" (p. 178). After this, a series of responses to the information garnered by the equity audit is recommended.

In year one, leaders need to self-identify their role in the inequities, along with school policies and practices. From there, leaders need to build self-reflection in others, and enlist a team of equity partners to help in building a vision and plan for equity that includes better involvement of the surrounding community in the school and

accountability of the school for meeting the goals put forward. In year two, after the equity audit, common equitable practices need to be codified, and leaders need to move toward equitable practice in community outreach, internal teams and processes, and culturally responsive curriculum. Year three sees furthering of the work completed in the preceding years, along with building a community oversight committee to ensure responsiveness. Khalifa (2018) recommended that leaders should "resist notions that they will ever create *completely* (emphasis original) culturally responsive schools. Rather they should think of this work as an iterative cycle of (a) constantly engaging in critical self-reflection and (b) implementing and/or reforming policies that will make schools *more* (emphasis original) culturally responsive" (p. 177).

The Equity Audit: Khalifa (2018) provided deep detail regarding the steps and considerations that schools and school leaders must undertake in building for CRSL, and he also stated clearly that equity audits must lie at the heart of this work: "In essence, a comprehensive equity audit must be the starting point for CRSL and equity reforms" (p. 148). Khalifa's equity audit focuses on four focal areas: Equity trends (student, teacher, grade-level, etc), Survey data (on school culture and climate, community engagement, teaching practices), Policy analysis, CRSL (looking for areas of CRSL across the school). However, other forms of equity audit could also inform school practice (p. 204). Green (2017) noted that equity audits earned popularity in the early 2000s when Skrla et al. (2004) formally introduced them, but that the distinct process for utilization of the equity audit process is not agreed upon by scholars in the field (p. 8).

To understand what equity audits entail, it is helpful to consider McKenzie and Scheurich's (2004) discussion of equity traps. As the researchers stated, "These equity

traps, as we are conceptualizing them, are patterns of thinking and behavior that trap the possibilities for creating equitable schools" (p. 603). After completing research on building more equitable schools, they distilled their findings into four such traps that teachers or school leaders might fall under: A deficit view, or attributing struggles to some deficiency in students or their communities; Racial erasure, or "the notion that by refusing to see color, by acting as if we can erase the race of those of color, and by prioritizing other factors— such as economics—over race, we can deny our own racism" (p. 613); Avoidance and employment of the gaze, or working in low-income schools to avoid the pressure that comes from middle class white parents while seeking to assert their own thinking about the deficiencies of students of color in the school; and finally, Paralogical beliefs and behaviors, or a belief that a teacher's "negative treatment of their students was caused by the behaviors of their students" (p. 624). For each of these traps (which, importantly, are traps for equity, not traps for the teachers or principals), the authors provided strategies to overcome them. In their conclusion, the authors state that "the best route to influence current teachers is through the principal, who, research repeatedly shows, is the key to school change. For a principal to change the school community's attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors, the principal must be able to identify and understand barriers to equity" (p. 628).

The concept of uncovering equity traps was expanded upon by Skrla, McKenzie, and Scheurich (2009) in their work to design and delineate procedures by which to complete equity audits. The authors described ways that school leaders can audit teacher quality, school programming, and student achievement for equity. Then, the researchers named strategies to lead change for equity. The audit as presented consists of seven steps

and the writing concluded with a delineation of equity traps and encouragement for leaders to carry out equity audits as a step toward changing schools for greater equity.

Capper and Young's (2015) study proceeded from the argument that equity audits are the "primary equity practice in schools" (p. 187), followed by six steps that leaders must undertake to complete an equity audit. The authors asserted that "The achievement gap cannot be substantially narrowed unless we eliminate the significant equity gaps that inhibit students' opportunities to learn" (p. 195).

Green (2017) utilized the concept of equity audits and seemed to marry the concept with the call for community-responsiveness inherent in CRSL to create community-based equity audits. The process was not intended to be linear, check-the-boxes and move on, but instead, "is an approach that educational leaders and community stakeholders can flexibly apply to develop context specific strategies to pressing school–community concerns" (p. 5). Green's audits are based on the tenets of Freirean Dialogue, namely love, humility, faith, hope, and critical thought, and then take on four phases: "(a) disrupt deficit views of community, (b) conduct initial community inquiry and shared community experiences, (c) establish Community Leadership Team (CLT), and (d) collect equity, asset-based community data for action" (p. 17). In each phase, the community is enlisted to work together in highlighting the ways that schools can better serve community-wide, and therefore, student needs. From this process, school leaders are both charged with supporting the community surrounding their school and provided the knowledge and partnerships to deploy in achieving equity within the school and the school's community setting.

Each of the forms of equity audit seek to help school leaders approach school leadership in a manner that honors the student, family, community, and educator members of the school community. By approaching school reform through a lens that values the collective experience and knowledge of those who are impacted by the school, use of equity audits can be seen as a powerful first step in implementation of CRSL, and a direct challenge to the interpretations of the Coleman (1966) report and education policy that has followed after it. In this way, CRSL seeks to both serve the students who currently attend a school, and to correct the damage done to those who have already endured schooling that is culturally unresponsive.

Limitations of CRSL: Though CRSL is an effective form of leadership in building toward equity, it is important to note a key way in which it might not help overcome the challenges that some communities or leaders face.

Difficulty overcoming the power of white racial framing to challenge whiteness and hegemonic epistemologies. Taking up Lozenski's (2017) argument and looking at the historical and societal factors impacting achievement, it may be helpful to look outside of the realm of education to learn more about the roots of the current system. Feagin's (2013) delineation of White Racial Framing (WRF) may help to bring clarity to some of the societal factors that impact schools. Feagin outlined a way that white people tend to frame the world, or the way that their privilege and position in society allows whites to construct meaning in the world: "an overarching white worldview that encompasses a *broad and persisting set of racial stereotypes, prejudices, ideologies, images, interpretations and narratives, emotions, and reactions to language accents, as well as racialized inclinations to discriminate* [emphasis original]" (p. 3). He further

articulated that this frame has its roots in the idealized founding of the United States and that this form of thought is so pervasive that it serves to reassert itself through the preconceptions present in our civic institutions, friend groups, accepted self and group narratives, and even in the tenets of research science.

By looking specifically at the experiences of black male students, Fitzgerald (2014) identified WRF as repressive to equitable outcomes for black students. He explained how WRF can dilute even seemingly earnest searches for equity, stating, "The White racial frame allows… public discussions of oppression and race…to be diluted, weak, and many times frankly dishonest" (p. 17). In his work with a school district looking to move toward greater racial equity, Fitzgerald's results pointed to the fact that many white teachers "contended that they possessed a color-blind ideology and that race was not a factor in the district." Furthermore, "they increasingly expressed resentment toward any further emphasis or focus on race" (p. 18). Such resistance can in turn lead to a lack of forward progress, and a return to white comfort.

Amos (2016) revealed how WRF impacts Latinx educators, specifically how white frames can lead to a counterproductive and hostile work environment. Participants in her study reveal their ability to teach effectively and bilingually was undermined and seen as a weakness rather than a strength. The level of questioning and seeming surveillance experienced by both educators led them to believe that they were underperforming, when in fact neither was. Both participants reported that "Spanish language skills, cultural knowledge and understanding of effective methods of teacher-student bonding and discipline—were not recognized nor appreciated by the(ir) colleagues" (p. 20). Amos later suggested that, "Administrators and teachers of all colors

should take responsibility to educate themselves regarding how the white racial frame works in the United States in general and at their schools in particular, and how it leads to structural racism" (p. 22). His suggestion is apt and succinctly calls forward a central tension of school leadership for equity: if leaders are not able to identify and dismantle racism in themselves and their schools, they will necessarily reproduce inequity. Therefore it is the responsibility of justice-minded leaders to delve into WRF and its influence on both their leadership and their institutions.

Impacts of Racism on School Leadership. It is notable that the literature on how racism impacts effective leadership for equity remains considerably limited. Swanson and Welton (2018) studied white principals' reflections upon race and their efforts to address racism in their schools, but the study did not directly address forms of equity leadership. In their study, the researchers found that though principals "worked to develop their own personal consciousness about systemic racism, they admittedly felt unprepared to raise the consciousness of others" (p. 21). The researchers recommended that principals seek out the development needed to lead such efforts and to train teacher leaders to lead them. This study does not determine specifically how racial consciousness in leadership can impact schools, but rather focuses on the need to hold conversations about race.

Looking specifically at leadership formation, Hernandez and Marshall (2017) sought to learn more about how school leaders view their roles and their schools as performance sites for equitable leadership practices. The researchers audited ten leadership candidates' reflections on social class and race/ethnicity in search of trends and greater understanding of leaders' conceptions of equity in leadership practice. The

study found that, “The one social justice end that students in this principal preparation program all seemed committed to was equity of student achievement [and]…a common goal of driving toward increased student achievement for all groups in their district” (p. 221). However, the authors question how this commitment contributes to action once leaders are installed in their schools, and there is a lack of evidence to clearly answer that question.

Johnson, Perez, and Uline (2011) utilized a concept they termed “expert noticing” to study how principals impact schools that produce more equitable outcomes. The researchers chose schools that, “Unlike the overwhelming majority of urban schools in the United States…the academic achievement of African American, Latino, and low-income students exceeded state averages for all students” (p. 123). The researchers first established that principals do indeed influence student performance, specifically through instructional leadership. They later named the ways in which principals, through paying close attention, and reflecting upon specific actions observed in classrooms, can impact student outcomes. Principals impacted teachers’ practice by “providing detailed and specific feedback focused on observed classroom behavior within a problem-solving orientation based on trust and respect” (p. 133). Though this study did not directly address a specific style of leadership for equity in schools, it seems to call for more research into what principals who are successfully serving all students are looking for when entering a classroom.

In a study that names the impacts of WRF on leadership, Toure and Dorsey (2018) explored the work of three white principals in an ethnographic study. Each of the schools studied serves a predominantly African American population, though each had

differing levels of diversity. Their findings showed that each of the principals "faced many issues of race, culture, and learning, yet, in a manifestation of the White racial frame, tended to be colorblind and colormute" (p. 14). Additionally, in each principal's practice, the researchers noted actions that aligned with Feagin's (2013) delineation of WRF. Specifically, they described five aspects of WRF: (1) racial stereotypes that rely on common narrative rather than personal interaction; (2) racial narratives to rationalize actions or choices that oppress; (3) racial images used to create a sense of colorblindness (4) strong feelings about race and "feelings about racism as a new and uncommon phenomenon as opposed to historical, deep-seated, or structural" (p. 120), and finally, (5) racial discrimination. Within the actions of school leaders, they found evidence of each of these five aspects of WRF. Their findings show the importance of white school leaders recognizing and disrupting WRF when seeking to create greater equity. They also point to a need for greater racial literacy in school leaders, and a focus on how WRF can impact schools. Finally, the researchers suggested that study of how leaders can counteract WRF in their own practice is warranted. The extremely limited body of empirical evidence regarding school leaders' first-hand experiences with equity leadership point to an overarching need to better understand the realities of implementation of the theoretical aspects of equity-based leadership, and specifically CRSL.

Gap in Literature

It is clear from the extant literature that racism is implicated in educational inequity and that racist policies and ideas live in both school structures and school leaders themselves. Because of the historical and deeply engrained roots of such racism, the

system as designed will continue to recreate inequity. It is also clear that work within schools to create greater equity has remained a difficult, or at times unconquerable task.

The literature points to large scale statistical analysis of test scores that are used to define a gap in outcomes for students, but even these scores come from assessments that can be viewed as biased or flawed. The analysis may then be based upon biased or oppressive understanding itself. Overall, no clear, singular definition of equity, how to measure equity, or how best to achieve equity emerges from the literature. Instead, the research reveals a wide range of ideas and definitions regarding each of these areas. What does emerge from the literature as a point of fact is that seeking specifically to define *why* there is an "achievement gap" leads down reductive and biased paths to conclusions that do not specifically illuminate how leaders can build toward more equitable practice.

Much of the literature reviewed called for school leaders to lead in a way that increases equity and points to some examples of how that is done. However, a substantial gap in the literature appears when looking for specific accounts of such leadership and what school leaders who work to lead for more equitable outcomes in their schools might encounter. Additionally, there is little consideration of the role that the racial identity of school leaders plays in the relative success of equity leadership. Specifically, though WRF is named to inhibit antiracist change efforts, there has not been deep exploration of how a leader can directly confront and dismantle the power of WRF in himself or in his leadership practice. Though some aspects of de-framing and reframing are theorized by Feagin (2013), there do not appear to be studies that rely on first person accounts. Such accounts are needed, as reality at the school level can differ

greatly from theorized practice. Additionally, the specific structures and methods by which a leader can confront racism as a barrier to equity need to be explored so that school leaders can more easily implement such exploration of their practice at their own schools.

Chapter Summary

Since most principals and school leaders (80%) are white (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), it is particularly salient to understand how WRF perpetuates the structures of oppression that they seek to undo. Studying how a white school leader works to use CRSL to achieve more equitable outcomes for his students could create greater understanding of WRF alongside further exploring the potential of CRSL. Positioning the school leader as researcher could help delve even further into these ideas. The following chapters represent a study designed to achieve such an end. This study is my own first-person account as a white school leader seeking to implement CRSL through use of critical reflection on how my own WRF impacts my understanding. The methodology utilized is described in the following chapter, and the results are then shared.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This study was designed to uncover the ways in which my white racial framing (WRF) serves as a barrier to effective culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) at the school where I lead. For my own practice, the study was designed to show how my practice impacts stakeholders and to call out where WRF influences my thinking and actions. I sought to gain insights into the limitations of my own leadership through critically reflecting on the ways in which white racial framing (WRF) shaped my leadership practice as a white school leader and impacted my school community. In the following project, I delineate how I used systematic critical self-reflection to guide the first steps toward implementation of CRSL. In this study, I focused on my own role as both researcher and practitioner, as I worked to move the school in which I lead toward more equitable outcomes for its students.

In this chapter, I begin by describing the design of the research project, including why this design is appropriate for what I hope to learn as a school principal, including how the conceptual frameworks of the project will guide data collection. I describe the setting of the study, the tools and procedures that were utilized in collecting data, and how it was analyzed. Importantly, I acknowledge how my role as school leader, researcher, and white male impacted the study. I then describe how I drew my conclusions, and how I ensured that the conclusions I drew were trustworthy and of

practical benefit to other school leaders. Finally, I name the limitations of the project overall, and summarize the overall design.

Qualitative Inquiry and Action Research

The study was performed as a qualitative action research project. Qualitative study was chosen based upon Creswell's (2014) outline of how to choose the correct research approach, which stated that qualitative study should be utilized when exploring a relatively under-explored topic or when clear variables to study are unknown. As the study does not have a clear hypothesis to be explored, nor an experimental treatment-outcome relationship, qualitative research is most appropriate. Specifically, Creswell stated that qualitative study is useful when "the subject has never been addressed with a certain sample or group of people, and existing theories do not apply with the particular sample or group under study" (p. 21). Finally, the design of the project is consistent with what Creswell termed a transformative worldview, or the belief that research should help drive positive social change.

Rationale for Action Research. Action research, as defined by McNiff (2017) allows practitioners to examine their practice to drive improvement. Importantly, she stated that such investigation allows the researcher-practitioner to "live more fully in the direction of their personal and social values" (p. 10). Such research should arise from an issue noted by the practitioner and should then lead to creating a systematic way to examine and evaluate the actions that are taken in response to the issue.

McNiff (2017) asserted that general agreement exists that action research consists of action rooted in improvement of practice, research, and building new understanding. Her definition included that reflective practice is not action research but must be followed

by action to respond to the understanding gathered from reflection. Reason and Bradbury (2008) put forward a succinct definition of the practice:

> action research is a participatory process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities (p. 5)

Furthermore, the researchers stated that action research should engage what they termed first, second, and third person research. The implication is that though a singular practitioner may engage in action research regarding his organization, it is useful to engage others with this process to push thinking, and that the focus should remain upon serving a greater purpose of lifting up marginalized people (p. 9).

McNiff's (2017) contention that action research can help practitioners transform practice into theory is also particularly salient to the purpose of this project. The results of action research can be widely utilized by other practitioners, and "others can learn with and from stories of practice and adopt or adapt these to their own practices as deemed appropriate" (p. 31). As a school leader in one school, it was my hope that this project could lead others to adopt or adapt my study and apply their learning in their own schools to drive wider, systemic change.

Researcher-practitioner. In the study design outlined in this chapter, I served as researcher-practitioner. In my role as principal of an elementary school (discussed further in the "Research Site" section of this chapter), I was positioned as practitioner. I could look at the practices and structures within the school where I served to create change in the internal workings of the school in response to what is learned through closer study of the school. By utilizing action research, I also served as researcher. I

completed background study of the issues I hoped to impact and implemented the steps outlined in this study design to gain further insights. The dual role of researcher-practitioner allowed me to both fully engage in and deeply consider the work of this project. I am hopeful that through the action research process, I will take steps toward transforming practice into theory, as McNiff (2017) suggests.

Need for Improvement: Inequitable school climate. The prevalence of inequity in schools is well documented. Similarly, the school in which I serve shows a gap in student outcomes based on the results produced on state assessments (discussed below). Though such accountability measures do not present the whole story of a school, they are a way to measure how well schools serve their students. Skrla, McKenzie, and Scheurich (2009) used achievement results as one aspect needed for developing a larger view of equity within a school. However, they also advocated for schools to strive for systemic equity, which "requires that equity be present in all parts of the educational system, including environment and resources" (p. 14). To create greater equity in schools, Khalifa (2018) named CRSL as a highly effective style of leadership. He suggested that equity audits can be used an effective first step to illuminating how leaders can implement CRSL.

Strengths of this Action Research. Action research provides the clearest pathway for me as a current school leader to study and improve my own practice in its context while providing insights for other, similarly social justice focused leaders. McNiff (2017) asserted that it is best to use action research "when you want to evaluate whether your work is contributing to your own or other people's learning, or whether you

need to do something different" (p. 19). Further, as action research is performed in a realistic context within the real-world limitations of its setting, it is highly empathetic to those who would be impacted by the changes considered as its result. Stringer (2007) asserted that, through action research, "We come closer to the reality of other people's experience, and, in the process increase the potential for creating truly effective services and programs that will enhance the lives of the people we serve" (p. 204). Public schools are an amalgam of relationships in context of the school and the stakeholders whom the school serves. After taking the individual variables of a public school into account, action research becomes the impetus for positive change. McNiff pointed to action research to fulfill one's responsibility in their role as a member of humanity, stating, "if you occupy your space on earth, it becomes your responsibility to use that space well" (p. 41). An action research project allows the researcher to determine how to go about using his space on earth better.

Challenges Associated with this Action Research. Action research procedures often fall outside of the structures of traditional research, but this does not nullify the possible impact, authenticity, legitimacy, or validity of action research outcomes (Stringer, 2007). Though action research provided the best method through which I could complete my exploration, the study as described presented a few challenges. One of the significant challenges with the study described herein involved time. This study was performed simultaneously with the other responsibilities and requirements of my position as a school leader, and so time in which to focus and reflect on the research at hand was limited. The role of researcher/practitioner had to land more heavily on the practitioner

role at times during the process, and the researcher side had to be carefully planned and executed.

Finally, an aspect of the project required convening a group of colleagues to act as critical colleagues, but the time we had together was quite limited. The group protocols had to be clear and concise so as not to create disjointedness as the process was carried out under time constraints. An ideal situation would allow for ongoing consultation with the group of critical colleagues, but that could not be achieved under the time frame of this study. To contend with this, I ensured careful documentation of the meetings while ensuring that the defined protocols were followed with fidelity. Overall, each of the challenges I faced were considered in the design of this study, and through following the process as designed, I worked through the challenges to arrive at new insights and ideas about my school, my leadership, and the power of WRF.

Study Design and Procedures

The procedures of this study were designed to answer the central research question: *In what ways can I, as a school leader confront my white racial framing as a barrier to the development of impactful culturally responsive leadership practice?* It also answered the sub-questions: *How might better understanding stakeholders' experiences of my leadership help highlight relevant action steps toward effective implementation of culturally responsive school leadership? How can reflection upon the impacts of my leadership with a circle of critical colleagues expose how white racial framing manifests within my leadership practice and highlight next steps in the eradication of my white racial framing?*

In this study, I utilized a process to explore how WRF in my leadership practice contributed to inequities within my school. I surveyed stakeholder groups to gauge their experience of my leadership, and I used focus groups to gain deeper understanding of the collected survey data. In collaboration with a group of critical colleagues, I explored the data gleaned from the surveys alongside follow-up focus groups and my own reflection upon the survey answers. Additionally, the critical colleagues helped me explore where the influence of WRF was present in my leadership and in my own thinking, as I shared reflections upon leadership in the school with them. From this process, I sought to gain deeper understanding of what actions were needed in my leadership toward equity and the ways in which my own racial framing presents a barrier to cultural responsiveness.

The study was based upon a theory of action that if I learned about the experiences of stakeholders at MTCS through the lens of CRSL while thinking critically about my leadership practices through the lens of WRF, I could I could both determine next steps toward effective implementation of CRSL, and begin to undermine the influence of WRF on my leadership. The process of my action research cycle was taken from McNiff (2017), and the cycle can be seen below in figure 2.

I derived the specific methods of my action research project from the work of Khalifa (2018) regarding CRSL. The steps of my project are illustrated in figure 3 and are delineated below.

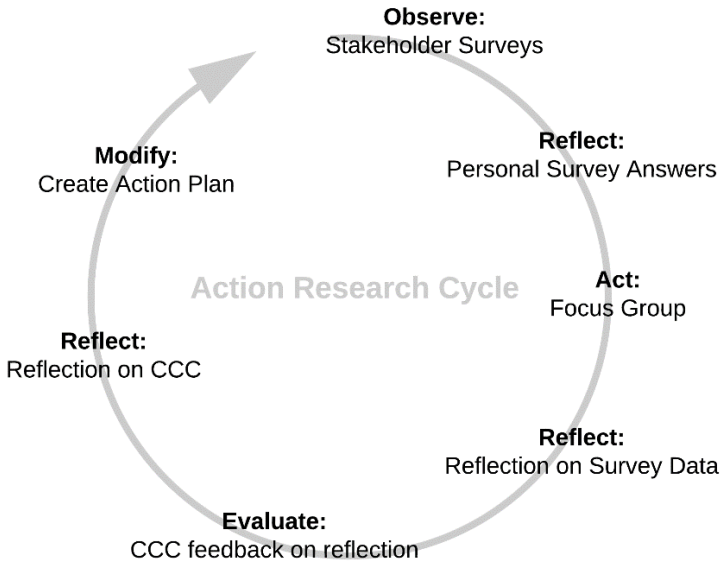

Figure 2: The action research cycle of the study

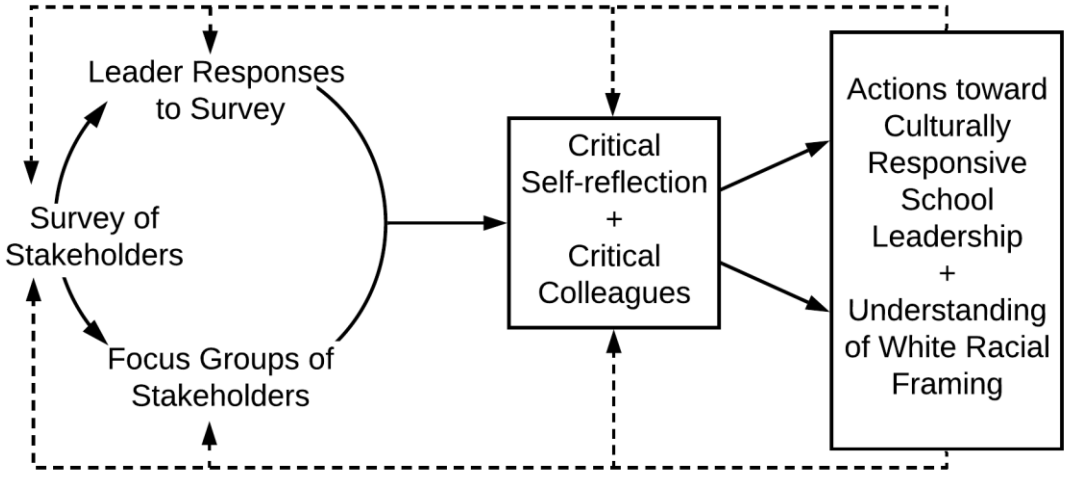

Figure 3: Project design. Through practicing critical self-reflection based upon the results of a survey of stakeholders, and presenting reflections to a group of critical colleagues, the researcher gained clarity in what actions can be taken to help move toward CRSL and deeper understanding of how his WRF is a barrier to equity.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

I collected data regarding stakeholder experience using three surveys, personal responses to the surveys, and focus groups to deepen my understanding of the survey data. These data represent a full picture of stakeholder experience of my leadership, as well as my own thoughts and perceptions of my leadership.

Survey design and administration. To collect and begin to draw patterns from stakeholders in the MTCS community, I created three surveys, a 13-item survey for parents/families, a 15-item survey for students, and an 18-item survey for teachers. (See Appendix B for complete surveys.) Each survey was administered using Qualtrics over an 18-day period. The survey as administered was not intended to return reliable quantitative data but to provide a sense of the overall experience of diverse groups within the community. Specifically, the survey was designed to collect school stakeholders' perceptions regarding how well my leadership creates a culturally responsive environment in the school. As the family survey stated, "I want to know how my actions are seen to impact work toward our school's development of culturally responsive practices. That is, I wanted to understand how our school creates the environment and conditions for students of different racial, ethnic, and cultural background to feel supported and successful."

Respondents were asked to name whether they saw certain actions or behaviors from the principal regularly, sometimes, not often, or never. Each of the questions in each of the surveys was meant to look at actions aligned to one of the indicators of CRSL as uncovered in my study of extant literature: recognition of students' lived experience; creation of an inclusive, culturally responsive environment; understanding of community

context; empowering students and the community; collaboration between the school and the community. By collecting a body of data surrounding various stakeholder experiences regarding each of these categories, I also gathered a baseline of understanding from which I could develop focus group questions and personal reflections. In that sense, the survey functioned as a tool to help me develop a cohesive body of qualitative data, and it helped me begin to see and record emergent themes regarding my leadership of the school. The number of questions aligned with each of the CRSL indicators can be seen in table 1.

Table 1: Survey constructs aligned with indicators of CRSL

	Inclusive, culturally responsive environment	Students' lived experience	Community Context	Collaboration between school and community	Empowerment of students and community
Parents	2 questions	5 questions	2 questions	2 questions	2 questions
Teachers	5 questions	4 questions	3 questions	3 questions	3 questions
Students	3 questions	4 questions	2 questions	3 questions	3 questions

For the teachers and families, all members of the community were invited to participate. All survey data was kept anonymous, and no identifying information was collected as part of the survey data collection. In this way, I hoped to lessen the real and perceived power dynamic between stakeholders and myself as the researcher/practitioner. Approximately 785 family email addresses received the invitation to complete the survey through the school's regular communication channels of schoolwide newsletters as well as teachers' homeroom-based newsletters. It is impossible to know how many families this represents, as the school's 550 students live in multiple households, and some families have multiple students in the school. Families were offered the survey in

English and Spanish, and the window was held open for 16 days. The school's 65 teachers were invited to take the survey over the course of 16 days through both direct verbal invitation at a staff meeting and through an internal newsletter that is sent to teachers on a weekly basis. The teacher survey received 43 responses (66%) while family survey received 70 responses.

In administering the survey to students, all results were held similarly anonymous. The families of each of the 87 fifth graders were informed that their children would be asked to complete a survey, but that there was no requirement to complete the survey. Families were given the option to opt out directly with the teacher, so that I would not know who had or had not taken the survey. Students were informed by teachers that they could stop taking the survey at any time, and they were not required to take it. The survey was administered within the homeroom classes by the students' homeroom teacher, and 75 students (86%) chose to respond. Demographic information for the student, family, and teacher groups can be seen in figure 4.

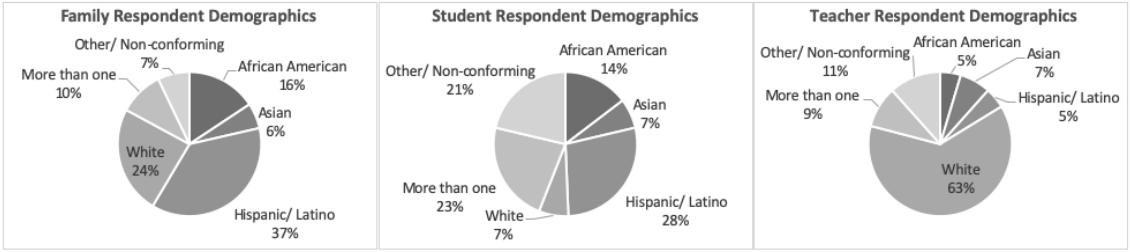

Figure 4: Survey respondent demographics

Personal survey data collection. As part of the data collection for the surveys, I, as a researcher/practitioner, answered each of the questions presented on each of the surveys in an open-format, reflective style. These reflections can be seen in Appendix E.

I attempted to think about how each of the groups might respond to the questions or experience my leadership, and to present some of the evidence that I had in answering each of the questions. These qualitative data are presented alongside the data that was collected using focus groups in conjunction with the survey.

Focus group process. After completing the last question at the end of the survey, participants were presented with a link to click if they were interested in being part of a focus group to dig more deeply into some of the survey responses. By clicking, their identity was not collected, but they were redirected to a separate site where they could fill in contact information and remain anonymous in their survey answers. At the close of the survey window, I reached out to the volunteers to arrange a time and location for the focus groups to take place. The teacher focus group went forward as planned, but both the family and student groups were negatively impacted by schools being closed due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the family focus group was held via computer-based virtual meeting, and the student focus group had to be cancelled. Under ideal circumstances, the student focus group would have provided an additional layer of context and richness to the data, but it was not possible to arrange at this time. In moving forward with the work of building a more culturally responsive school, it will be essential that I engage students in further surveys and follow up focus group conversations, and that I include students in the work of making changes within the school.

The focus group conversations were designed to be held for about 60 minutes and the process was based on Morgan's (2019) design, starting with broad questions, and

moving to more detailed questions. The detailed questions were restatements of the survey questions and focused on each indicator if CRSL. Copies of the focus group questions in the moderator's guide can be seen in Appendix F.

The teacher focus group contained five participants, all of whom were white women. The conversation was moderated by Dr. Aaron Griffen. Dr. Griffen is an African American man who works as an equity consultant both for the school district and as an independent contractor. He has presented professional development at MTCS on diversity, equity, and inclusion, and is familiar with the context of the school.

The family focus group contained six participants, though one of these only joined the conversation for the last question; the group consisted of two African American women, one Latinx woman, two white women (one of whom was the participant who joined at the end), and one white man. This conversation was facilitated by Vanessa Rodriguez. Ms. Rodriguez is a Latinx woman who serves as the family and community liaison at the school. She lives in the neighborhood where MTCS is located and has worked at the school since its opening. Additionally, Ms. Rodriguez is bilingual and has relationships with many of the families in the MTCS community.

Data Coding. Each focus group conversation was recorded transcribed using Trint, an online transcription service. Transcribed conversations were then entered into Nvivo 12 for coding. I first utilized initial coding as described by Saldaña (2016). He stated that this coding is used to break down qualitative data and compare it for similarities and differences. Further, it is an opportunity for the researcher to "reflect deeply on the contents and nuances of [the] data and to begin taking ownership of them"

(p. 115). The first question of each focus group asked participants to write down several words to describe what culturally responsive practice means at school. The participants were then asked to read these out to the group. From their answers to this question, I took the wordings that were used as initial codes for the transcripts. This created 47 codes.

I worked through coding the rest of the focus group responses to those 47 codes, consolidating some of the codes as it became clear that they addressed the same general idea. I was able to distill the codes down, and after the initial round, several key categories began to emerge. In each of these categories, the group could identify some actions that had been taken by myself or by the school to address this aspect of cultural responsiveness. However, there were also several areas that were pointed out as needing further development. After completing the coding process with the focus group conversations, I coded my own written answers to the same nodes and categories identified previously. After adding in my own responses, these categories were aligned with the five categories of CRSL as indicated in the conceptual framework so they could be viewed alongside the survey collection data. These categories are: inclusive, culturally responsive environment, students' lived experience, community context, collaboration between school and community, empowerment of students and communities. Through analysis of these pieces of aligned data, emergent themes were uncovered and used to respond to the research questions.

The Critical Colleagues Circle

I wanted to ensure that as researcher/practitioner, I did not rely too heavily on my own interpretation of survey data, nor upon my limited view of what might help move the

school toward more equity. After unpacking the collected data, I enlisted the help of a sort of critical friends group, which I call a critical colleagues circle (CCC). Curry (2008) defined a critical friends' group as a "school-based professional community aimed at fostering members' capacities to undertake instructional improvement and schoolwide reform." Kuh (2016) focused on critical friends' groups as a tool for encouraging teacher growth through information sharing and student work examination. She named that groups should consist of eight to ten members and should utilize protocols to guide group conversation. The term critical friends group now carries the specific meaning defined by Curry (2008), and so I utilized CCC to delineate that this group will not meet the strictly prescribed definition that the term critical friends group implies. Instead, the CCC will represent a group of school leaders who provide insights into my leadership practice.

Though critical friend groups generally meet on a regular basis to aid in development of the group members' practice (Fahey, 2011), the CCC as constituted for this project served as a shorter-term reflective partners as I sought to think deeply about the survey data collected and to reflect on my own responses to the data and its implications. Through this group-based reflection, I hoped to uncover instances and examples of where my WRF presented a barrier for implementation of culturally responsive practices and.

To begin, I enlisted a group of colleagues who agreed to serve as the CCC, and then provided a forum by which we could reflect together on the impacts of my leadership. The group consisted of four leaders who practice different forms of

educational leadership. In recruiting for members of the CCC, I reached out to people who were currently serving in leadership roles in the district in which MTCS sits. I wanted to recruit members who had familiarity with the neighborhood and the district, and from different levels of education. I invited three elementary leaders, two middle school leaders, one high school leader, two leaders who work in support across multiple schools and levels, and one district level leader. I hoped to have a diverse group of participants, so I invited people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. The invitees included two African American men, two African American women, one Latinx woman, two white men, and two white women. After scheduling challenges and other obligations were accounted for, the CCC was made up of two African American men, one African American woman, and one white man. The CCC members are presented in table 2 below under pseudonyms.

Table 2: CCC Members

Name	Relevant Information
Bryan	Current principal at a highly privileged high school, has led turnaround, alternative models in the neighborhood of MTCS. He is African American.
James	Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at a network of schools in MTCS neighborhood. Has led turnaround and consults with schools to increase equity. He is African American.
Brandon	Principal at a 98% FRL, 90% ELL school in the district which has successfully exited turnaround. Has built strong family engagement into the school community. He is white.
Kristen	Principal at a charter middle school where many MTCS students will go. Has led turnaround efforts and studies race in leadership. She is African American.

The CCC Process. Butler et al (2011) named both a formal and informal purpose for enlisting critical colleagues. The formal purpose is to provide feedback on data, "helping make sense of this and other school data and supporting the planning and

implementation of changes" (p. 8). The informal aspect is more about discussion, reflection, and encouragement towards the school's efforts. The CCC as constituted represented a deepening of Khalifa's (2018) call for critical reflection regarding the equity practices within a school while also serving the role to expose areas in which my WRF acts as a barrier to deeper CRSL.

The CCC was initially scheduled to visit MTCS for a guided tour and a presentation of my reflections based on the survey results. I intended to ask them to help me see areas of the school and school community that I was not seeing and to help identify and call out the aspects of my leadership that were possibly impacted by WRF. Additionally, the chance to speak candidly about race and culture, and their impacts upon school leadership would help me to develop my own understanding even more.

After confronting the closing of schools including MTCS due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, I was forced to make some adjustments to the format our interactions would take. Face-to-face meetings were no longer an option nor was visiting MTCS to see students and teachers in action. To cope with these limitations, I invited the CCC members to an initial video conference. At that time, I shared my conceptual framework and an overview of the school with the circle and shared links to several videos that had been taken within the school. Though the videos were meant for coaching purposes and not necessarily to showcase the culture of the school, the participants were asked to look at them to get an overview of the atmosphere in the school and how students might experience it. Additionally, I shared the question-level survey responses from the teachers, students, and families, along with my own open-ended responses to the survey

questions. All group members were asked to look through the materials and were given a note catcher if they needed some direction on what to look for. We arranged to meet again to reflect together. The data and materials I shared with them would simply serve as the backdrop against which we would carry out critical examination of my thinking and ideas.

***Personal Reflection*:** Khalifa (2018) named critical self-reflection as a key component of CRSL. He pointed to the need for school leaders to "look for how they are positioned within organizations that have marginalized students; they then find ways to personally and organizationally resist this oppression" (p. 59). Further, he named that leaders must have an ability to identify oppressive contexts, a willingness to see how they are involved or complicit in these contexts, and the courage to develop structures that are responsive to the oppression seen in the school. In response to this call, and in preparation for the second CCC meeting, I completed a deep reflection on the information I had learned through the survey results and the consequent focus group conversations. I structured my own reflection based on the format that would be used in the protocol that would be utilized in the data analysis section of my meeting with the CCC and considered how the results might be seen to exemplify instances of CRSL and WRF. The protocol is adapted from the Looking at Data Sets Protocol from the School Reform Initiative (schoolreforminitiative.org). The protocol begins with three broad questions: What? So what? and What else? I adapted the protocol to the format my own reflections would take, and I used the central research questions to focus each of the broad questions. The questions that I used for reflection are:

The "What" questions:

- What do these data say about cultural responsiveness within my own practice?
- What do these data say about stakeholders' experience of my leadership?
- What might I not be seeing due to WRF?

The "So what" questions:

- What is it important for me to consider as I work to implement culturally responsive leadership practice?
- What do I hope stakeholders will experience differently through culturally responsive leadership?
- In what areas do I need to be particularly mindful of WRF in my practice?

The "What else" questions:

- What further questions do I need to ask?
- What do I not know that I now think I need to know?

The CCC Protocol. The second CCC meeting consisted of following the adapted protocol as a form of feedback and collaboration. To complete this protocol, I first presented my reflection, which had been focused on the questions outlined above. After responding to a round of clarifying questions, the CCC members then asked me a series of probing questions about my reflection and the data that they had reviewed since the last meeting. I answered the probing questions, seeking to describe my thinking and process more clearly. Next, the CCC was given time and space to discuss my leadership with each other, and without me commenting. They were asked to use the broad questions of *What?*, *So what?*, and *What else?* to guide their discussion. Finally, I had a

chance to respond to the discussion, offering my thoughts and further questions to the CCC members. The full protocol is attached in Appendix C.

Research Site. Since I currently serve as a school leader, I used the school in which I lead to collect equity data and implement the action research cycle as described above. I called the school Mountain Top Charter School (MTCS) – a pseudonym. MTCS sits in a rapidly growing part of a large city in the mountain west, and the school was opened to fill a need for a high-quality school in this part of the city. Most of the school population comes from two adjacent neighborhoods, and the students represent a highly diverse student population. The diversity is seen in socio-cultural and socio-economic groupings. Several families have lived in the neighborhood around the school for many years, while others are more recent arrivals. Some of the students are first generation immigrants, while others come from families with multiple generations having lived in the city where the school is located. Approximately 65% of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and 82% of students are students of color, with 8% of students identifying as Asian, 26% as Black, 39% as Latinx, 9% from multiple races, and 18% as White. The school reports over 22 different home languages spoken in students' families. Of the student population, 28% are listed as English language learners, and 13% are identified to receive special education services. The school has been growing from opening with just over 120 pre-K through first grade students in 2014-15, to hosting approximately 550 students in grades pre-K through fifth in the 2019-2020 school year.

The school's mission states that MTCS "exists to foster a diverse and equitable community of youth and adults striving together for academic, personal, and civic

excellence." These three areas, academic, personal, and civic excellence, are accentuated daily in the school and are highlighted through discussion and exploration of what are termed "REACH values." The acronym REACH stands for Responsibility, Empowerment, Aspiration, Citizenship, and Honesty, which are the values around which the school is organized. Recognizing that the words represented by REACH might present a challenge to some of the youngest students, and to help the values align more clearly with the school's mission, the REACH values are generally presented as REACHing Up, REACHing Out, and REACHing In. Students, teachers, and even the board of directors of the school organize their efforts into categories of REACH Up for academic excellence, REACH In for personal growth, and REACH Out to be good citizens of their community. This level of language is appropriate and understandable for the youngest, four-year-old students, and as students' progress through the grade levels, the depth of conversation and the level of action taken by students regarding the ideas of the REACH values grows.

As a school that names fostering equity and academic excellence as part of its reason for existence, the promise of that mission has not yet been realized in the day to day operation of the school. The school receives an annual rating, termed a school performance framework (SPF), from the district. The SPF takes several areas of school performance into account, and the school receives a score for student achievement (grade-level performance), for student growth, for family and student engagement and satisfaction, and for equity. Scores are represented by a color chart, with red representing

that a school is not meeting expectations, yellow meaning approaching expectations, green meaning meeting expectations, and blue representing exceeding expectations.

MTCS received a score of approaching expectations (yellow) for each of the categories of student growth, equity, and student/family engagement and satisfaction. The school was rated red, or not meeting expectations in grade-level student achievement. From these ratings, the district gives one overall score, which utilizes a color scale as well, from red (probation), to orange (on priority watch for probation), yellow (on watch), green (meeting expectations), or blue (distinguished performance). MTCS is currently in the orange band and has a mandate to improve or it risks closure. The school's most recent school improvement plan (required by the state on an annual basis) names literacy growth, math and literacy achievement, overall growth for students of color, and community partnership as school-wide priorities.

Utilizing the school's 2017 SPF (see Appendix A), inequitable outcomes can be seen in several areas. For the younger students at the school (grades pre-k through second), 23.57% fewer students who were identified as English Language Learners (ELL) achieved on-grade-level scores on literacy measures. ELLs also saw 19.1% less growth than their monolingual English-speaking peers. For younger students receiving free or reduced-price lunch, there were 18% fewer who scored on-grade level than students who did not qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and a 12.5% gap in the level of growth. 19% fewer pre-K through second graders of color scored on grade-level than their white peers, and the level of growth for these students was 31.3% lower than for white students. 2017 was the first year that older students took the state standardized

tests, so there were no growth scores, and there were not enough white students to do a comparison between students of color and their white peers. However, there was a 20.3% gap between the number of students scoring proficient in literacy and a 17.3% difference in students scoring proficient in math between students receiving free or reduced-price lunch and their wealthier peers.

In some sense, this study was born when I was named principal of Mountain Top Charter School in May of 2017. As I prepared to take on leadership within this growing, struggling, and very young school, I saw something of a blank canvas within the school, and thought about how I could help foster creation of systems and structures that worked to meet the optimistic charge of the school's mission. I struggled to understand why after three years of existence this school reported a wide gap in testing outcomes for white students and their peers of color, between students in poverty and their more well-to-do peers, and between the students who were native English speakers and those learning English as a second language. Was the school thinking deeply enough about who the students in the school were? Was the school serving the needs that the community named as important?

Seeing wide gaps in proficiency and on-grade-level performance seemed unacceptable for a school serving such a diverse population and seeking to build for equity. Even more troubling was the huge gap in the growth scores. This meant that students of color, ELLs, and students in poverty were less likely to catch up to their white, wealthier, native-English-speaking peers. Not only was MTCS failing to provide equity of outcomes for students, it was moving further from reaching equity because of

the lack of growth for impacted students. I could see clearly that something different needed to happen. Perhaps what was most perplexing was realizing that I did not understand how to make effective change. As a new principal, the many tasks and responsibilities within the day to day life of a school almost overwhelmed my ability to see the big picture.

As a leader I believe in distributed leadership, and in giving teachers an ability to shape the learning in their classroom in a way that works for them and their students. I worked to empower teachers in my first year, and to help get the school past the experiences they had over the past two years. This included the founding principal moving on with a poorly received succession plan that seated an unpopular principal who quit after six months in the job, and a chaotic end to the year the included unclear leadership and a sense of chaos throughout the school. As I reflected upon my work, and the needs of the community in which I served, I did not know how to push back against the strength of the unseen structures that encouraged the widening disparity in student outcomes, or even what it was that I needed to push back against.

I knew that I needed to learn more, to see something more, and to change something about my own leadership if I wanted to truly make change in this one school. From that understanding, I began to envision how to structure a project that could change the trajectory of the school, and more importantly, the students who were underserved by the current structures. My studies at the time were just introducing me to critical race theory and the idea that my whiteness needed to be questioned deeply in seeking to serve

people of color more effectively. From that learning, and from my continued push to improve my school, I began to think about designing this project to help make change.

Trustworthiness

As a researcher-practitioner, it will be essential that all data collected and all conclusions reached can meet the standards of trustworthiness that may be demanded of them. To help ensure the trustworthiness of the outcomes of this work, I will carefully document each of the processes utilized to collect the data, to interpret the data, and to draw conclusions made. Collection of survey data will utilize the format in Appendix B and will be drawn from across different groups of school stakeholders. Data will be taken as a whole, as well as differentiated between the results shared by students, teachers, and parent/guardians in the school. Before reviewing the data, I will journal my own thoughts and interpretations in response to the survey questions, to collect them and keep them bracketed from the survey results.

A second stream of data will come from the critical friend circle protocol and the responses that are garnered from it. Presentation of the differing perspectives of the CCC members will include member checking to ensure that the conclusions are valid. These steps will serve to provide thick data that has been verified. Finally, all conclusions that are drawn from this research will be based upon evidence from literature as well as from the results of the survey, the collective work of the CCC and my own thinking as the school leader. Through triangulation of data between school stakeholders, the participants in the CCC and my own reflexive journaling, I will be able to track the integrity of the conclusions that I draw from the work of the study. All source materials will be documented and presented as part of the results of the study.

Researcher Positionality

In truth, each of the areas of my identity, and the beliefs and understandings that I have developed over the course of my career in education serve to shape this study. It is particularly important to me, as a white school leader serving in a community of color, that I describe and take ownership of my position in the research and in the school community in which I serve. As a researcher, it is important to recognize and remain mindful of the position I carry into this work. That my study will be impacted by my own position and my own experiences of life is undeniable. In naming how I am positioned in this research and reflecting briefly upon how it may impact the study, I seek to bracket my role as researcher from that of school and community leader. To begin this reflection, it is important to uncover what has shaped me, and what about my experience has led me to enter into this study.

As a child, it was easy to overlook the privilege that I was fortunate to be born into. As the fourth of five children, I was constantly surrounded by my family, and these were the people who shaped my life, my thinking, and my understanding of the world around me. I knew that my parents worked extremely hard to build and maintain the comfort of our family. I knew that school was easy for me, and that I could generally find and make friends whenever I wanted to. I knew that I was safe to go outside to play and that when I came home, I would have access to the many toys, books, games, and records available in our home.

Along with the things I knew, there was so much I never had to consider. I never had to think about where my next meal would come from. I never had to worry about whether I would be able to rest at night, whether I would have clean clothes for school, or

whether I would be able to get to school. I never had to think about my skin color, and whether my skin would impact how I was viewed at school, on a sports team, or in a store. I never even had to consider whether I would go to college, nor how it would be paid for. College was just what we did, and my parents would make sure that I could go. In fact, I had so much that was just given to me, by family and society, that I easily forgot to acknowledge and appreciate it. My mother and father both reminded me to be grateful for the things I had and taught me to give thanks to God for providing me with such a blessed life, but truthfully, I had no real grasp of what the alternative was to the way I lived.

My window on the world began to expand when I started to attend summer camp. Here I was surrounded by many people who were different from me, with different life experiences, different religions, diverse ways of thinking about the world. As I got older and continued to meet and experience different kinds of people, I started to realize that I really *liked* people who were different. As I moved into working as a counselor at the camp, I realized that I also really liked working with younger people and helping them to learn. Armed with this understanding, I set out to work as a teacher. When the opportunity came to go to somewhere totally different and not just at the school down the street, I gladly accepted it, and headed off to Porcupine, SD. Until I began my career as a teacher, I had no concrete grasp of how significant my privilege was in my life.

Teaching in the classrooms of Native American children on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, in one of the poorest parts of the US, I was forced to realize that the things I valued and the way I saw the world were completely different for people who did not

have what I had. Even something that I considered a universal necessity and an innate good, a college education, did not carry the same meaning for a people who value family, spirituality, and collective knowledge above mainstream definitions of success. In my years there, I evolved from feeling pity for what I considered was the Native people's short-sightedness regarding the realities of the world, to feeling hopeful that I could help teach children to value what was important about the world, to finally accepting that I understood very little about the way that the world worked for people who did not have what I had. Since that time, I have been a teacher and an administrator within both private and public schools. I have taught kindergarten through high school, and have taught subjects as varied as photography, math, and social studies. Through each of these experiences I have seen the power of education when it works for a student and I have felt the sorrow and frustration that it does not work for many students.

All that I learned from my time teaching in locations from the Reservation to outdoor mountain classrooms to urban centers and Title I schools told me that there was more that education could achieve, there was something that was missing from the work of educating students from racialized and marginalized backgrounds. From this realization, I have created a new goal for myself and my work. The goal of my work is to provide; to provide educational opportunity, and to learn how to best provide a learning environment that is conducive to the learning of all students.

In comparing my experiences growing up amidst the homogeneity of Northern Indiana to the years I have spent experiencing turnaround schools in poor urban areas, I see that many problems in education stand in failing to serve those who fall outside of the

mainstream. I am an optimist – I believe that through greater public education, our communities, states, and nation can create a democratic society that includes care for all its constituents and meaningful belonging for every person who lives within. As a school leader, I believe that I am called to participate in creation of a richly varied and socially conscious community of learners for all students to find joy and learning within. This belief lies at the heart of this study and pushed me to begin my graduate level coursework of which this study represents the culmination.

Part of what I have learned through my coursework and continuing leadership experience is that it is important to understand how my position relative to those I serve and those I seek to study impacts my work. As a school leader, I am an authority figure by the people I seek to serve, some of whom may be involved in this study. Because of this reality, I need to ensure I clarify when I am serving strictly as researcher, and how the role is different from that of principal. Additionally, since I am choosing to study the school in which I serve, I obviously hold a vested interest in the ultimate success of the school and its students. To some, this may appear to present a conflict of interest, or that my perspective regarding collected data and its impact upon the school may be distorted by a drive for positive, successful outcomes. For this reason, I need to carefully document my work, and to use critical colleagues to check that my conclusions are not influenced by my leadership position.

As a white male setting out to explore the differences in outcomes for students of color and their white peers, ignorance of the many privileges I experience based on my outward identity (white, male, westernized, privileged, cis-gendered, able-bodied, upper-

middle/middle class, American born, native English speaker) could call my work into doubt, and could be a cause for diminishment of the findings of my work. However, I do not deny the reality that my outward identity gives rise to privilege and obliviousness that racialized and otherwise marginalized people do not experience. Where race, dis/ability, gender identity, or socioeconomic status are topics that I can choose to think about or choose to turn my energy toward, for many it is something that cannot be denied, as these identities are consistently used to marginalize and impact their experience of life. By exploring the ideas of WRF in this study and in seeking to identify aspects of my leadership that are impacted by my white identity, I hope to address these concerns directly. In fact, by identifying, calling out, and thinking critically about how whiteness shapes my leadership, I hope to diminish the power of WRF in public education, a social institution that best serves white people. I know that if I hope to move others to think about their own positions within white-dominated spaces, I need to be consistently vigilant to ensure I do not forget that my whiteness shapes the way I experience the world.

Finally, through my study of the ideas of Freire, Ladson-Billings, hooks, Scheurich, Khalifa, Theoharis, and Feagin, among others, I have come to a new belief about education. I believe that high quality, culturally responsive, anti-racist, inclusive education for all students is the truest act of social justice that one can undertake. Education provides the groundwork from which future generations spring and investing in all students equitably represents an act of hope in the future. To express belief in all young people by refusing to stop working to serve their educational and personal needs is

to express belief in the goodness of humanity and the ideals of democracy. While engaging in the important work of education, and more directly, in the work of this study, I must ensure that I do not stop thinking about my position in the work, so that I do not proceed within the ignorance and blindness that has created and continues to uphold the oppressive systems which I seek to disrupt. It is my hope that this study is my first step toward realizing a goal of building for greater equity in the system of public education.

Ethical Considerations

The project as described has been designed to ensure that a high standard of ethics is followed, and to protect the school and its constituents from having their identities reveled. Throughout the work of this study, the school, and each of the members of the CCC are identified through their pseudonyms only. The study will rely upon anonymous survey data and will not delve into individual student data. If the need to share any specific information about members of the school community arises, the identities of anyone who is referenced will be hidden using pseudonyms. Therefore, none of the stakeholders in the school will need to be named or cited in this work. If such need arises, identifying characteristics or data will be removed, and pseudonyms will be used. All my own personal reflections will be edited to preserve the anonymity of people, places, and identifiable events as needed. The project will be approved by an Institutional Review Board prior to its beginning, and always, attention will be paid to upholding ethical standards of practice.

Chapter Summary

The preceding chapter presented a methodology that will be used to explore the research questions of: (1) *In what ways can I, as a school leader confront my white racial*

framing as a barrier to the development of impactful culturally responsive leadership practice? (2) *How might better understanding stakeholders' experiences of my leadership help highlight relevant action steps toward effective implementation of culturally responsive school leadership?* (3) *How can reflection upon the impacts of my leadership with a circle of critical colleagues expose how white racial framing manifests within my leadership practice and highlight next steps in the eradication of my white racial framing?*

I outlined the process of collecting stakeholder data, completing personal reflection and utilizing a CCC to analyze my reflections upon the data and my leadership, including transcription and coding processes. Additionally, I delineated the methods by which I responded to each of the three research questions. To answer the second research question, I interpreted survey data alongside the focus groups' deeper responses to the survey questions and my own responses. To answer the third research question, I practiced critical self-reflection and presented my reflection to a circle of critical colleagues to help highlight the influence of WRF. To answer the first research question, I utilized the understanding gained through the processes of answering the other research questions and synthesize overall conclusions regarding how to confront WRF moving forward. The following chapter describes the results that were obtained through the methods described above.

Chapter Four: Findings

In late February/early March 2020, the spread of a novel coronavirus and its related illness, COVID-19 wreaked havoc across the world, the United States of America, and the schooling of countless numbers of school children. Because of the effects of this disease, school communities in the US were not permitted to meet in person for much of the last third of the school year, and students' education was disrupted and driven to online and distance-learning scenarios. Schools and districts undertook extensive work to ensure that all students had access to the internet as well as the devices needed to access the instruction. These efforts likely fell short, impacting the ability to deliver equitable ongoing education to students. It seems that the drive to build community and equity becomes even harder at the same time it becomes even more essential in these difficult times.

With certainty, this study was impacted by the effects of COVID-19, and some aspects of the data collection were forced to take place online utilizing the variations in procedures described in chapters one and three. Because of these realities, it seems irresponsible to present the data collected without mention of those who fell ill or lost their lives during this terrible pandemic. It also seems important to recognize that all education occurring in the US following the close of the 2020 school year is likely to be altered by the events of spring 2020. Without the context of the upheaval caused by the

pandemic, the data presented may seem to fall short in addressing the new realities that emerge following the end of the 2020 school year.

Introduction

The findings presented in this chapter represent the outcomes of following the procedural steps outlined in chapter three in attempt to answer the central research question: *In what ways can I, as a school leader confront my white racial framing as a barrier to the development of impactful culturally responsive leadership practice?* I also explored two sub-questions which are: *How might better understanding stakeholders' experiences of my leadership help highlight relevant action steps toward effective implementation of culturally responsive school leadership?* and *How can reflection upon the impacts of my leadership with a circle of critical colleagues expose how white racial framing manifests within my leadership practice and highlight next steps in the eradication of my white racial framing?* I will begin by exploring the second research question, then the third, and I will finish by exploring the first research question as an amalgam of the results presented by the two sub-questions.

Collected Data – Research Question 2

The survey and focus group data serve to give a clear response to the research question: *How might better understanding of stakeholders' experiences of a principal's leadership help highlight relevant action steps toward impactful implementation of culturally responsive school leadership?* The data clearly revealed a need for open, transparent, and thorough planning to ensure that culturally responsive practice is widespread and effective. As a school community, what families, teachers, and students

are most asking for is deeper collaboration. Though the data revealed that some roots of a culturally responsive environment are in place, clearer communication and more shared understanding of realities within the school and within the community is needed. Additionally, the ability to impact the functions of the needs to be shared more widely with stakeholders so that the entire MTCS community can become much stronger in providing for the success of all students.

Survey data. It is important to reiterate that the survey itself is not a scientific collecting of quantitative data, but rather a set of information from which I, as the researcher/ practitioner, can begin to consider my impacts upon the school and the school community. It is undoubtedly informative to consider the outcomes of the survey and to utilize the information gathered in determining next steps, but there should not be a direct correlative assumption made between the numerical data presented from the survey and the next steps of this research project. Simply providing a survey such as the one I used and then making leadership changes based on the results would not yield a more culturally responsive form of leadership. One must also invest in the focus group and self-reflective processes that are a part of this project. Additionally, assuming I could learn all I need to know just through examination of the survey results would likely lead to continued or even greater instances of my WRF manifesting in my leadership, as my interpretation would only happen through my own framing of the data with no further context. To try to gain more perspective on the collected survey data, I convened a focus group of teachers, and a focus group of students to dig more deeply into survey responses. It is unfortunate that I was not able to host a student focus group due to the

impacts of COVID-19, but future efforts toward CRSL must include more student perspectives.

Keeping in mind the imperfect nature of the survey data, there is still a lot that can be read based on the stakeholders' responses. For instance, overall, and across all the categories, the data point to some aspects of cultural responsiveness, but further study is needed to develop a clearer sense of family experiences. Cultural responsiveness is strongest in the areas of recognizing students lived experience and empowering students and the community. It is much less strong in the areas of understanding community context and collaboration between the school and community.

In looking at the data across the stakeholder groups, it seems that families tend to have the strongest sense that CRSL is impacting the school with a similar perception of each of the five categories. Teachers seem to have a more measured take, expressing a need for greater collaboration with the community and a better understanding of the community context. Students present themselves as the most critical, particularly in the need for an inclusive, culturally responsive environment, my understanding of the community context, and the need for greater collaboration between the school and the community. Though use of the student focus group would have (and will in future) shed more light on the reasons for the student responses, it seems that the fledgling efforts toward cultural responsiveness within the MTCS community do not manifest as actions that students recognize or that they feel are influential upon the school environment. The data collected from the students begs for further exploration and explanation in future iterations of this work.

Focus group data and my open responses to the survey. Looking into the details of the focus group responses and combining them with my own open-ended responses to the survey questions, there is clear willingness to be partners in leadership across all stakeholder groups, but there is a recognition that there are pieces missing in creation of true cultural responsiveness. First, teachers and parents need opportunities to develop more skills in culturally responsive practice and effective communication between stakeholder groups. Students, teachers, and families all need to feel efficacy in both hearing others and feeling heard. By all accounts this needs to start with me as the school leader, and I need to both ensure training is available to others and grow in my own abilities to hear stakeholders and to be a culturally responsive leader.

Further, there is a strong need for clear, decisive, and well-mapped action steps that all members of the school community can use to understand where they are in their singular journey toward cultural responsiveness, as well as understanding where the school is on its collective journey to provide a responsive, effective learning environment for all students. In my own response to the survey as well as in listening to the focus group responses to deeper questioning, it is clear that mapping a pathway to CRSL needs to take place before working to build for greater equity in the school. It is also important to note that the mapping should include stakeholders who will help create a sense of balance and clarity around how the plans will impact the needs of the community. Most importantly, any planning needs to invite and encourage deeper collaboration with the whole school community.

Answering Research Question Two: Stakeholder Data

To begin to unpack the data collected for the second research question, it is best to view each question in relation to one of the five indicators of Culturally Responsive School Leadership. For each of the indicators, I present the data, and then share the findings for each of the research questions.

Inclusive, Culturally Responsive Environment

In some sense, the foci of building toward CRSL aim at an inclusive, culturally responsive environment. In Johnson's (2014) words, culturally responsive leaders' primary charge is to "create inclusive schooling environments for students and families from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds" (p. 148). Such an environment is conducive to learning for all students and helps ensure that the needs of each student are met.

How might better understanding stakeholders' experiences of my leadership help highlight relevant action steps toward effective implementation of culturally responsive school leadership? The data indicate that stakeholders see diversity as an asset in the school, but that inclusivity and culturally responsive practice need to be more clearly defined so that all members of the school community have a sense of how well the school presents an inclusive, culturally responsive environment.

Survey results. To assess this aspect of CRSL and the inclusivity and cultural responsiveness of the school, I utilized questions 3 and 8 on the parent/family survey (The principal leads with high expectations for student achievement for all students regardless of race, culture, language, dis/ability, gender or socio- economic status; The

principal treats all students equitably regardless of race, culture, disability, gender or socio- economic status.), questions 1, 5, 6, and 10 on the teacher survey (Our principal's leadership practice ensures that all teachers are treated equitably regardless of race, culture, dis/ability, gender or socio- economic status; Our principal's leadership practice reflects that it is important for students' classroom groupings to be representative of our school's racial, ethnic, socio-economic, and linguistic diversity; Our principal ensures that the process for assigning students to classroom groups is equitable regardless of their racial, ethnic, gender, socio-economic, or linguistic background; Our principal models inclusive instructional and behavioral practices.), and questions 1, 4, and 10 on the student survey (The principal wants to make sure students from all races and cultures, students with disabilities, students of all genders, and wealthy or less-wealthy students are treated fairly; The principal likes all kinds of different students; When students get in trouble, they are not gone from class very long).

Aggregate results across stakeholders show that 70% of respondents regularly saw leadership actions that helped create an inclusive, culturally responsive environment, 19% of respondents sometimes saw those actions, 8% did not often see such actions, and 3% never saw them. To disaggregate, 77% of teachers responded that they regularly saw actions that created an inclusive, culturally responsive environment, 16% sometimes, 5% not often, and 2% never saw those actions. For families, 87% of respondents regularly saw actions leading to creation of an inclusive environment, 3% sometimes, 5% not often, and 5% never saw such actions. The students were more critical, with 55% saying that they regularly saw creation of an inclusive, culturally responsive environment.

Another 31% responded that they sometimes experienced leadership actions that built an inclusive, culturally responsive environment, 11% did not often experience this, and 3% never did. Overall, students seem to experience less inclusivity and cultural responsiveness than the other stakeholders. The implications of students' feelings for overall student success and for the effectiveness of teachers' instructional practice should continue to be explored while implementing CRSL.

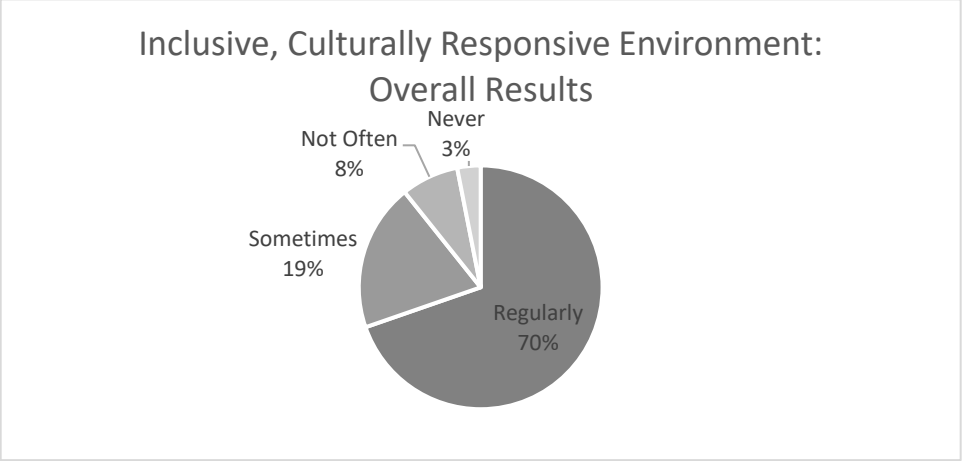

Figure 5: Survey results regarding the inclusive, culturally responsive environment at MTCS

Focus group outcomes. The focus group responses that were categorized as *recognizing diversity* and *actions taken* aligned most closely with the ideas of creating an inclusive, culturally responsive environment**.** Most of the focus group participants noted the emphasis on culture at MTCS, and the events that the school holds to celebrate and hold up the many cultures within the school.

One parent participant stated that, "It's part of our school culture to embrace the cultures that make up [the school]…and you feel it." Another stated that it was important in a school with so many cultures to be able to be responsive, while a third added that it was important that the school recognize "the possible difficulties inherent in being a part

of an underrepresented …culture," so that the school could meet all students' needs. Two of the parents noted that they felt that the school leadership was aware of the needs of students and that the school was concerned with serving all students. Another referenced how the school has chosen to bring families into the school, saying, "I really appreciate… the things that they've done to kind of deal with that, like the literacy nights and, you know, making sure that our students have the resources they need." Another stated that he appreciated that he regularly sees adjustments made in the school, and staff added to address some of the student needs. Several of the families noted how dedicated the teachers are, and how much impact the teachers make on the students at the school.

The teacher group noted that they feel valued in the building, that the assistant principals and I work to make them feel valued. One stated that I was incredibly open to helping think through how culture may be impacting a student or family, and that I encourage teachers to think about that when working with families. Another appreciated the investment that has been made in social-emotional learning in the school, "…he invested in a whole mental health team, which… I've never seen at any school. He's invested in responsive social and emotional practices. He's invested in racial equity trainings. He empowered me to do… a gender equity training. He's just invested in a lot of really important paths."

However, a teacher also stated, "I don't think that students with disabilities receive the level of respect that they should" both from students and staff members. The teacher continued, "And I think there is this sometimes this belief that we can only reward students who are like up here… we can actually be an exclusive school if we

acknowledge that for some students, excelling looks different…but as we've pushed for more and more academic growth, we've… physically taken away some things that bring a lot of joy to children." These comments signal underlying attempts toward responsiveness, but sometimes a lack of clarity around how the school should be responsive, or how the school should choose to celebrate the differences that diversity of cultures and learning styles and funds of knowledge bring into the school.

Researcher/practitioner results. Creation of an inclusive, culturally responsive environment strikes to the heart of what I hope to achieve, and so I feel somewhat more confident and comfortable as seen in my written survey responses. I named that I do not wish to judge families at any time, and that I hope that students see my equal treatment of students from diverse backgrounds. I did, however, question some of my actions and whether I am clear in accepting and embracing the diversity of teachers. In my personal reflection, I wrote, "I would imagine that I may do better with students and families on recognizing/honoring difference than with teachers. In many aspects of leadership, I would imagine that my blind spots are greater with teachers than with other groups of stakeholders." This speaks to the fact that the teachers represent a more homogenous group and so I tend to overlook the need to be inclusive of their differences.

Several of the survey answers I gave tended toward naming actions that I see as culturally responsive that have already taken place. Some examples I cite are implementing stronger social-emotional programming, ending the use of behavior clip charts, ending performance grouped classrooms, partnering with AmeriCorps' City Year program to offer more support to students, hiring a bilingual community and culture

liaison, and creating the expectation that all students receive grade level instruction along with instruction that addresses their individual skill needs on a daily basis. I also named building better reliance upon use of data to drive practice: "Getting our school to be a more data-rich environment has been a major focus of my work since starting at the school. We have been building systems to track grade-level standards attainment, as well as skill level progression. Implementation of an intervention program (which did not exist when I started) and asking interventionists to know students' skill needs and build their skill levels has been key – and using data to show our thinking is a growing and improving aspect of this process."

Summary: The data clearly state a strong connection to diversity in the school but a call for increased clarity through two-way communication and feedback regarding how we celebrate inclusivity across all groups. In looking at the three stakeholder groups represented in this study, it seems that in moving from parents/ families to teachers, to students, the sense of an inclusive, culturally responsive environment lessens with each group. This signifies the need for students to be more involved in the processes of building an inclusive environment and need an outlet to express how they are or are not experiencing inclusivity. Adding my own reflection to the data reveals that I can name some of the actions I have taken toward cultural responsiveness, but that clearer communication is needed along with engaging families in defining how they define culturally responsive practice. To truly create a sense of inclusivity, more stakeholders need to be integrated into the school structures, especially those typically marginalized by schools and society.

Students' lived experience

Understanding students' lived experience lies at the heart of CRSL. It is vital that leaders operate from an informed background, resisting deficit mindsets (Kahlifa et al, 2016) and seeking to learn about their students and families as they progress.

How might better understanding stakeholders' experiences of my leadership help highlight relevant action steps toward effective implementation of culturally responsive school leadership? The data show that although MTCS espouses a belief in the value of diversity and equity that is highly valued by families, and although some of the internal practices at the school demonstrate this belief, many of the common practices at the school fall short. In particular, the curriculum does not reflect students' experience and marginalizes students and stakeholders in not doing so.

***Survey results*.** In the parent/family survey questions 2, 9, and 10, (The principal treats our family as a valued member of the school community; The principal ensures discipline policies are implemented equitably regardless of race, culture, dis/ability, gender or socio- economic status; The principal does not promote exclusionary disciplinary policies, practices, and behaviors.) in the teacher survey, 2, 8, 11, and 12 (Our principal treats me as a valued member of our school community; Our principal's leadership actions ensure the participation of students from diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds in all school activities is representative of the larger student body; Our principal's leadership practice ensure that all students are treated equitably regardless of race, culture, disability, gender or socio- economic status; Our principal's leadership practice ensures discipline policies are implemented equitably regardless of race, culture,

dis/ability, gender or socio- economic status.), and in the student survey, questions 2, 3, 5, and 8 (Every student has a chance to do after school programs, enrichment, and other school events; The principal treats me and my family with respect and tries to help us feel comfortable at school; The principal wants me to feel included and accepted at school; I have students from different races and ethnicities in my classes.) were designed to ask about perceptions of the school's recognition of students' lived experience. For these questions, 76% of overall respondents stated that they saw leadership actions that regularly recognized students' experiences, 15% sometimes saw these actions, 6% did not see them often, and 3% stated that they never saw these actions. The numbers change slightly once I disaggregated the data. In looking at teacher responses alone, 71% stated that they saw these actions regularly, 23% sometimes, 6% not often, and 0% never. From families, 83% stated that they regularly saw such actions, 5% sometimes saw them, 6% not often, and 6% never saw such actions. Students fall roughly in line with teachers, 71% responding that they often saw these actions, 22% sometimes, 4% not often, and 3% never saw these actions. Overall, families tend to see actions that recognize students' experience somewhat more often than students and teachers, though most stakeholders do see such actions regularly or sometimes.

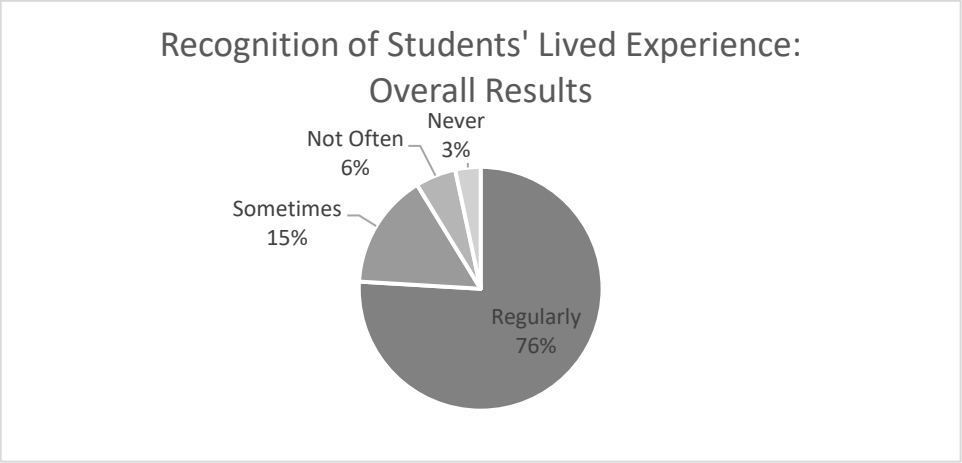

Figure 6: Survey results regarding MTCS' recognition of students' lived experience

***Focus group outcomes*:** The responses from the focus group that were categorized as *Responsive Curricula and Atmosphere* were most closely aligned with the ideals of recognition of students' lived experiences. Parents in the focus group pointed out many shortcomings in the responsiveness of the curriculum, though they also noted an embrace of the diversity within the community. One stated that MTCS "embraces the culturally diverse nature of our neighborhood [and] does more to kind of showcase that than any other place in the neighborhood." Another noted that it is important that the school figure out to address the need for high quality instruction while also being responsive, and that it was not yet meeting either need fully, as seen in the school ratings. Several stated that moves toward online learning and some of the curricula as adopted has limited the amount of representation that kids see in their work. The group as a whole advocated for the school to build its own curriculum, with one parent stating that "I think… that the staff and the faculty could do it, the community, the parents that are involved with the school would be… would be into it. I would just like to, to kind of see [MTCS] take the next step and challenge itself a little bit." The challenge of building a

curriculum to meet the needs of our own MTCS students would be immense but could yield strong results for creating success through culturally responsive practice.

Teachers pointed to some difficulties with in-school practices, and one teacher named the literacy curriculum as "a dry culturally responsive curriculum, but it's trying," further saying that more time was needed to develop more responsive work for students. A second teacher agreed, stating that she hasn't "really seen or been told of a way… how we can connect [instruction] to students' lives. And…ways that we can incorporate students background and histories into our curriculum." In agreement, one of the teachers added, "perhaps like a more explicit focus around…garnering information about students backgrounds and producing new curriculum specific to the students in your classroom would be helpful." Another teacher stated that though she enjoys the ways that the school responds to students' social-emotional needs, she struggles with kids "who are frequent flyers, who do have higher needs, who are out of the classroom more, it's much more difficult to hold them academically accountable. And I have struggled with that. And… I'm not sure what the balance is." Finally, a teacher cited the need for more discussion about bias and the need to serve all students needs to begin to move toward more responsive practice.

***Researcher/practitioner results*.** In looking at student and family experiences, I named that it is important that families feel like the school is for them and for their families. However, I also noted uncertainty in inviting more student and family voice, asking "What are the ways to reach out to families to show them that they are valued? …this is different for each family and taking each family's needs/preferences into

account is vital – but in our school, in our school community, there are so many challenges to helping families to feel valued."

When thinking about teachers, I seemed to continue this thought, wondering about to really show value and how to communicate value: "I think that I do this, but I do wonder what the perception is…the definition of 'valued' can be extremely variable, as each person feels valued based on different factors… I should solidify and clearly communicate my "way" of showing value, while also seeking to understand how individual teachers perceive being valued." Regarding students, I realized I did not necessarily know how they would answer the questions about how they see the school because I was not sure "how students would define feeling comfortable at school. There are many different measures that we have taken to welcome folks into the school and to provide a place for all, but I am not sure on how it is received." This points to a clear need for more student voice in further work toward CRSL in the school.

Summary. The themes that emerged from this data show that some stakeholders name that the school does show care and concern for student needs, but that such concern needs to go deeper than it does now. Parents and teachers hope for more direction and clarity in how the curriculum is used, how it can be more closely aligned to student experience, and how to invite greater recognition of the importance of students' lived experience. Stakeholders recognize that though MTCS does have some structures that support recognition of students' lived experience and some school-based practices demonstrate this recognition, other practices and structures are not responsive. Particularly, the curriculum is lacking and serves to marginalize some students and

stakeholders. Any work toward implementation of culturally responsive practice must include consideration of how the school will better center student experience through curricula and internal school structures and practices.

Community context

In describing school leadership to end wider societal oppression, Green (2017) says that leaders must realize "how to critically understand and act in solidarity with their school's community" (p. 4). To make the appropriate changes needed for the school and its community, teachers and school leaders must build knowledge of what the context of the community entails, and how that context is carried into the school each day.

How might better understanding stakeholders' experiences of my leadership help highlight relevant action steps toward effective implementation of culturally responsive school leadership? The data show that there is strong willingness to work with some members of the school community, but that these interactions are largely the result of stakeholders approaching school leaders. There is little evidence that school leaders engage in actions or processes to build wider understanding of community context, or to consider how community context impacts the lives of students and families in the school.

***Survey responses*.** Survey questions 5 and 6 in the parent/family survey (The principal's leadership provides support needed to help all students reach academic success regardless of their racial, ethnic, socio-economic, or linguistic background. The principal supports the inclusion of the history, values, and cultural knowledge of students' home communities in the school curriculum.), questions 4, 9, and 13 in the teacher survey (Our principal's leadership practices emphasize high expectations for

student achievement for all students regardless of race, culture, language, dis/ability, gender or socio- economic status. Our principal's leadership practice supports the inclusion of the history, values, and cultural knowledge of students' home communities in the school curriculum. Our principal challenges exclusionary disciplinary policies, practices, and behaviors.), and questions 9 and 14 in the student survey (I can see pictures of and learn about people who are something like me when I am at school. If a student speaks a language other than English, their parents can still be a part of helping them learn.) were all aimed at determining the perceptions of my ability to understand the community context. The responses to the surveys showed that 62% of overall responses stated that they regularly saw evidence of such understanding, 25% sometimes saw evidence, 10% did not often see evidence, and 3% never saw such evidence. Among teachers, 60% regularly saw evidence of my understanding of students' lived experience, 27% sometimes, 12% not often, and 1% never saw evidence. Families came in at 83% regularly experiencing leadership actions that showed an understanding of community context, 7% sometimes, 6 % not often, and 4% never experiencing this. Students indicated that 47% saw such actions regularly, 39% sometimes did, 11% did not often see, and 3% never did. These results again indicate that fewer students and teachers experience my leadership actions to regularly show understanding of community context than parents/families.

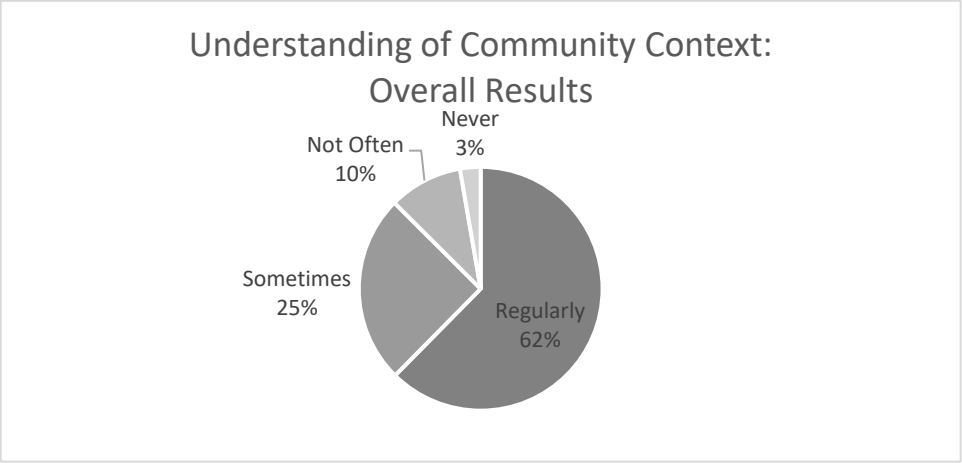

Figure 7: Survey results regarding understanding of community context at MTCS

Focus group outcomes. Focus group responses that aligned most closely to understanding community context fell into the category of *building relationships*. Several of the parents expressed appreciation for my openness to working with parents and to being open to hear from families. One parent stated that as I have been at the school longer, I'm "more comfortable with the school and the community and the people that are working with him and working for him. And so all that is kind of a positive overall positive experience for me." Another continued that in a case where she had some concerns around her daughter's experience in the school, I had been available to listen to her concerns and had been transparent about where the school had made mistakes and what I would to do ensure they were fixed. This action had showed an understanding for her concerns and a willingness to meet her needs. Finally, a parent stated that she wanted me to keep in mind that "the community grows from [my] leadership… it's more than just teaching kids. It's a big, huge organism of parents and little siblings and friends and networks." These comments show a belief in the interconnected nature of the school community, and the need to nurture this at all levels.

Teachers stated that they felt that there were several ways they could reach out to me when they needed help, and that I was responsive to those needs. One teacher noted monthly staff culture surveys as important to building relationships. "I remember one month I was not feeling good. And I said that [on the survey] and I got a call… just like a check in, a supportive check in. So that was nice. However, a teacher also noted a need for me to build better relationships with the older students in the school, and that doing so would help with discipline and relationships with families who feel undervalued.

***Researcher/practitioner results*.** My survey responses reflect my desire to build better relationships to understand the community context, while at the same time naming a lack of understanding how best to do so. From a practical standpoint, I named communication as a barrier, "I know for some families, just to see their language or culture represented in the school means so much. I am curious about resources that may be available that I am unaware of that would help communicate… with families". For students, I also wondered about communication, "I am not sure if the students know how… important I think it is for them to do their best work at all times. I want to… think about how I can better communicate with students to show them that I am on board with their families and teachers in wanting them to do their best." Interestingly, none of my responses to the teacher survey suggest needing to build more relationships with teachers, which may be further evidence of the need to ensure teachers are considered as instrumental to all efforts within the school. Without building relationships with teachers, it will be impossible to help the school progress.

Summary. The data indicate that I show willingness to partner with stakeholders in the community when they approach leadership, but there is little evidence of wider understanding of community context, or responsiveness to the community context. The work toward understanding community context is especially important for students to see and experience. I can see that my own thought processes around these questions reveals a lack of confidence in building relationships with the community, and a lack of relationships internal to the school that might help me to understand a broader view of community context. Action plans for building stronger CRSL must include steps to build my understanding of the community through building relationships and invite more two-way communication in the school community.

Collaboration between the school and the community. If the school is to serve the community, it must be a place where the community has a voice. Investing in deep, meaningful collaboration with community members and incorporating their ideas and input into the school helps "gain the support of community elders and learn what is important to them and their collective aspirations. Educators affirm student identity by having people from their communities in school" (Khalifa 2018 p. 175).

How might better understanding stakeholders' experiences of my leadership help highlight relevant action steps toward effective implementation of culturally responsive school leadership? The data indicate that teachers, families, and especially students all see a clear need for deeper collaboration between school leaders and the school community. Further, in my actions as principal, I do not demonstrate that I value community input, and I do not act to collaborate with stakeholders in the work of school

leadership. It will be important to build carefully considered school policies, systems, and structures that encourage collaboration and that allow more stakeholders to lead aspects of the work toward culturally responsive practice.

***Survey results*.** For this CRSL indicator, I used questions 7 and 13 of the parent/family survey (The principal promotes an inclusive organizational structure that engages students and their families in school decision-making and program planning. The principal provides opportunities for families to collaborate with the school staff about how best to meet the needs of students), questions 16, 17, and 18 in the teacher survey (Our principal's leadership practice reflects an inclusive organizational structure that engages students and their families in school decision-making and program planning. Our principal actively seeks ways to improve engagement with non-English speaking families. Our principal provides opportunities for staff to collaborate with families about how best to meet the academic needs of students.), and questions 7, 13, and 15 in the student survey (Community members come to the school and help us learn. The principal asks families how they would like the school to run. My teacher lets my family know what is going on in class and talks to my family.) to determine how regularly stakeholders felt that there was collaboration between the school and the community. Overall, 48% of responses indicated a feeling that this occurred regularly, 30% sometimes, 18% not often, and 4% felt that it never happened. Teachers responded at a rate of 57% feeling that there was regular collaboration, 31% saying it sometimes occurs, 11% not often, and 1% stating that it never happens. For families, 78% of responses indicated regular collaboration between the school and community, 11% sometimes, 9%

not often, and 2% stating that there was never collaboration between the school and community. Student numbers came in at 27% sating that collaboration happens regularly, 41% sometimes, 25% not often, and 7% never. This category represents the lowest positive response rate of any aspect assessed in the survey, and students particularly do not see enough collaboration. These results signal a strong need for better and deeper collaborative efforts on behalf of the school.

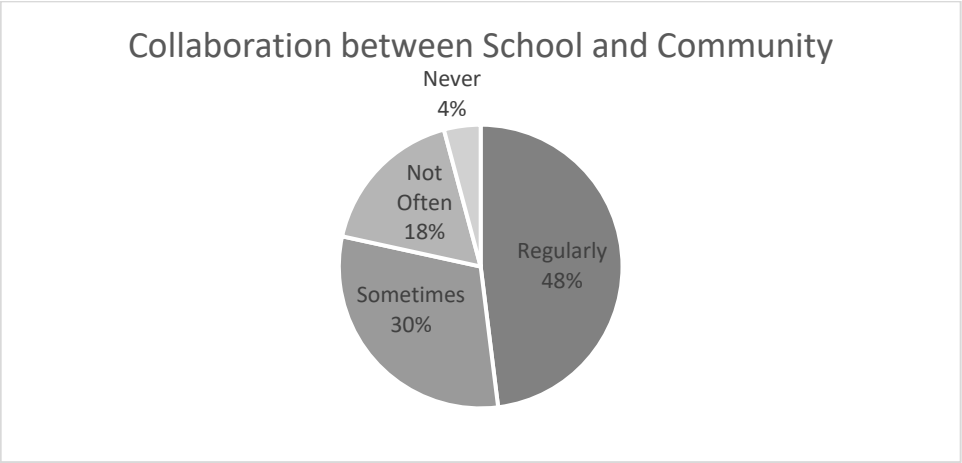

Figure 8: Survey results regarding collaboration between MTCS and its community

Focus group outcomes. Focus group responses generally fell into the categories of *openness to new ideas* and *transparency in plans/actions.* Several of the members of the family focus group cited that I am open to hearing new ideas, and that I am working to listen and implement new ideas. They also tended to have ideas about how to be more open. One parent stated, "I feel very comfortable… bringing ideas and desires and requests to the school administration. I feel like every time I have brought something up, it's been well received. It's been taken seriously and it's been, if not implemented, at least kind of like, you know, put in the brain bucket of the school." Another followed up that,

“I don't know if other parents maybe feel that way, especially if there is a language barrier with them and the principal.”

A few of the parents suggested getting input into the curriculum from families and asking at the end of each school year what needs the students have for the upcoming year. One parent suggested regular surveys and roundtable discussions to increase the input. Finally, a parent stated that he was appreciative that, “They're are constantly adjusting, which makes me feel good that… we're not just going through the motions or we're just going to try the same thing that somebody else is doing and just we're gonna do this for the whole year. The school… feels like it's not afraid to pivot while they're in motion and make changes and small adjustments throughout the course of the year.”

The family focus group also discussed the fact that they knew that I was working toward more equitable outcomes, but that they were not quite sure how. One parent suggested to make the expectations around culturally responsive practice in the classroom clearer to everyone – teachers, families, and students, “so that then I could say, yeah, this is… the direction that the school is going. And then this is what I see happening from admin to encourage and, you know, like make that happen.” She encouraged me to be more explicit in naming a belief in cultural responsiveness, “Is that what you eat, drink and breathe? Is that clear and evident in all components of conversations? I just haven't seen that… manifest itself in practice, or, if that were the case, I think I would see it a little bit more.” These comments point to a need for clearer communication and definition of the school’s work toward cultural responsiveness.

Teachers stated that it would be helpful to know the data on where we are as a school regarding equity, and to look at data regarding all aspects of what we do as a school. This would help us to focus and clarify our efforts. One teacher stated that sometimes teachers feel that actions regarding discipline are inequitable, particularly when they see different outcomes of disciplinary action for different students but that might be because they don't know all the actions that were taken with the child. "Sometimes it's because we don't know the whole story of what is going on. What are the special needs of that child? What's going on in the family? … I think it might help staff… to at least follow up on that part with it, with the staff member to say this is there's stuff going on at home. And I know that this was handled this way. And here are some reasons why." Again, clearer structures and communication would build stronger responsive practice.

Researcher/practitioner results. My survey answers that seem to point to ways in which I hope to invite novel ideas into the school. I discussed one parent group that ostensibly advises the school, but that I hope to see a stronger group develop to be able to help define the direction in which the school is headed. I named that students are not involved in decision making for the school and may feel that their families are not either. I also stated a need to "build in clear steps and stages for myself, and to allow things completely out of my hands from time to time" as a way to build more collaboration with various stakeholders in the school.

Perhaps, considering the previous data, it is unsurprising that much in my answers to the survey questions focuses on a need to build greater transparency, explicit plans,

and clearer communication with all stakeholders. Regarding parents, I shared concern that "I am not sure how much information or how clearly I am communicating this to families. Do they know what my expectations are when they are high? Do they agree with my expectations? Do they feel that the school works to help their child meet those expectations even if/when/though we are not yet meeting the high bar?" I also wondered about how clearly disciplinary policies and statistics are communicated. For teachers, I wondered if I make too many assumptions about culturally responsive practice, stating "If I hope to lead a community of teachers toward culturally responsive teaching practices, I need to make this more of an explicit aspect of my leadership."

Later, I note that much of our focus as a school has been "to develop teachers' understanding of and teaching to the standards, [so] we have not explicitly focused on culturally responsive teaching under that name. I would argue that we have been moving steadily toward CRT, but I also acknowledge that this is an area for much more development." Summarily, I note a need to build efficacy and critical understanding of culturally responsive practice within the teacher community while planning to implement these practices over time: "Some aspects of that implementation will certainly be looking at studies and literature that calls people to critical consciousness, but to get to a place of actively building critical understanding seems like it will come after we are able to more clearly name a need and a desire for culturally responsive practice."

Summary. The most explicit need indicated by school stakeholders is a need for closer collaboration between all members of the school community, but my reflection shows hesitancy and uncertainty in doing so. This theme shows the greatest area of need

in my leadership practice toward CRSL and in the school overall. In some sense, my responses show that I can see the need for growth, but I did not seem to grasp the level of need expressed by the students, nor the need for clarity and explicit direction indicated by the family responses. Additionally, the relatively low focus of teacher responses in this category may further indicate the need for explicit development of school processes and procedures to encourage and enhance collaboration.

Empowering students and the community. To be truly culturally responsive, the needs of the community and students must be heard and heeded. Johnson (2014) contends that CRSL must "bridge school and community concerns, advocate for cultural recognition and revitalization, and position educational leaders as advocates for race equity and community development in diverse neighborhoods" (p. 150). To carry this work forward, school leaders must seek to empower their students and the community to help identify needs and lead in the work of CRSL.

How might better understanding stakeholders' experiences of my leadership help highlight relevant action steps toward effective implementation of culturally responsive school leadership? The data show that my leadership needs to be focused more intentionally on empowering stakeholders in the school community. Cultural responsiveness can be practiced through more closely engaging with the various stakeholders and building explicit systems and structures in which they can participate in the direction and leadership of the school.

***Survey results*.** Questions 11 and 12 in the parent/family survey (The principal promotes disciplinary policies that work to keep students in class as much as possible.

The principal actively seeks ways to improve engagement with non-English speaking families.), questions 3, 4, and 7 in the teacher survey (Our principal provides opportunity for in-service training and professional development sessions that build our capacity for culturally responsive teaching. Our principal's leadership practices emphasize high expectations for student achievement for all students regardless of race, culture, language, dis/ability, gender or socio- economic status. Our principal provides me with the instructional support needed to help all students reach academic success regardless of their racial, ethnic, socio-economic, or linguistic background.), and questions 6, 11, and 12 in the student survey (My teachers understand how to teach me and help me to learn. The principal wants me to do my best and show what I am learning. The principal knows that some kids are different from others, and says that is OK, everyone is welcome at school.) were designed to assess how well my actions empower students and the community. From these questions, 72% of overall respondents said that they regularly saw actions in my leadership that served to empower students and the community. 20% sometimes saw these actions, 6% did not often see them, and 2% never saw actions that empowered students and the community. Looking at teachers separately, 70% stated that they regularly saw actions that empowered students and the community, 26% sometimes did, and 4% did not often see these actions. Families responded that they regularly saw empowering actions at a rate of 78%, 8% sometimes seeing these actions, 9% not often seeing them, and 5% never having seen actions to empower students and the community. 70% of student responses pointed to regularly experiencing actions that empower them and their community. 23% sometimes experienced such actions, while 5% did not often,

and 2% never did. Though positive responses across the board are generally high, it is interesting that a larger percentage of families say they never see these actions than any other group.

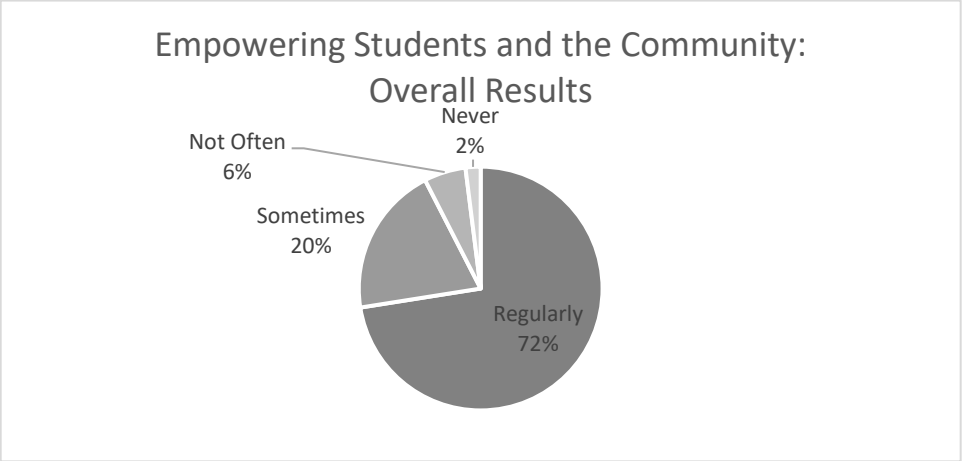

Figure 9: Survey results regarding empowerment of students and the community at MTCS

Focus group outcomes. The focus group responses that align most closely with the category of empowering students and the community were labeled as *building capacity* and *inviting conversations about equity*. In these responses, members of the family group stated that they were aware that MTCS provided some training in diversity, equity, and inclusion to the staff and that "there is access to the knowledge around incorporating cultural responsiveness" for teachers, though there was not clarity around the specifics of the training that was provided. Further, members of the parent group spoke to a need to better understand how students are impacted by the realities outside of school, and how those realities impact them daily, or when they are going through standardized testing. One parent noted that for students who are struggling, "you have parents who are willing to help" but that the school needed to invite parents to help. This

comment suggests a need for the school to tap into the resources in the community rather than waiting for them to appear in service to the school.

Teachers cited training that they have done, and that they appreciate that the professional development is focused on equity and in-classroom practices. A teacher cited a professional development session that was aimed at uncovering personal biases, saying that "I know … many times… people feel uncomfortable to talk about…race [but] it's important to have that conversation in the school… everybody has biases and I think it's important for everybody to sit and address those biases within themselves, because that's what's going to hold us back from [being equitable]." Another teacher added that "after that conversation, after that PD, a lot of people in the hallways were, the conversation continued, which says that our staff is open to that and our staff wants it. It was valuable and it got that conversation going." However, another teacher disagreed, sharing a desire for more coaching to help with implementation of new practices within the classroom. One of the teachers stated, "I feel like we've made a lot of progress in… the effectiveness of our professional development." Another agreed, saying, "The PDs have been incredibly thoughtful and purposeful, and… it's stuff that we can take back to the classroom and the very next day, that's unlike any other building I've been in." The teachers' comments show that they are in different places as instructors and in the journey toward culturally responsive practice. Their individual journeys need to be considered in planning for CRSL across the school.

Researcher/practitioner results. My responses in this instance seemed to point to something of a disconnect between my own practice and beliefs, and the ways in which I

ensure that others can utilize the same practices. In response to a question about modeling inclusive practice for teachers, I stated:

> In working with students, I aim to use restorative approaches and in working with teachers, I talk about inclusion and ensuring that all are welcome and feel efficacy within the classroom. However, the word… I am not sure how I could/should/would model these practices rather than… setting clear expectations and following up.

Further, I expressed a concern that in working with families, "I am such a new principal that I am not yet quite ready to let go of the reigns, and I do not have the skill to drive the conversation that could/should happen" which shows reluctance to allow others to lead. Further, though I do see the need for capacity building in other stakeholders, I also recognize the need to build my own capacity for facilitation as a leader. I did acknowledge that some families have had experiences of the school "that cause them to feel that [equity] is not a focus, or that their own child experiences something less than an equitable experience." I also named a need to "find ways to better communicate the work that the school is doing on behalf of creating greater equity, and also work on inviting families to see and experience the day to day of the school so that they can learn about what we do, or so they can have specific areas or suggestions to share when they see that things are lacking."

Similarly, for students, I stated that I was sometimes unsure of where to start in connecting more closely with more of them. I also seemed to ask myself why I did not have more of a sense of how students see and feel about the school, and their experiences of school. Regarding their work in classrooms and with teachers, I wondered about how to teach students to challenge inequities in a productive manner, questioning if "building

the pathways by and which they can express their concerns, understandings, and experience is a way forward."

Summary. The data point to teachers having experienced some amount of training and skill building, though their growth it could be more focused to create greater efficacy and stronger culturally responsive practice. Students and families do not experience skill building toward self-efficacy as regularly as teachers, or not at all. In viewing my own responses to the survey, this is an area of future growth and challenge for my own leadership. A relatively high percentage of families say that I do not empower them, and my responses show the questions that I bring to this area of aptitude in CRSL. More explicit training (for myself and the school as a whole) in and clear delineation of how to empower students and community members is warranted here.

Findings from Critical Reflection – Research Question 3

By design, the reflection aspects of this project were meant to dig into the third research question, *How can reflection upon the impacts of my leadership with a circle of critical colleagues expose how white racial framing manifests within my leadership practice and highlight next steps in the eradication of my white racial framing?*

Simply stated, the answer to this question is, "immensely." The insights gained through opening my reflection up to examination and critique by respected, interested colleagues gave almost concrete structure to the ways that WRF manifests in my thinking and my practice and clearly highlighted the areas in which I need to grow. Namely, the CCC helped uncover that when I am reliant upon my own thinking as correct, or right, or obvious, WRF is hiding the experience of part of the community from me. I need to

circle back, question myself, and question others to learn from them. When I seek to prove the value of something that I have done and seek validation for all the great steps I have taken, I am practicing WRF by minimizing the role of the community and community-based outcomes that are more impactful on students. I need to work in concert with the community instead and celebrate successes as a part of that community. When I do not listen carefully to stakeholders or provide clarity of my own thinking and ideas in a way that allows them to respond, I am serving the perpetuation of WRF much more than the growth of cultural responsiveness. I need to gain a wider lens and look beyond the frame to truly understand the impacts of my leadership – the CCC helped to do this.

My actions that most clearly indicate WRF are:

- Focus on "I" instead of "we" in leadership
- Assuming universal definitions of inclusiveness
- Seeking praise or recognition as an ally
- Positioning myself as a heroic "good white person"
- Ignoring the impacts of my actions
- Defensiveness – especially when confronted
- Understanding community based on perception
- Focus on my own ideas and understanding
- Ignoring WRF/default to WRF

The reflection with the CCC also showed that I need to get outside of my own perspective and into the perspective of those I hope to serve if I want to get closer to

overcoming WRF in my work. The work done in hearing feedback from a group of critical colleagues was some of the most influential and valuable critique of my leadership that I have ever experienced. In the group's ability to question anything about my leadership, I was able to open myself up to questioning everything. To be clear, this was not a negative sort of questioning, but rather an opening of my thinking that allowed me to see the limits of my prior thinking in a new way. I see strong value in working with a circle of critical colleagues, and I will continue to do so as I continue to expose my limits and push the boundaries of my thinking about leadership. Certainly, this group has given me greater clarity on ways in which WRF limits my viewpoint and impacts my leadership practice.

Personal reflection – confronting WRF. Because part of the protocol for the CCC was to share my own reflections with the members, I intentionally structured my own reflection based on the format that would be used in the consultancy that would be completed with the CCC. This protocol asks three broad questions: What? So what? and What else? As I designed the protocol and the format my own reflections would take, I used the central research questions to focus each of the broad questions. Full reflective writing can be viewed in Appendix H, but each of the reflection questions and summary responses are included here.

The "What" questions:

- What do these data say about cultural responsiveness within my own practice?
- What do these data say about stakeholders' experience of my leadership?
- What might I not be seeing due to WRF?

Reflections on the what questions. My reflections point to the generally positive survey results, but also state that I should not fall into the trap of allowing the broad response blind me to the real need that is also represented by the results.

I also note that I see "a lack of clear statement of purpose for culturally responsive practice, and a lack of communicating and checking back in with different stakeholders to see if actions take the desired effect." I shared excitement that some good things are happening, but a concern that they were not happening purposefully. I also investigated how WRF limits my efforts:

> When I think deeply about the community in which I serve, I often come to a point of exhaustion, confusion, or perplexedness (sic) that leads me to figuratively throw up my hands. I have often thought that there is no way to do it, no way to unite people of such disparate backgrounds, cultures, ways of thinking, ways of experiencing life in this city and country. This is undoubtedly followed by a thought of, something along the lines of, "If they would just all do ___ and do it like this, it would be so much better. Can't people see what is possible? It is in these moments, and in these reflections that I show how WRF can infiltrate and deaden even earnest searches for equity

After that bit of reflection, I questioned how to better garner feedback from a wider range of stakeholders, or from those who might not be capable or comfortable expressing their ideas in survey format. I finished this idea by recognizing the limitations of using survey data as the sole basis of drawing conclusions about my leadership. "If I am seeking the data in these surveys for affirmation that I am one of the 'good guys', I can certainly find it. If I use the data… to instead look beyond what is there to what is missing, I may be on the track to opening the school to true equity, and to building a stronger community sense of ownership and belonging in the school."

Thinking more deeply about WRF and its impact on my ability to implement CRSL, I dug deeper into some of the limiting factors of my ability. "Am I scared to learn that I cannot lead this community because of my lack of understanding? Am I scared to learn that I cannot lead this community because of some other aspect of who I am/where I am from/what I think about/what I believe? In some sense, this fear will only be confronted by committing to CRSL, and to charting a path toward implementation." In asking such questions, I am pointing to my own fears. Fear of failure is a real possibility in school leadership, especially in an era of school accountability measures and high stakes testing. Fear of my own inadequacy lies in WRF, a belief that I am the only one who can accomplish this work. In reality, when I am able to empower leadership in others, the risk of failure is lessened and successful outcomes for students become much more likely.

The "So what" questions:

- What is it important for me to consider as I work to implement culturally responsive leadership practice?
- What do I hope stakeholders will experience differently through culturally responsive leadership?
- In what areas do I need to be particularly mindful of WRF in my practice?

Reflections on the so what questions. In thinking about considerations for implementation of CRSL, I continue to come back to the need to be organized, methodical and clear in all aspects of the work. The stage has been set for strong implementation, but without clear direction and definition, my leadership and the school

community will not be able to progress past where it is now. Specifically, I note that implementation of culturally responsive practice "is a matter of small steps, and reflection at each step to ensure that I am indeed being culturally responsive and not succumbing to my neutral, which is WRF."

My reflection on my hopes for stakeholders drove toward the point of ownership for all and collective efficacy in creating and maintaining the conditions for all students to thrive. I thought about the school mission, citing it as central to what I hope to help develop:

> There are many great things happening in the school, but they are not quite organized, not quite named and grouped in a way that they can become part of a succinct and accurate depiction of the school as meeting its mission of existing "to foster a diverse and equitable community" and furthermore, that the outcomes of that existence can be easily seen to be "academic, personal, and civic excellence" – not just by an arbitrary definition created by boards of education or leaders of schools, or academic thinkers, but by each definition that each member of the school community has and uses to measure. This would mean that every person would say, "Yes, that has been accomplished" and also, when they are asked what academic, personal, and civic excellence means, each person would potentially have a different answer.

As I reflected on the need to be on watch for how WRF shows up in my practice, I tried to dig more deeply into the extent to which my practice exemplifies WRF. Therefore, to overcome the power of WRF, I need to enlist a group of stakeholders so my own thinking is not the only driving force behind cultural responsiveness in the school. Additionally:

> As I continue thinking about WRF, I am wondering more and more how much of the power of WRF exists in creating a sense of normality about deficit thinking. Is it the same thing that tells me it's impossible to bring people together that allows me to normalize that they are apart? If I could look at the uniting forces (often, the kids!) instead of the dividing forces, what would I see differently, what would be possible, what would change for me?

Finally, I named that by intentionally enlisting the voices of those who might disagree with me in making plans to be culturally responsive, and by engaging in continued critical reflection, I am committed to eliminating WRF in my practice.

The "What else" questions:

- What further questions do I need to ask?
- What do I not know that I now think I need to know?

Reflections on the what else questions. I responded to these questions by considering a variety of questions that I need to continue to ask as this process moves forward. They are listed below:

- Who is NOT represented in this data? How can I represent them better?
- What is the best way to communicate?
- Is there a different person who would garner different responses?
- How different would response have been if I was not principal/researcher, but just researcher?
- How do I balance the various definitions of success while ensuring all can reach their definition?
- What steps do I need to take to build community in such a diverse group of people?
- Are there ways to increase the sense of group? What intersections would allow for this?
- How can students be the catalyst for bringing families together (not just theoretically, but what actually would I hope that they could do to accomplish this)?
- How will I measure results?
- How long am I willing to do this?
- Who else needs to be on board? Who already is?

Consideration of each of these questions will be important as I move toward creating action plans and building toward implementation of CRSL. The better I can keep

thinking through these questions as I consider the other collected data, the clearer my work will become.

Outcomes from the critical colleagues' circle. The protocol that was used with the CCC can be found in Appendix I. The protocol was designed to allow me to present my personal reflections to the CCC, and for them to respond critically based on their view and understanding of the school. The purpose was not so much to gain suggestions for implementation of CRSL or changing the trajectory of MTCS, but to help call out areas in which my leadership, or the school community were reflective of a narrowed viewpoint. Specifically, they were asked to expose my WRF and to provide ways to deframe.

Almost immediately, the group began to point out a need for me to clearly define what I meant in talking about high expectations, culturally responsive, high-quality instruction, and to be explicit in naming what I see as the ideal state for the school moving forward. The assumption that all stakeholders, or even all members of the CCC would hold the same definition of these ideas was seen of evidence of framing, and perhaps influenced by my position as a white male who has not struggled to navigate the world of education.

Members of the CCC also questioned what steps I was taking myself, and how I saw my own role in identifying WRF in my practice and throughout the school. It was recommended that I take time to reflect on the videos myself and to use the reflection on these videos as a way to collaborate with the teachers to share ideal states or critically question the ways that teachers were instructing. I was reminded that it is most critically

important to ensure equity in disciplinary practice, as the emotional connection to discipline is strong in over-incarcerated communities of color.

Though each of these ideas and suggestions was extremely helpful, when the CCC was given the space to talk amongst themselves and dig further into what the data they were presented with were saying, a deeper and more critical focus emerged. The group named that my reflections felt defensive, like I was seeking validation for being right, and that I reflected through the lens of the self, and not the lens of others. They suggested that I needed to take on others' experiences and try to understand them more, rather than name my own experience and compare it to theirs. They named that I needed to model my ways of thinking and my struggles, being vulnerable to experiencing my own white fragility in front of others. They suggested that I practice think-aloud, modeling how I work to make decisions and what the aim of certain decisions might be. The group also clearly named that the "I" of my reflections indicated WRF and represented an unconscious move to make myself the heroic, sacrificial good white person, and did not acknowledge the "we" of leading a community that likely has completely different experiences than I understand.

The group did give some concrete suggestions, namely that I start implementation of CRSL by examining discipline and clarifying that throughout the community. They suggested that I use the survey data to guide my reflection and decision making as I planned for CRSL, but that I reflect on *why* the data came out the way it did, rather than *how* it came out. Further, they suggested that I needed to work to build relationships and connection with families and students to build trust, and thereby diminish the power

dynamic that leads families to feel underrepresented within the school community. Finally, and perhaps most impactful to next steps moving forward, the group members suggested that I work with rest of the school administration team to understand their thoughts and experiences of the school. The members suggested that I needed to ensure that CRSL was not a mandate, but rather a clearly defined way of being, and a form of leadership that defines who we all are together as leaders.

How to expose and eliminate WRF and develop CRSL – Research Question 1

The central research question of this work asks: *In what ways can I, as a school leader confront my white racial framing as a barrier to the development of impactful culturally responsive leadership practice?* The results of this study show that to be a culturally responsive school leader I need to practice leadership as a part of the community, not apart from the stakeholders. To confront WRF, I need to continually reflect on the role of WRF in my thoughts and actions. Perhaps most significantly, WRF can be confronted by broadening my understanding of leadership, its impacts, and the ways in which I think about it beyond my own thinking and past the boundaries that I may not see due to WRF. In this broadening, the partners to whom I must turn are both stakeholders in the school and critical partners in the work of education. By turning to stakeholders, I gain further insight into the characteristics of the school and the community it serves. By turning to critical colleagues, I gain insights into how the limits of my leadership impact my work. The most practical finding is that greater equity at MTCS will be achieved through methodical and well-planned work toward CRSL alongside methodical and well-considered reflection upon my own WRF and its impacts.

Building for CRSL and overcoming WRF require the input and incorporation of partners from the school community and beyond. Delineation of the work ahead is presented briefly in table 3, and more deeply in the descriptions in chapter five.

The study completed in this action research project has presented answers to the research sub-questions, and those, in turn, give direction for how to proceed. Table 3 highlights the overall findings of this study. Since the aim of this study is to lay the groundwork for better culturally responsive practice at MTCS, the table is organized by the five indicators of CRSL. Column one contains a succinct summary of the results presented from the data surrounding research question two, column two highlights the ways that my WRF presents itself in my leadership, and column three shows the next steps indicated by the understanding gained through this study and reflection.

Table 3: Results by research question and CRSL indictor

	My CRSL (RQ2)	**My WRF (RQ 3)**	**My Leadership Next Steps (RQ1)**
Inclusive, Culturally Responsive Environment	**Stakeholders see diversity as an asset in the school, but inclusivity and culturally responsive practice need to be more clearly defined and practiced.** • Survey Data: 87% Respondents regularly saw, less for students (55%). • Focus Group: "there is this sometimes this belief that we can only reward students who are like up here… we can actually be an exclusive school if we acknowledge that for some students, excelling looks different…" • CCC: Define my meaning of high expectations, cultural responsiveness, high-quality instruction, and my ideal state.	**I assumed universal definitions of inclusivity, equity, and responsiveness – based on my own understandings. I failed to consider that my own understandings are shaped by my position as a white male who is not confronted with the oppressive structures of education.** • "I talk about inclusion and ensuring that all are welcome and feel efficacy within the classroom." (self) • "By seeking a "normal" or a "correct" way of doing, I normalize dominant ways and minimize the real and lived experiences of students, their families, teachers, and the community writ large." (self)	• CRSL: Create definitions and benchmarks for inclusivity and cultural responsiveness. Meet with groups of stakeholders, seek their definitions, and work to create shared definitions and understanding of these ideas in different school contexts. • WRF: Utilize IDI or other cultural responsiveness index. Reflect on where my definitions of inclusivity, cultural responsiveness were formed. Share reflections with stakeholder groups. Create vulnerable space to share fears, misunderstandings.

Students' lived experience	**Though the school espouses a belief in the value of diversity and equity and some practices demonstrate this belief, common practices at the school, and particularly the curriculum are lacking, and may marginalize students or stakeholders.** • Survey Results: 76% regularly saw understanding of student context. Similar across groups. • Focus Group: Curriculum does not reflect student experience – it's important that the school figure out to address the need for high quality instruction while also being responsive, and that it was not yet meeting either need fully. Teachers haven't "seen or been told of a way… how we can connect [instruction] to students' lives. And…ways that we can incorporate students background and histories into our curriculum". • CCC: Reflect through the lens of others, I reflected through my own lens.	**I did not consider the way that curriculum that is not reflective of student experience marginalizes them, and that instruction must connect to students' lives. I focused on my actions as correct, rather than uncovering the impacts of those actions or how they affect students' experiences.** • "I need to see more cultural representation in the curriculum. There are minimal examples seen in my kids homework or school work" (parent). • "There are many different measures that we have taken to welcome folks into the school and to provide a place for all, but I am not sure on how it is received" (self)	• CRSL: Create and participate in a team of stakeholders, including students, to study what curriculum shifts need to be made, how instruction can center student identity and experience, and includes student voice. • WRF: Reflect on how students' experience falls outside of my own, reflect on how my leadership allows marginalization of students by making their experience invisible. Invite reflection with teachers and engage in critical conversation with teachers and CCC.
Community context	**There is strong partnership with many stakeholders in the community when they approach leadership, but there is little evidence of wider understanding of community context or responsiveness to the community context.** • Survey Results: 62% regularly see actions that recognize community context, lower for students, 47% • Focus Group: Openness to hear from families, I have "become more comfortable" but need to build better relationships with students and families who may feel underserved. • CCC: Try to understand others experiences, rather than compare them to my own.	**I was defensive of my actions and used my own lens to describe the community. I relied upon an understanding of the community based only upon my perception, not the experience of others.** • "There are many great things happening in the school, but they are not quite organized, not quite named and grouped in a way that they can become part of a succinct and accurate depiction of the school as meeting its mission" (self).	• CRSL: Form and participate inequity team of teachers, staff, family members, students, community members. Empower equity team to explore the local community, and to explain assets and foundational ideals present in the community along with needs and opportunities for growth. Share findings with school staff to educate them on history and present state of community. • WRF: Reflect on my understanding of the community and how I came to that understanding. Identify community leaders to engage in conversation, and share reflection with them.

Collaboration between school and community	**Stakeholders see a clear need for stronger collaboration with the community, and I do not demonstrate that I value community input, including collaboration in the work of leadership.** • Survey Results: 48% see regular collaboration, only 27% of students. • Focus Group: Aware of the work toward equity, but not how it was happening – "I just haven't seen that… manifest itself in practice, or, if that were the case, I think I would see it a little bit more." It would be helpful to know the data on equity, and how school-based actions impact the data. • CCC: need to examine and discuss discipline, build trust with families to lessen power dynamic.	**I focused on my own ideas and understanding, rather than the community that likely has different experiences than mine. I did not allow space for collaboration, or for others to lead. I positioned myself as the heroic good white person.** • "I am also regularly confronted with a sense of fear in turning over aspects of what the school is and could be to the community" (self). • "I just think that there's a way to be a little bit more intentional about the structure of getting parents feedback in a way that makes it so that it's not a burden to come up to school at various times" (parent).	• CRSL: Share equity data with community and hold a conversation about needs and opportunities in the school. Work with equity team to establish equity vision and requirements for CRSL. Create more forums for stakeholder input and collaboration. • WRF: Reflect on my role as leader, and when that includes greater distribution of leadership. Share reflection with CCC, and work with admin team to questions impacts of leadership actions.
Empowerment of students and communities	**My leadership needs to be more intentionally focused on empowerment and strategies to empower students and the community through cultural responsiveness.** • Survey Results: 72% regularly saw empowerment. • Focus Group: Though "there is access to the knowledge around incorporating cultural responsiveness" for teachers, there is not a sense of how training should impact practice. Teachers need more coaching in responsiveness. No mention of students or families. • CCC: create conditions for all to participate in building for cultural responsiveness, not as a mandate, but as a part of community.	**I did not create space for collaboration on or building toward equity, but assumed I knew how to create it. I did not share my own thinking, model decision making, or explain the aim of decisions – rather deciding that it should be obvious to stakeholders.** • "I need to use the works I have read to help me chart that course. I need to commit to various steps at various times, and then find/enlist the right people to help make sure those steps are accomplished" (self). • "We need to practice being OK with vulnerability and OK to say this doesn't feel right to me. And then too. But it might feel right to you. So let's talk about this in this in a place of respect. And so, yeah, having some skilled facilitation of that" (teacher).	• CRSL: Work with equity team to create list of needed training, understanding, and space for learning for teachers, families, students, and leaders. Work to create opportunities for as much of the list as possible. Create book study group about race and equity with community. • WRF: Reflect on why collaboration seems difficult, and what lack of collaboration signifies to stakeholders. Share reflections with equity team and CCC. Empower leadership team to call out when collaboration is needed.

What has become clear through this exercise is that each of the kinds of data I collected, and each of the results that the data illuminate is essential to my own growth as

a culturally responsive leader, and without collection of this data, my work would not be able to move forward effectively at MTCS. It will be important to collaborate with the school community as I continue to collect similar kinds of data, and to repeat, re-question, and rethink the work of the school at regular intervals if I hope to build strong culturally responsive practices at the school.

Significance of these Findings

For school leaders who wish to build for greater equity through implementation of CRSL, the findings are not as significant as the pathway by which I arrived at the findings. The needs of each school will be different based on the community, the leader, and the areas where inequity is most present. The results of engaging stakeholders will likely be different, but the process could follow a similar path to the one presented. Though it is highly likely that others are impacted by WRF, it is similarly important for them to do their own study of their school, and their own practices through the lens of WRF to lessen its impact on their thoughts and actions. The next chapter will also present a set of steps that leaders can take in seeking to gather information about the needs in their own schools and their own limitations.

For my own work, and for the outcomes of this project, the significance of these findings is that they have illuminated the path forward. By combining the findings of this study with the advice and suggestions of extant literature, I have both a broadly prescriptive and narrowly focused path toward CRSL, a framework by which to build, and strategies and considerations to use in implementing CRSL in my work, and the necessity of engaging with stakeholders at every step along that framework. It is these

understandings, and the subsequent plan for MTCS that I will put forward in the next chapter of this study. Additionally, the findings show that my WRF is a barrier to CRSL, and through engaging critical colleagues, I can start to see ways, within the context of building for equity, to overcome the impacts of WRF on the work.

Chapter Five: Conclusions

Within the chapters of this project, I presented the problem of inequity in public schooling in the US and suggested one way to increase equity within schools through implementation of more culturally responsive practice. I explored the literature regarding school leadership and the definitions of equity within schools and then articulated a process by which to gain greater understanding of the needs within a school. Recognizing that my own WRF is a barrier to development of culturally responsive practice in my school community, I created structures to question my own thinking and to help point to areas where I had limited perspective. I presented the results of carrying out the designed processes in the preceding chapter and suggested that the outcomes provided a path forward.

This chapter serves as a synthesis of the overall work that has been completed and the implications of the findings. By utilizing a conceptual framework that illustrates the antithetical natures of WRF and CRSL, the collected results point to ways I can help increase culturally responsive practice while working to overcome the handicapping impacts of WRF on my efforts. I consider the implications for me as researcher/ practitioner as well as for other school leaders who wish to build a deeper understanding of their own leadership practices. In presenting the implications, I present a plan for MTCS based upon the outcomes of the study, and a plan for my own reflective practice to continue the work of dismantling my own WRF.

Research Questions and Answers

In looking at CRSL overall, the literature, data from school stakeholders, the discussion of my critical colleagues, and my own reflection all point to the fact that in order to be more culturally responsive, leaders need to be more inclusive. Actions that invite others in to the practice of leadership and place high value on their perspectives, ideas and experiences will certainly create greater equity within schools. For myself, I have uncovered and experienced that WRF destroys progress toward equity and distorts my ways of thinking and acting so that they often do not align with my beliefs about leadership. I have also discovered that the role of researcher-practitioner presents a methodical way to confront and attempt to overcome the power presented by the racism of WRF. For my own growth, it is best to have a clear path forward, and to be continuously holding myself accountable to my leadership actions. This process certainly causes discomfort and doubt, but such feelings are the consequences of dismantling WRF systematically, regularly and emphatically.

In the first research question, I asked: *In what ways can I, as a school leader confront my white racial framing as a barrier to the development of impactful culturally responsive leadership practice?*

The answer to this question is that I began to confront my WRF when I began to see it as a default in my thinking and leadership actions. By first learning the true impacts and deficits in my leadership toward CRSL and then reflecting critically with others to better understand where the influence of WRF lies in my practice, I was able to expand my understanding and build a plan to work toward overcoming WRF. I have felt

how difficult and important it is as a school leader to be open to honest feedback from both stakeholders and critical colleagues and act on it. I also had to repeatedly face the reality of how my actions marginalize one or more groups within the school. It is now my hope that through consistently engaging in open, honest (self-honest), and deep self-reflection while working with the community to build the structures of cultural responsiveness within the school, we can begin to dismantle the white racial frame in me and in the school ~~and its influence over our school~~.

I turned to the school stakeholders and sought to understand their experience of the school. From this exploration and taking stock of my own understanding of the needs of the school, I found that I could begin to confront WRF by seeking consultation outside of my own ideas and thoughts, and by listening to the voices of others. Feagin (2013) stated that most leaders have not listened to marginalized voices, and to break down systemic barriers to equity we must "learn to listen carefully, frequently, and well to the experienced voices of people of color" (p. 210). Theoharis (2010) also named listening as key to building for equity: "setting a tone and creating a climate that deeply respects and values the racial, cultural, and economic diversity represented in many public schools…required an ongoing commitment to building relationships…by committing to reaching out and listening to families" (pp. 368-369). Through survey and focus group conversations, I was able to listen to these voices (alongside their white counterparts) and to understand better what needs my leadership was not addressing.

I found that teachers, families, and students sought clarity, communication, and overt descriptions of the work that the school was doing to become more culturally

responsive. Sleeter (2012) concurred with this recommendation, asserting that to create more culturally responsive practice in schools, "there is a need to educate parents, teachers, and education leaders about what culturally responsive pedagogy means and looks like in the classroom" (p. 578). In alignment to Khalifa's (2018) recommendations, this education of stakeholders (myself included) must include continuing conversation with and feedback from the stakeholders. Below I outline an illustrative plan to collaborate with stakeholders at MTCS in building a more culturally responsive school.

Finally, I wanted to ensure that WRF could be exposed even after collaborating outside of myself. Through further reflection and opening my practice to the feedback of a group of critical colleagues, I sought to again confront the limits of my leadership as it exists and sought to deepen the impacts of cultural responsiveness. Feagin (2013) recommended "consciously taking apart and critically analyzing elements of the white racial frame" and further, "accepting or creating a new frame" (p. 204). The CCC represented attempts to do just this, and the power of a group challenged me with some of the most brutally honest and welcomed feedback I have ever received. The work with the CCC directly highlighted instances where WRF might be implicated and encouraged me to resist these ideas. In this conversation, I was given clear direction and a pathway by which to move toward the "new frame" of CRSL.

Research sub-questions and answers. The second and third research questions relate directly to the process of action research that I undertook through this project. McNiff (2017) stated that action research must aim to address both actions, or carrying out an action to improve practice, and research, or contributing to theoretical

understanding. The second research question addresses the improvement of practice directly through highlighting how best to implement CRSL at MTCS, while the third addresses contributing to theoretical understanding of WRF in the instance of my leadership at the school.

In my second research question, I asked, *How might better understanding stakeholders' experiences of my leadership help highlight relevant action steps toward effective implementation of culturally responsive school leadership?*

The experience of collecting data from and listening carefully to the voices of stakeholders within the school community both revealed the particular needs that my leadership should work to address and pointed to a direction in which to lead. It was the act of providing space to listen, and then thinking deeply about the data that was shared that helped to illuminate this pathway. It is clear that space needs to be created to involve stakeholders in defining and working toward cultural responsiveness. Continuing to invite stakeholders to take part in the work of the school, listening to them share about their experience, and then working alongside the community to fulfill unmet needs within the school is the clearest way to build toward cultural responsiveness. Without understanding the implications of my leadership, I would not as clearly know the ways in which the community needs to be served. Better listening and reflection means better understanding and better choices about what should come next.

I found that I could gather a wealth of information and understanding by listening to and carefully considering the experiences of those who I am charged to lead. As Green (2017) found, "to equitably improve urban school and community outcomes

requires approaches that foster solidarity among a range of stakeholders, especially educational leaders" (p. 4). In seeking to understand the school community through the lens of CRSL practice, I uncovered a series of action steps that are needed to become a more culturally responsive school. Importantly, stakeholders indicated a need for clarification of purpose and expectation, communication of intent, and clearly articulated strategic planning as central to successful implementation of CRSL. Blumer and Tatum (1999) similarly recognized that "Creating a shared vision with shared language clearly helps to move the process forward. When the goal is clear, everyone can begin to assess their own performance in terms of that goal. While not everyone will be motivated to do so, those who are will be energized by the support they feel" (p. 266).

Additionally, all groups noted a need for me to ensure more consistent interaction with students and a desire for more interaction with all stakeholders. Khalifa (2018) noted that school leaders should "embrace the expressions of student identities and voices" (p. 110) in their leadership and should center these identities in their thinking. Further, he asserts that leaders who wish to be culturally responsive must center community-based perspectives in reforming school policy and practice. By listening to the stakeholders, I can better understand the needs of the school community and can ensure that the school is responsive to those needs.

In my third research question, I asked, *How can reflection upon the impacts of my leadership with a circle of critical colleagues expose how white racial framing manifests within my leadership practice and highlight next steps in the eradication of my white racial framing?*

The answer to this question is that reflection with a circle of critical colleagues can expose WRF in as much as it widens my vision to see the many ways that WRF is present. When I am able to participate in critical reflection upon the impacts of WRF on my actions of leadership, my ways of thinking, and my assumptions about my understanding, critical colleagues will help call those impacts into clearer focus, and reflection will highlight my next action steps. This reflection will not destroy the frame, but it can suggest the needed actions for deframing and clearer understanding of how WRF influences leadership actions.

In seeking to grow as a culturally responsive school leader, I took very seriously Khalifa, Gooden and Davis' (2016) charge that culturally responsive leaders "must be willing to interrogate personal assumptions about race and culture and their impact on the school organization" (p. 10). This was coupled with Khalifa's (2018) statement that "the lack of critical self-reflection, unfortunately, leads to a muting of community voice" (p. 62) which would undermine the aims of working toward CRSL. In working to enlist community voice and plan forward for strong implementation of CRSL, I found it essential to begin a journey of critical self-reflection.

To try to prevent my reflections from veering back into areas of WRF, and to hold myself properly accountable to the current realities of the school, I enlisted a CCC. As Theoharis (2009) described, school reform for equity can create significant challenges for leadership but working with colleagues that leaders "could talk with, colleagues who had similar ideals, colleagues they could trust, created the needed feeling of support" (p. 116) for continuing toward success through difficulty. This is certainly in line with my

experience of the CCC. The group members' willingness to dig deeply into the culture of the school and the data I had collected allowed them to call out many areas of short-sightedness in my leadership and to highlight not only specific instances of WRF, but also highlight broader areas of my practice that might be impacted by WRF. A major revelation they uncovered was that I tended to rely too much on my own thinking, and did not look at the wider picture, or "we" of leadership. Such individualism was pointed out to reveal a connection to an assertion of rightness that could be influenced by the WRF.

The influence of WRF could be seen when I would attempt to name an aspect of the school as blatant or obvious, and reflection revealed a search for validation of my rightness rather than paying attention to the experiences of the school or the community impacts of my actions. As the CCC pointed out, when I do not hear stakeholders clearly, or provide clarity of my own thinking and ideas in a way that allows them to respond, I am both submitting to and serving the perpetuation of WRF much more than the growth of cultural responsiveness.

The value of the insights gained through collaboration with this group cannot be overstated – their perspectives were invaluable to my work on this project and to my understanding of the work that lies in front of me. Feagin names WRF as "imbedded within individual minds (brains) as well as in collective memories and histories" (p. 9). Because of this, I identified individual WRF in the conceptual framework around which this research is built. The group of critical colleagues was able to point out my own personal manifestation of WRF, an individual framing that impacts the school in which I

lead whenever it is left unchecked. By calling this framing to the forefront, I can now continue to work on personally deframing and reframing my thinking.

Implications of the Study

This research study was designed to have two specific outcomes. The first was to highlight the actions needed to build a stronger culturally responsive community within MTCS. The second was to gain clearer understanding of my WRF and its impacts on my leadership and on the school. Undoubtedly, the latter of these goals is much more esoteric, and the result does not yield as concrete an outcome as the former. However, this project has two outcomes at its purpose, and when applied to the local context of MTCS, the work calls for the creation of a solid plan and a pathway forward based on what the data has shown. The plans that I have developed in response to the completion of this study are presented below.

Planning for CRSL at MTCS. Action research as described by McNiff (2017) requires ongoing cycles of observation, reflection, and action that are adapted and changed at each iteration as new understanding and new data comes forward. In describing the process, McNiff lists the process of "observe – reflect – act – evaluate – modify – move in new directions" (p. 12) as central to action research. It is necessary for an action research project to change and for the researcher to present a new path forward at the end of each cycle. This study was intended to lay the groundwork for MTCS to move toward CRSL, and to outline the next steps indicated in the collected data. To be clear, the project described here represents only one iterative cycle of action research, and it lays the groundwork to have the cycle continue. After completion of this

project, I have updated the cycle from that represented in figure 3, so that the next round will follow the pathway represented in figure 10.

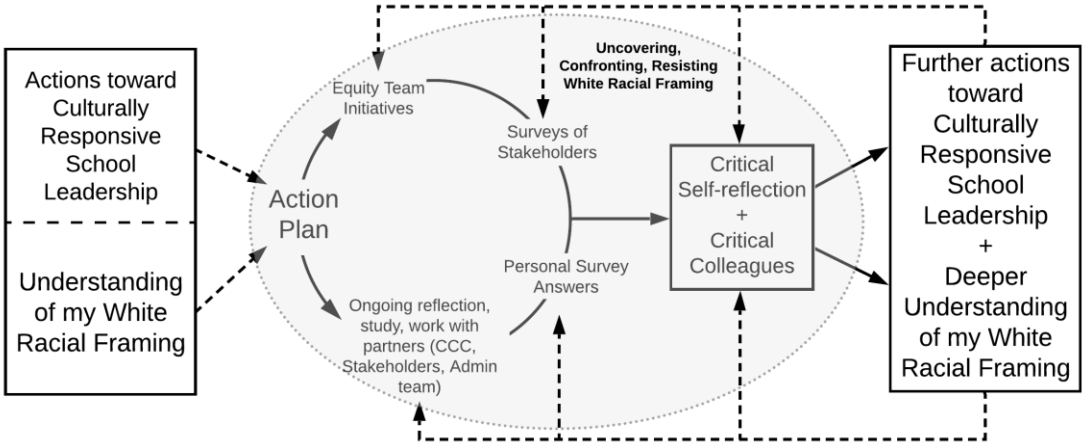

Figure 10: The next action research cycle.

Critical reflection action plan. One of the most notable additions to the next action research cycle is depicted as a grey oval surrounding the whole process. The oval represents the need for me to continue to engage in and better develop my own skill at critical self-reflection so that I can continue the work to dismantle WRF in my leadership. Khalifa (2018) names critical self-reflection as a "first and continuing act of culturally responsive school leadership" because it "is a process through which school leaders recognize and discover how their institutions and practices have been oppressive to minoritized students" (p. 74). To grow in my abilities of self-reflection, I have developed two tools. The first, depicted in table 4 lists a series of actions that I will take, along with a listing of the frequency with which I should take these actions. Though they may not all produce effective results immediately, through continued practice, these actions will help develop my critical self-reflective lens.

Table 4: Critical self-reflective practices

Action	Frequency
Book and research study	Consistent, ongoing. Engage with a book group whenever possible. Use research and text as reflective tool based on experiences.
Use of an intercultural responsiveness index	At start of new cycles of work (school year, etc.) to frame growth and progress, and to define continuing steps needed.
Written reflection	At least weekly. More when situations arise, and especially after reflective conversations with stakeholders.
Sharing reflections with stakeholders	Occasionally. When situations arise and greater vulnerability or transparency would build trust or greater responsiveness.
Engaging with a group of critical colleagues	Quarterly. Work with group of educators with commitment to antiracism who wish to overcome WRF. Share experiences and reflections and give critical feedback.
Conversation with students	Monthly. Ask questions and provide space to encourage students to share their experiences and their thoughts about school.
Conversation with teachers	Monthly. Ask questions and provide space to encourage teachers to share their experiences and their thoughts about school.
Conversation with family members	Monthly. Ask questions and provide space to encourage family members to share their experiences and their thoughts about school.

Along with the actions listed, it will be important for me to directly address the forms of WRF that are most often present in my actions and leadership. To address these, I have developed a series of questions that will be helpful in directly confronting each aspect of WRF that this study identified in my practice. The questions should be tailored to situations or specific instances of WRF as needed. Table 5 lists each of the forms of WRF, with a few proposed questions for each.

Table 5: Reflection questions to confront my WRF

My WRF tendency	Questions for reflection
Focus on "I" instead of "we" in leadership	• What are the areas for distributing leadership? • How can we distribute power differently in the organization so that it is shared more diffusely across the organization? • What message would it send to have someone else lead in this situation? How do I share the purpose and goals behind distributed leadership? • What better outcome could be achieved if different perspectives were applied to the leadership of this?

Assuming universal definitions of inclusiveness	• Where did my definition come from? • What in someone else's experience might give them a different perspective? • Is my definition correct for all stakeholders? Why or why not? • Where is/are oppression and exclusion present in the system? In my actions?
Seeking praise or recognition as an ally	• What alternative metrics could I look to as indicators of success? • What drives my desire for recognition? Is that more important than student outcomes?
Positioning myself as a heroic "good white person"	• How did I/should I position myself as host rather than hero? • What drives my desire to be seen as the hero? How does my embracing that role impact my school? • What is the purpose of this work? What do I believe in that is the important outcome of this work? • Do I share my motivations, processes, and structures with others? How do I collaborate with others and communicate my processes and decisions? • Do I need praise to know that the work is just?
Ignoring the impacts of my intentions and actions	• What was my intention? Did my intention manifest in the outcome? • Why might have the impact of ____ been ____?
Defensiveness – especially when confronted	• How can I focus on the message rather than the messenger? • What are the unconscious beliefs that I or my organization hold that create and sustain our fear of honest, constructive feedback? • Did I explore the issue as if the other person was correct? • If the other person is right, what does that mean for my next steps? Would different perspectives and different actions lead to different outcomes?
Understanding community based on perception	• What did I assume about the community or community member when I _____? • What should I try to learn to better understand?
Focus on my own ideas and understanding	• Is there a two-way exchange of knowledge and resources? • Do my actions demonstrate respect for the people and places I am working with? • Do I share my motivations, processes, and structures with others? How do I collaborate with others and communicate my processes and decisions?
Ignoring WRF/default to WRF	• How regularly and routinely do I explore the questions on this chart? • Where did WRF take over my actions/response/thinking in that scenario? Where does it take over in my daily actions/thinking? • How did I come to be like this? • When did I/how can I approach situations with an intentionally antiracist lens?

Though table 5 does not present an exhaustive list, these are questions that can help to jump-start critical reflection, or that can be used in reflecting critically with a group of stakeholders or colleagues. Through engaging in the reflective actions indicated and confronting WRF in my reflective practice, I will continue the work of dismantling WRF, and I will be better prepared to serve as leader of a culturally responsive school.

Reconsideration of terms. Kendi's (2019) definition of an antiracist idea is "any idea that suggests the racial groups are equals in all their apparent differences…antiracist ideas argue that racist policies are the cause of racial inequities", and his definition of antiracism is "a powerful collection of antiracist policies that lead to racial equity" (p. 20). These definitions highlight the impact of racism on inequity. As I set out to explore the three research questions posed in this project, I began with a view of equity and inequity as forces in opposition to each other. However, through the work and reflection of this project, I now see a much clearer connection of how racism creates inequity and antiracism leads to equity.

Inequity is the current state of education and the current state of MTCS because of the racism present in society and in my own leadership. This racism is clearly illustrated by WRF on a societal level. In my own practice, I have highlighted the individual racism and WRF that acts to ensure inequity. Equity, then, is not so much a force to itself, but an outcome of successful antiracist practice. Equity will only be achieved by dismantling the racist power of WRF and implementing antiracist leadership through CRSL or another form of antiracist practice. Antiracism can be seen as a force in opposition to inequity.

MTCS detailed plan. Notably, it is important to engage in the next action cycle within the structure of the school and community while continuing self-reflective practice. In figure 10, the new action research cycle begins with an action plan, informed by the endpoint of the first cycle. The action plan is presented in table 6 as a set of actions and approximate timing for when these actions should take place, while also naming the stakeholders who should participate in the actions. The plans for MTCS have been adapted from Khalifa's (2018) prescriptive checklist and represents what can hopefully be accomplished within one year of this work. Year two and three will likely see new and different challenges, and the school leadership should return to Khalifa (2018) to update their planning. Additionally, it is important to keep in mind that "Educational leaders should resist notions that they will ever create *completely* culturally responsive schools. Rather, they should think of this work as an iterative cycle of (a) constantly engaging in critical self-reflection and (b) implementing and/or reforming policies and practices that will make schools *more* culturally responsive" (p. 177).

Table 6: Detailed plan for implementation of CRSL based on the results of the study

Action	Timing	Responsible Stakeholders
Name a schoolwide initiative to increase cultural responsiveness. Define culturally responsive practice broadly, enlist groups to define in different school, community contexts.	Beginning of year (Teacher pre-service, Family back to school gatherings), First weeks of school	Principal, select teachers, select family representatives
Use schoolwide data to complete an equity audit that identifies specific inequities. Share all data and outcomes with all stakeholders.	First month of school	Principal, volunteer stakeholders
Track the data used in the equity audit across the school year, present to principal at regular intervals. Principal present to community.	Ongoing	Directors, coordinators, behavior interventionist, mental health team
Reflect on school leader role in contributing to inequity.	End of first month	Principal

Host community conversation about inequity	End of first month	Principal, families, teachers, students
Invite CCC to help in reflection after community conversation. Check influence of WRF in reflection.	After reflection, community conversation	Principal, CCC members, possibly school admin staff
Establish schoolwide activities to cause critical self-reflection across all departments, practices and programs in the school	Before fall break	Principal, school admin staff
Identify equity leaders in the building, empower them to make changes, coach teachers in the building to promote equity	Before fall break	Principal, school staff
Enlist equity leaders to create list of needed training, understanding, and space for conversation. Share list with staff and work to create opportunities for as much of the list as possible.	Before fall break	Principal, equity leaders
Form equity team of teachers, staff, family members, students, community members. • Establish research practices as central to the work of the equity team • Create consensus on roles and responsibilities of equity team	Before winter break	Principal, Volunteer stakeholders
Equity team establishes an equity vision and common vocabulary for the school that highlights cultural responsiveness.	January	Principal, Equity team members
Create and distribute survey to gather experiences of CRSL so far, and where stakeholders see differences in the school.	January	Principal, equity team
Invite CCC to help in reflection following the creation of the equity vision. Check influence of WRF in reflection.	End of January	Principal, CCC members, possibly school admin staff
Empower equity team to explore the local community, and to explain strengths, realities, history, and marginalization present in the community. Share findings with school staff to educate them on history and present state of community.	February	Principal, equity team, school staff
Create regular times for families and community members to come into the building and to be able to express their input for school policy and reforms.	Regular intervals (4X/year)	Principal, equity team
Introduce equity accountability members to teachers and staff members. Initial rollout is informational but will become evaluative.	March/April	Principal, school admin staff, directors, coordinators as needed
Create and distribute survey to gather experiences of CRSL so far, and where stakeholders see differences in the school.	May	Principal, equity team
Host focus groups to clarify outcomes of survey.	May	Principal, equity team

Invite CCC to help in reflection after surveys, focus groups. Check influence of WRF in reflection.	May	Principal, CCC members, possibly school admin staff
Create a five-year reform plan including measurable goals.	Before end of school year	Principal, equity team
Set goals and timeline for year two implementation of equity plan.	Before end of school year	Principal, equity team

Expected impacts to the school community. The outcomes of both the internal work of critical self-reflection and the outward work toward cultural responsiveness should have widespread and highly positive impacts upon the community. For my own leadership practice, as I build the structures and practice of critical reflection into my routine, I will become better able to lead a culturally responsive school and to build trust and relationship with stakeholders. The work of self-reflection and dismantling WRF is central to my work in leading a culturally responsive school.

For the wider school community, Lopez (2015) stated that students who experience culturally responsive instruction and environments "(a) have the opportunity to achieve academic excellence; (b) engage in learning that raises their awareness of injustices in society; (c) [have their] experiences and ways of knowing…included in the teaching and learning process; and (d) engage in curricula that disrupt dominant privilege and power" (p. 172). This means that successful implementation of CRSL as described will raise achievement, raise awareness of and confront injustice, reflect the true identities of the students, and begin the work of creating citizens who will disrupt systems of oppression. In short, by carrying out these actions, MTCS students will be fully living the mission of the school and will be successfully living the values of the school: REACHing Up for academic excellence, REACHing In for personal growth, and

REACHing Out to be good citizens of their community. Importantly, the community and all its stakeholders will be a strong partner in this accomplishment.

Recommendations

For the educational community, the aspect of this study that explores the influence of WRF on the thoughts, ideas, and actions of a school leader are likely to warrant deeper study. Though the process of confronting WRF in my own leadership was helpful and illuminated how I could change the ways in which I lead, it could be useful to the education community at large to have some generalizable principles to use in looking for and confronting the WRF. Feagin's (2013) contention that deframing and reframing are essential to countering the WRF bears further exploration in the broader context of school leadership. This study did not explore reframing and its role in creating educational equity, but based on my own experience, highlighting WRF and helping school leaders counteract the influence of WRF represents a significant step toward building more equitable systems across public education.

What becomes clear from this research is that any school leader can gain greater understanding of the impacts of their leadership through survey and deeper conversation with community members. Additionally, any school leader who serves in a community of which they are not a member, or who leads a school with a diverse student population will have significant blind spots in seeking to implement cultural responsiveness. Finally, any white school leader could build stronger leadership from questioning the role of WRF in the direction of the school in which they serve, and in the thinking and systems they engender through their leadership. Until white leaders can start to unpack

the ways that they benefit from the racist structures of WRF and how those structures impact their leadership, they will not be effective culturally responsive leaders or be able to lead their diverse school communities toward equitable outcomes and futures.

I have shown that through deep reflection on leadership with various stakeholders and interested, critical colleagues, a school leader can improve the ways they connect with and serve their communities. Creating a cycle of reflection and adjustment in a methodical and regular fashion will undoubtedly drive leaders to work in concert with the community they are charged to serve. I suggest that any leader follow the steps below to create a cycle for their own context:

1) Gather equity data for the school across several categories (testing, discipline, faculty and staff make-up, etc.). See Skrla, McKenzie, and Scheurich (2009) for more detailed discussion of how to perform an equity audit if needed.
2) Reflect upon the needs of the school and community as indicated by the equity data and determine what aspects of CRSL seem to be most lacking.
3) Complete a personal reflection to highlight what you see as needs and opportunities for growth in the school.
4) Utilize the surveys in Appendix B to gather stakeholder data.
5) Complete the surveys in open format to determine your own understanding of the school.
6) Compile the survey data and interpret, disaggregate as needed.
7) Host focus groups of teachers, parents/families, and students to dig deeper into each aspect of CRSL, or significant findings from the survey data.

8) After considering all of the survey data and the focus group conversations, complete a personal reflection about what you are thinking about the needs in the school now, and how the data has struck you. Follow the what, so what, what next format presented in appendix I.
9) Enlist a circle of critical colleagues. If possible provide them with a tour of the school, as well as a presentation of what you see as the needs within the school. Follow the protocol outlined in appendix I and record your thinking and reflections.
10) Complete a further written reflection on your understanding of the needs of the school, and the areas in which you need to check for WRF.
11) Create a CRSL plan, following the guidance in Khalifa (2018).
12) Present your plan to your school leadership team and any other stakeholders whose feedback you would like. Ensure the plan includes stakeholder input and feedback, and multiple checkpoints regarding both the success of CRSL and the influence of WRF.
13) Update plans as needed.
14) Continue work with CCC, consistently reflect on practice and check for WRF.
15) Revise CRSL plans as time demands (yearly), when you have gotten off track, or when the needs of the community shift significantly.

I am hopeful that this plan can help other school leaders more clearly identify the needs in their own schools and communities, and that they can build for greater equity in their context.

The Challenges of Leadership as Researcher/Practitioner

As I have worked through the particulars of this project, I have had to consistently balance my role as researcher with that of practitioner. Without question, school leadership is a vocation that requires a level of dedication, energy, and attention that is not regularly duplicated in the professional world. It is no secret to school leaders that if they were to dedicate 24 hours a day, seven days a week to their role, they would still have aspects of their work that would be not be completed, or that could stand to receive further attention. School leaders need to learn to live with the fact that the work is never done in their role. This realization is particularly useful for leaders who seek to expose WRF, work for CRSL, or who wish to work as researcher/practitioner in their own studies.

To begin with, just as school leadership work is never done, the work of cultural responsiveness has no end point. There will always be new challenges, new stakeholders, and new ideas that propel the need for constant and consistent reflection and growth. Likewise, the work of research has no set end point. At various times throughout this process, I began to shift my focus into what I thought was a new and interesting area of study. I had to stop myself and name that the new idea had to be set aside for future exploration. So, though I present a completed research project here, I am certain that this is not the end of the research.

Similar to the previous two aspects of this research, seeking to dismantle WRF is a journey of infinite length. Through the process of this research and writing this summary of my work, I have regularly been alerted to passages, phrases, or even word

usage that indicates my slipping back to my default of WRF. This is illustrative of the nefarious and all-encompassing nature of WRF in society and in ourselves – even in seeking to undo it, we regularly reinforce it. We must be ready to fail and to accept that our failure is rooted in racism and misunderstanding. However, as Kendi posits, there is good news in the fact that "racist and antiracist are not fixed identities. We can be racist one minute and antiracist the next. What we say about race, what we do about race, in each moment, determines what – not who – we are" (p. 16). The small moments of clarity and understanding that come from confronting WRF show that there is hope for destroying the ideas and policies that continue to marginalize people of color in our country.

Societal Challenges to Leadership

Finally, it seems impossible to complete this study without mentioning two major current events that have potentially altered the landscape of education and society. Over the past several months the COVID-19 global pandemic has killed over 100,000 Americans and has likely altered the future of schools and schooling for countless children across the globe. Schools are currently unable to meet in live session, and students as young as four are forced to utilize distance learning through technology to continue their learning. What remains clear in my mind, is that whether schools continue to operate as they have for the preceding 65 years, or whether this crisis foments broad changes in educational structures in this country, inequity will persist. If the nature of schools changes drastically, it will be incumbent upon school leaders to continue to seek greater equity. Though the ways of achieving cultural responsiveness may change, or the

context in which responsiveness can be achieved may look different, it is my hope that my work in this research will help to guide other school leaders toward deeper reflection, and more successful implementation of practices that increase cultural responsiveness, and ultimately build toward equity in schools.

Additionally, after weeks of shelter in place orders and cities on lockdown due to COVID-19, demonstrations for justice and large-scale protests of police brutality broke out across the United States on May 28, 2020. The flashpoint of these demonstrations occurred on May 25, 2020, when George Floyd, a black man who had been handcuffed and laid face down by Minneapolis police officers, was murdered by a white officer placing his knee on Mr. Floyd's neck for eight minutes and forty-six seconds. Mr. Floyd can be heard yelling to the officer that he can't breathe, but the officer does not relent. This murder of a defenseless black man came close after the murder of another black man, Ahmaud Arbery, while he was jogging through a predominantly white neighborhood and after a well-documented case of a white woman calling police on Christian Cooper, because he, a black man asked her to put her dog on a leash in the park. Each of these incidents demonstrates the lack of value placed on the lives and well-being of black people in the United States. None of these incidents is unique, as cases of police killings, murder, and hateful discrimination of black people at the hands of white people are too many to number in contemporary society.

I include mention of the protests here because they present some sense of hope that societal change may come and that our nation may decide to invest in a series of reforms, reparations, and new initiatives that work to destroy the white racial frame, and

that pave the way for equity in society and in our schools. Concurrently, I have been reflecting on the place of education within the bounds of our nation. It is incumbent upon school leaders, particularly white school leaders, to lead in ways that confront, overcome, and eventually destroy the power of the white racial frame. We do this by practicing antiracist leadership and building school communities that exemplify antiracist, culturally responsive practices. Through collaboration with the communities we serve, we must educate all children equitably, admit and engage with our own racist tendencies, and raise up the value of each member of our schools and communities. Through dismantling the systems of inequitable power that are born in our schools, we can create wider change in society and dismantle the systems that work to marginalize and destroy people and communities of color.

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Appendix A – Mountain Top Charter School Performance Framework

[redacted]

SPED	Points Earned: 1 Possible: 2		50.00% Approaching
Measure	**Earned**	**Possible**	**Rating**
2.09 Disaggregated Early Literacy Status Comparison - Students with Disabilities	1	2	Approaching

Students of Color	Points Earned: 7 Possible: 24		29.17% Does Not Meet
Measure	**Earned**	**Possible**	**Rating**
1.06c Disaggregated Early Literacy Catch-Up - BGL & SBGL - Students of Color	4	12	Approaching
1.07c Disaggregated Early Literacy Catch-Up Comparison - BGL & SBGL - Students of Color	0	6	Does Not Meet
2.07c Disaggregated Early Literacy Status - Students of Color	2	4	Approaching
2.08c Disaggregated Early Literacy Status Comparison - Students of Color	1	2	Approaching

Student Progress - Growth	Points Earned: 52 Possible: 117		44.44% Approaching
Measure	**Earned**	**Possible**	**Rating**
1.01a Early Literacy Catch-Up - BGL & SBGL	6	12	Approaching
1.01b Early Literacy Catch-Up - SBGL Only	8	12	Meets
1.02a TSGOLD Catch-Up - Language	3	6	Approaching
1.02b TSGOLD Catch-Up - Literacy	6	6	Exceeds
1.02c TSGOLD Catch-Up - Mathematics	6	6	Exceeds
1.02d TSGOLD Catch-Up - Cognitive	5	6	Meets
1.03a TSGOLD Keep-Up - Language			
1.03b TSGOLD Keep-Up - Literacy			
1.03c TSGOLD Keep-Up - Mathematics			
1.03d TSGOLD Keep-Up - Cognitive			
1.04 ACCESS Median Growth Percentile	3	6	Approaching
1.05 ACCESS % On Track	3	9	Approaching
1.06a Disaggregated Early Literacy Catch-Up - BGL & SBGL - EL	0	12	Does Not Meet
1.06b Disaggregated Early Literacy Catch-Up - BGL & SBGL - FRL	4	12	Approaching
1.06c Disaggregated Early Literacy Catch-Up - BGL & SBGL - Students of Color	4	12	Approaching
1.07a Disaggregated Early Literacy Catch-Up Comparison - BGL & SBGL - EL	2	6	Approaching
1.07b Disaggregated Early Literacy Catch-Up Comparison - BGL & SBGL - FRL	2	6	Approaching
1.07c Disaggregated Early Literacy Catch-Up Comparison - BGL & SBGL - Students of Color	0	6	Does Not Meet

[redacted]

Student Achievement - Status	Points Earned: 24.5 Possible: 50	49.00% Approaching

Measure	Earned	Possible	Rating
2.01a TSGOLD % Proficient/Advanced - Language	0.5	2	Does Not Meet
2.01b TSGOLD % Proficient/Advanced - Literacy	**2**	**2**	Meets
2.01c TSGOLD % Proficient/Advanced - Mathematics	1.5	2	Approaching
2.01d TSGOLD % Proficient/Advanced - Cognitive	**1.5**	**2**	Approaching
2.02a CMAS % Met/Exceeded - Literacy	2	4	Approaching
2.02b CMAS % Met/Exceeded - Math	**4**	**4**	Meets
2.03b Disaggregated CMAS Status - FRL	2	4	Approaching
2.04b Disaggregated CMAS Status Comparison - FRL	**0**	**2**	Does Not Meet
2.06a Early Literacy % At Grade Level - Kinder Only	2	4	Approaching
2.06b Early Literacy % At Grade Level - Grades 1-3	**2**	**4**	Approaching
2.07a Disaggregated Early Literacy Status - EL	0	4	Does Not Meet
2.07b Disaggregated Early Literacy Status - FRL	**2**	**4**	Approaching
2.07c Disaggregated Early Literacy Status - Students of Color	2	4	Approaching
2.08a Disaggregated Early Literacy Status Comparison - EL	**0**	**2**	Does Not Meet
2.08b Disaggregated Early Literacy Status Comparison - FRL	1	2	Approaching
2.08c Disaggregated Early Literacy Status Comparison - Students of Color	**1**	**2**	Approaching
2.09 Disaggregated Early Literacy Status Comparison - Students with Disabilities	1	2	Approaching

[redacted]

Family and Student Engagement & Satisfaction	Points Earned: 7 Possible: 12	58.33% Meets

Measure	Earned	Possible	Rating
3.01 Attendance Rate	**3**	**3**	Exceeds
3.02 Student Satisfaction	0	3	Does Not Meet
3.03 Parent Satisfaction and Engagement Positive Response	**4**	**6**	Meets

[redacted]

Elementary School

School Performance Framework 2016 - 2017

1.02a TSGOLD Catch-Up - Language	Approaching

Appendix B – Family/parent, Teacher, Student Surveys and Results

Culturally Responsive School Leadership Practices - Teacher Survey

[redacted] Teachers,

Thank you for agreeing to fill out the following survey.

As you know, our school's mission states that "[redacted] [redacted] Charter School exists to foster a diverse and equitable community of youth and adults striving together for academic, personal, and civic excellence." This mission is central to all that we do as a school.

Through the following survey, I am seeking to learn how well I am serving as the leader of this mission. More specifically, I want to know how my actions are seen to impact work toward our school's development of culturally responsive practices, or how our school creates the environment and conditions for students of different racial, ethnic, and cultural background to feel supported and successful. The survey consists of 18 statements adapted from several existing surveys that measure cultural responsiveness and attitudes or actions about diversity and inclusion in schools.

For each of the statements, you will be asked to rate how often you experience evidence (directly or indirectly) of the actions as listed. The scale is from one to four, where one means that you never see evidence of this where four means that you regularly see or experience evidence of this.

For example, if the statement were: "The principal attends school-wide functions and greets families as they arrive.", you would mark a four if that is a regular practice you see or have experienced. You would mark a three if that happens sometimes at the school, a two if that does not happen often, or a one if it has never happened in your experience.

Please answer each of the questions to the best of your ability based on your experience. For each question, please only choose one answer, as half answers will be discarded. At the end of the survey there is a space for you to give open feedback or share opinions on the topic of the survey.

All responses will be completely anonymous. Your name or identity will not be collected with this survey, so please be as open and honest as possible. However, if you would like to be considered for follow-up conversation or possible inclusion in a focus group to clarify the responses received from the survey, there will be a link to sign up at the end of the survey. Again, these responses will be anonymous.

Thank you for your participation and feedback.

Sincerely,

Guerin Gray

Before beginning the survey, please answer a few brief questions:

- How would you describe your racial/ethnic background? _____
- How would you describe your gender identity? _____
- How long have you been working at the school? _____

  a. 0-2 years
  b. 3-6 years
  c. other

1. Our principal's leadership practice ensures that all teachers are treated equitably regardless of race, culture, dis/ability, gender or socio- economic status.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

2. Our principal treats me as a valued member of our school community.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

3. Our principal provides opportunity for in-service training and professional development sessions that build our capacity for culturally responsive teaching.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

4. Our principal's leadership practices emphasize high expectations for student achievement for all students regardless of race, culture, language, dis/ability, gender or socio- economic status.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

5. Our principal's leadership practice reflects that it is important for students' classroom groupings to be representative of our school's racial, ethnic, socio-economic, and linguistic diversity.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

6. Our principal ensures that the process for assigning students to classroom groups is equitable regardless of their racial, ethnic, gender, socio-economic, or linguistic background.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

7. Our principal provides me with the instructional support needed to help all students reach academic success regardless of their racial, ethnic, socio-economic, or linguistic background.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

8. Our principal's leadership actions ensure the participation of students from diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds in all school activities is representative of the larger student body.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

9. Our principal's leadership practice supports the inclusion of the history, values, and cultural knowledge of students' home communities in the school curriculum.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

10. Our principal models inclusive instructional and behavioral practices.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

11. Our principal's leadership practice ensure that all students are treated equitably regardless of race, culture, disability, gender or socio- economic status.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

12. Our principal's leadership practice ensures discipline policies are implemented equitably regardless of race, culture, dis/ability, gender or socio- economic status.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

13. Our principal challenges exclusionary disciplinary policies, practices, and behaviors.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

14. Our principal's leadership practice helps to develop a critical consciousness among teachers, staff, and students to challenge educational inequities within our school community.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

15. Our principal models the use of school data to discover and track disparities in academic and discipline trends.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

16. Our principal's leadership practice reflects an inclusive organizational structure that engages students and their families in school decision-making and program planning.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

17. Our principal actively seeks ways to improve engagement with non-English speaking families.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

18. Our principal provides opportunities for staff to collaborate with families about how best to meet the academic needs of students.

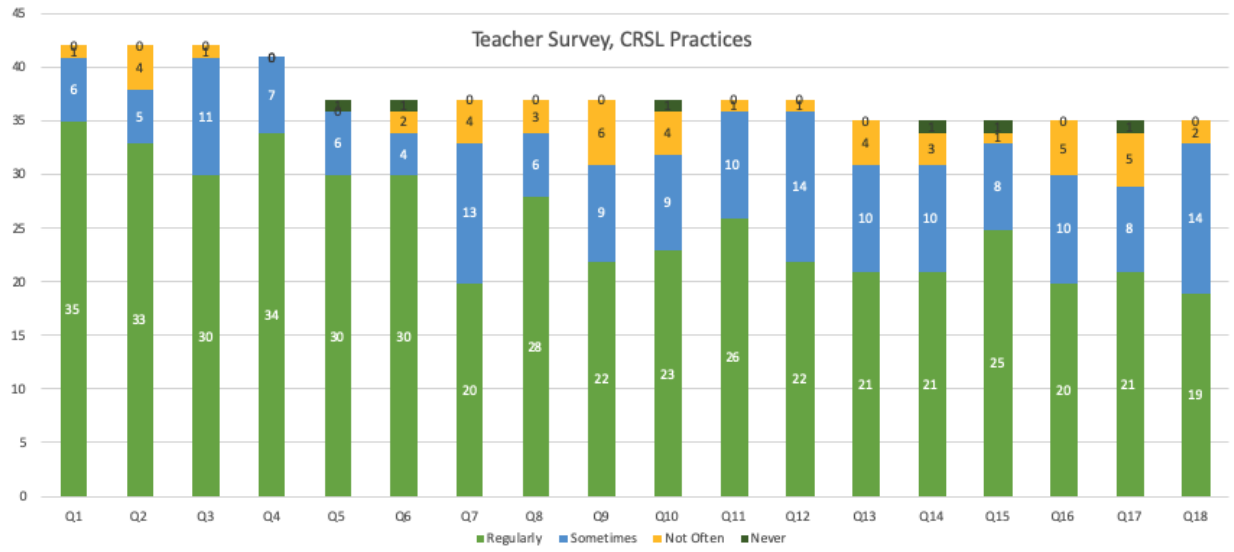
1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

19. Open response – What information or opinions about leadership actions toward culturally responsive practice would you like to share?

- Would you be willing to participate in a focus group or follow up conversations regarding these same questions?
    - If so, please go to the following link, and enter your information:

      http://www._____

Teacher Survey Responses



Culturally Responsive School Leadership Practices – Parent/Family Survey

Dear [redacted] Families,

Thank you for agreeing to fill out the following survey.

As you know, our school's mission states that "[redacted] [redacted] Charter School exists to foster a diverse and equitable community of youth and adults striving together for academic, personal, and civic excellence." This mission is central to all that we do as a school.

Through the following survey, I am seeking to learn how well I am serving as the leader of this mission. More specifically, I want to know how my actions are seen to impact work toward our school's development of culturally responsive practices, or how our school creates the environment and conditions for students of different racial, ethnic, and cultural background to feel supported and successful. The survey consists of 13 statements adapted from several existing surveys that measure cultural responsiveness and attitudes or actions about diversity and inclusion in schools.

For each of the statements, you will be asked to rate how often you experience evidence (directly or indirectly) of the actions as listed. The scale is from one to four, where one means that you never see evidence of this where four means that you regularly see or experience evidence of this.

For example, if the statement were: "The principal attends school-wide functions and greets families as they arrive.", you would mark a four if that is a regular practice you see or have experienced. You would mark a three if that happens sometimes at the school, a two if that does not happen often, or a one if it has never happened in your experience.

Please answer each of the questions to the best of your ability based on your experience. For each question, please only choose one answer, as half answers will be discarded. At the end of the survey there is a space for you to give open feedback or share opinions on the topic of the survey.

All responses will be completely anonymous. Your name or identity will not be collected with this survey, so please be as open and honest as possible. However, if you would like to be considered for follow-up conversation or possible inclusion in a focus group to clarify the responses received from the survey, there will be a link to sign up at the end of the survey. Again, these responses will be anonymous.

Thank you for your participation and feedback.

Sincerely,

Guerin Gray

Before beginning the survey, please answer a few brief questions:

- How would you describe your racial/ethnic background? _____
- How would you describe your gender identity? _____
- How long have you been involved with the school? _____

    a. 0-2 years b. 3-6 years c. other

1. The principal treats all families fairly regardless of race, culture, dis/ability, gender or socio-economic status.

4	3	2	1
Regularly	Sometimes	Not often	Never

2. The principal treats our family as a valued member of the school community.

4	3	2	1
Regularly	Sometimes	Not often	Never

3. The principal leads with high expectations for student achievement for all students regardless of race, culture, language, dis/ability, gender or socio- economic status.

4	3	2	1
Regularly	Sometimes	Not often	Never

4. The principal makes sure that the process for assigning students to classroom groups is equitable regardless of their racial, ethnic, gender, socio-economic, or linguistic background.

4	3	2	1
Regularly	Sometimes	Not often	Never

5. The principal's leadership provides support needed to help all students reach academic success regardless of their racial, ethnic, socio-economic, or linguistic background.

4	3	2	1
Regularly	Sometimes	Not often	Never

6. The principal supports the inclusion of the history, values, and cultural knowledge of students' home communities in the school curriculum.

4	3	2	1
Regularly	Sometimes	Not often	Never

7. The principal promotes an inclusive organizational structure that engages students and their families in school decision-making and program planning.

4	3	2	1
Regularly	Sometimes	Not often	Never

8. The principal treats all students equitably regardless of race, culture, disability, gender or socio- economic status.

4	3	2	1
Regularly	Sometimes	Not often	Never

9. The principal ensures discipline policies are implemented equitably regardless of race, culture, dis/ability, gender or socio- economic status.

4	3	2	1
Regularly	Sometimes	Not often	Never

10. The principal does not promote exclusionary disciplinary policies, practices, and behaviors.

4	3	2	1
Regularly	Sometimes	Not often	Never

11. The principal promotes disciplinary policies that work to keep students in class as much as possible.

4	3	2	1
Regularly	Sometimes	Not often	Never

12. The principal actively seeks ways to improve engagement with non-English speaking families.

4	3	2	1
Regularly	Sometimes	Not often	Never

13. The principal provides opportunities for families to collaborate with the school staff about how best to meet the needs of students.

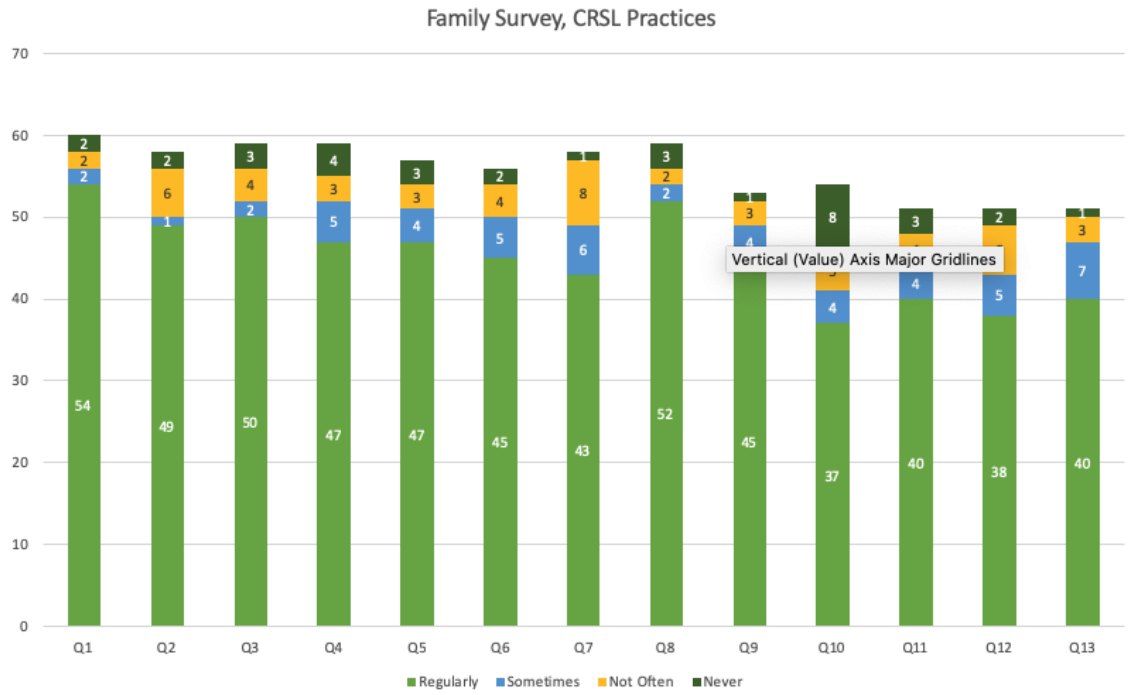
4	3	2	1
Regularly	Sometimes	Not often	Never

14. Open response – What information or opinions about leadership actions toward leadership that is culturally responsive would you like to share?

- Would you be willing to participate in a focus group or follow up conversations regarding these same questions?
    - If so, please go to the following link, and enter your information:

      http://www._____

Family Survey Responses



Culturally Responsive School Leadership Practices - Student Survey

[redacted] Students,

Thank you for agreeing to fill out the following survey! The survey is designed to learn more about how the principal helps, or does not help school to be a place where you are comfortable and able to learn.

There are 15 statements, and you are asked to score each one on a scale from one to four, where four means that this is true a lot, and one means it is not really true.

For example, if the statement were: "The principal spends time with students in the lunchroom.", you would mark a four if that is something that happens all the time. You would mark a three if that happens sometimes at school, a two if that does not happen very often, or a one if it has never happened.

Please answer each of the questions to the best of your ability, and based on your experience. For each question, please only choose one answer, as half answers will be discarded.

At the end of the survey there is a space for you to give your opinions about the principal's role in helping you feel able to learn.

Your name or identity will not be collected with this survey, so please be as open and honest as possible. If you would like to be considered for follow-up conversation to clarify the responses received from the survey, there will be a link to sign up at the end of the survey. Again, these responses will be anonymous.

Thank you for your help!

Sincerely,

Mr. Gray

Before we get to the survey, please answer a few brief questions:

- How would you describe your racial/ethnic background? _____
- How would you describe your gender identity? _____
- Which grades have you gone to school here?
    - ECE ___ K ___ 1st ___ 2nd ___ 3rd ___ 4th ___ 5th ___

1) The principal wants to make sure students from all races and cultures, students with disabilities, students of all genders, and wealthy or less-wealthy students are treated fairly.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

2) Every student has a chance to do after school programs, enrichment, and other school events.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

3) The principal treats me and my family with respect and tries to help us feel comfortable at school.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

4) The principal likes all kinds of different students.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

5) The principal wants me to feel included and accepted at school.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

6) My teachers understand how to teach me and help me to learn.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

7) Community members come to the school and help us learn.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

8) I have students from different races and ethnicities in my classes.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

9) I can see pictures of and learn about people who are something like me when I am at school.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

10) When students get in trouble, they are not gone from class very long.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

11) The principal wants me to do my best, and show what I am learning.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

12) The principal knows that some kids are different from others, and says that is OK, everyone is welcome at school.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

13) The principal asks families how they would like the school to run.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

14) If a student speaks a language other than English, their parents can still be a part of helping them learn.

1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

15) My teacher lets my family know what is going on in class, and talks to my family.

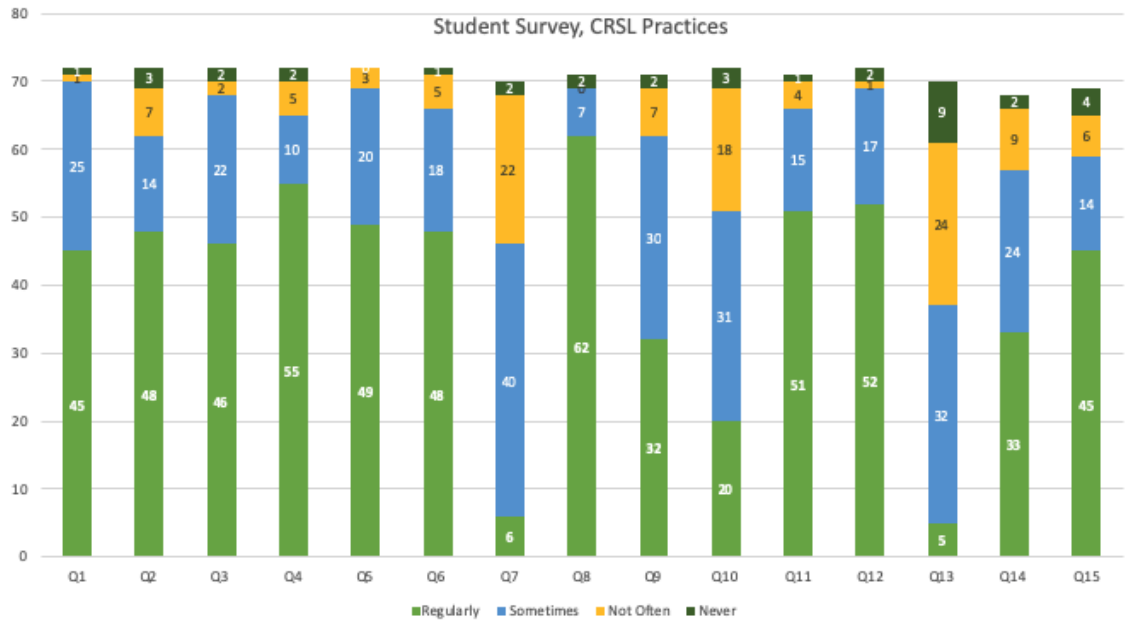
1	2	3	4
Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly

Open response – What information would you like to share?

- Would you be willing to participate in a focus group or follow up conversations regarding these same questions?
    - If so, please go to the following link, and enter your information:

      http://www._____

Student Survey Responses



Appendix C – Critical Colleagues Circle Protocol

CFC Meeting 2 – Digging into Data

Central Research Question:

- In what ways can a school leader confront white racial framing as a limiting factor in the development of impactful culturally responsive leadership practice?

Sub-questions:

- How might better understanding of stakeholders' experiences of a principal's leadership help highlight relevant action steps toward impactful implementation of culturally responsive school leadership?
- How can reflection upon the impacts of a principal's leadership with a circle of critical friends help highlight the influence of white racial framing on the leader's practice?

Today: I am enlisting your help to illuminate some of the areas in which the data I am collecting has begun to answer these questions, or have pointed to ways that my planning should more deeply address these questions. In some sense, this meeting will serve to help me dig more deeply into both the needs of the school and the areas I need to explore as a leader.

We will follow a protocol that is adapted from a "Looking at Data Sets Protocol" (schoolreforminitiative.org) to focus on the research questions. Protocol and questions have been adapted based upon focusing upon the research questions guiding my work.

Researcher/practitioner Pre-work: I have answered the following reflection questions after writing reflective answers to the survey questions and reflecting upon the outcomes of the survey and subsequent focus groups.

1) What?
    a. What do these data say about cultural responsiveness within my own practice?
    b. What do these data say about stakeholders' experience of my leadership?
    c. What might I not be seeing due to WRF?
2) So What?
    a. What is it important for me to consider as I work to implement culturally responsive leadership practice?
    b. What do I hope stakeholders will experience differently through culturally responsive leadership?
    c. In what areas do I need to be particularly mindful of WRF in my practice?
3) What Else?
    a. What further questions do I need to ask?
    b. What do I not know that I now think I need to know?

Participants Review Data: As participants, you have received a brief overview of the school and the school context, as well as my focus in completing the study. You were given a chance to view the school building, see lessons taking place (both virtually), and hopefully this has helped you gain deeper understanding of the feel and flow of the school.

Critical Colleagues Circle – Protocol for Analyzing Collected Data

Group Members: Researcher/practitioner = presenter, Critical Colleagues = participants, (optional) Facilitator

Protocol Steps for Collaborative Reflection on Data

1) **Presentation** (7 minutes)
   The researcher/practitioner shares a brief overview of the purpose of the survey data collection, and what s/he is attempting to uncover through this process. Then the researcher/practitioner shares his/her response to the What?, So What?, What Else? questions.

   The participants take notes and jot down questions.

2) **Clarifying Questions** (3 minutes)
   Participants ask clarifying questions of the researcher/practitioner — but this should NOT become a mini-lesson on the construction of the data set. Questions are asked and answered.

3) **Probing Questions** (10 minutes)
   Participants ask probing questions and should focus their attention on comments made by the researcher/practitioner regarding what they thought was significant and what the data did or didn't say to them. Probing questions may also be about things participants notice and think might be significant that the researcher/practitioner did not mention.

   Examples of probing questions:
   - You didn't comment on the responses to questions X and Y — what is your thinking about those?
   - What's your thinking about why those results might look the way they do?
   - Why does that particular finding trouble you so much?
   - How do you think X classroom practice is perceived by students?

   The presenter is silent, taking notes during this portion.

4) **Researcher/practitioner Response** (10 minutes)
   During this time the researcher/practitioner has the opportunity to respond to what she/he heard in the probing questions. The researcher/practitioner can decide if s/he wants to respond directly to any of the questions raised. The researcher/practitioner can reorganize the probing questions into new questions that may shape his/her thinking about the data. The researcher/practitioner can share what the probing questions are making her/him think about at that moment. The researcher/practitioner may also share any new thoughts s/he might have.

Participants are silent.

5) **Participant Discussion** (20 minutes)
The researcher/practitioner is now silent and the group talks with each other about what meaning they are making from the data and from the additional information provided by the presenter. They have the opportunity to answer the "So What?" and the "What Else?" questions based upon their own perceptions and thinking.

So What?

a. What is it important for the researcher/practitioner to consider while working to implement culturally responsive leadership practice at this school?
b. What might the researcher/practitioner expect that stakeholders will experience differently through culturally responsive leadership?
c. In what areas does the researcher/practitioner need to be particularly mindful of WRF impacting leadership practice?

What Else?

a. What further questions does the researcher/practitioner need to ask?
b. What is not shown through this data that should be shown?

During this discussion the participants may offer alternative explanations or theories about the data.

Researcher/practitioner is silent, allowing conversation to move between the participants. The purpose of this section is to expand the group's understanding of the data — not to give advice. The researcher/practitioner or facilitator should intervene if suggestions about action steps (other than about gathering more information) are made.

6) **Presenter Response and Next Step Questions/Thoughts** (5-10 minutes)
The researcher/practitioner is "invited back in" and briefly responds to what s/he heard. This can also be a time for the presenter to share where she/he thinks the group is on or off target.

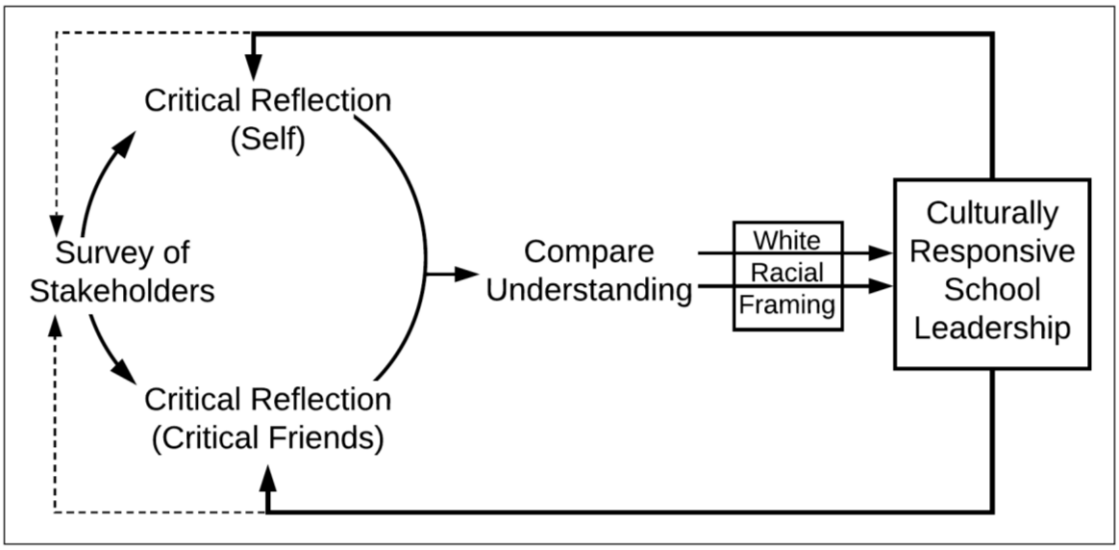
Now What?
The presenter can now share his/her thought on next steps. There are several options available to the presenter at this time.

- If the presenter has some thoughts about what action should be taken, she/he can share that with the group for feedback.
- If the presenter has a question about next steps, she/he can pose the question to the group for discussion.

If the presenter is unsure of an action or a question, she/he may ask the facilitator to use the time to facilitate a brainstorming session about next steps.

Critical Colleagues Participants

Description of the Study (evolving at this time!)



I derived the specific methods of my action research project from the work of Khalifa (2018) regarding CRSL which suggested that school leaders perform an equity audit as the first step toward implementing CRSL, and that critical self-reflection is a key component of implementation. A full set of disaggregate data is readily available regarding the outcomes of the school, but no such data set exists for inputs into the school. Therefore, I have designed a survey based on the tenets of CRSL to illuminate how my leadership creates inputs into the school culture and climate. Returning to Khalifa's (2018) suggestion, I will use this data to engage in critical self-reflection to help come to understand how my leadership thinking and practice could be shifted to more closely lead for cultural responsiveness.

I will also engage a circle of critical friends to provide their own reflections and responses to the survey data. By exploring my own reflections alongside those of the critical friend circle (CFC), I hope to uncover areas where my own thinking and leadership have been impacted by WRF, and how it may help reproduce oppressive systems.

Based on the outputs of this critical reflection on the survey data, and collaboration with the CFC, I will be able to derive greater clarity in two major areas. The first represents the action aspect of the action research: clearer understanding of the changes and improvements that are needed to help move the school toward greater cultural responsiveness and how I might implement changes through CRSL. The second represents a research-oriented outcome: a clearer picture of how WRF has impacted my

leadership as a white male, and what aspects of my thinking and leadership are implicated as results of WRF or the inability to recognize WRF in my leadership.

Through the process of critical reflection upon the survey data, and in holding my reflection up to that of a circle of critical friends, I hope to gain both concrete actions that I should take in my leadership and a more esoteric understanding of the aspects of my identity that might inhibit my ability to lead in truly culturally responsive ways. After recognizing these needs and implementing appropriate actions, the cycle can be continued at any time, either with further personal critical reflection alongside a circle of critical friends, or in performing an equity audit and beginning over with some sense of the results of leadership actions I have taken.

Location of Study

I will call the school Mountain Top Charter School (MTCS) – a pseudonym. MTCS sits in a rapidly growing part of a large city in the mountain west, and the school was opened to fill a need for a high-quality school in this part of the city. The majority of the school population comes from two adjacent neighborhoods, and the students represent a highly diverse student population. The diversity is seen in socio-cultural and socio-economic groupings.

Approximately 65% of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and 82% of students are students of color, with 8% of students identifying as Asian, 26% as African American, 39% as Hispanic, 9% from multiple races, and 18% as White. The school reports over 22 different home languages spoken in students' families. Of the student population, 28% are listed as English language learners, and 13% are identified to receive special education services. The school has been growing in size from opening with just over 120 pre-K through first grade students in 2014-15, to hosting approximately 550 students in grades pre-K through fifth in the 2019-2020 school year.

The school's mission states that MTCS "exists to foster a diverse and equitable community of youth and adults striving together for academic, personal, and civic excellence." These three areas, academic, personal, and civic excellence, are accentuated on a daily basis in the school, and are highlighted through discussion and exploration of what are termed "REACH values." The acronym REACH stands for Responsibility, Empowerment, Aspiration, Citizenship, and Honesty, which are the values around which the school is organized. Recognizing that the words represented by REACH might present a challenge to some of the youngest students, and in order to help the values align more clearly with the school's mission, the REACH values are generally presented as REACHing Up, REACHing Out, and REACHing In. Students, teachers, and even the board of directors of the school organize their efforts into categories of REACH Up for academic excellence, REACH In for personal growth, and REACH Out to be good citizens of their community. This level of language is appropriate and understandable for the youngest, four-year-old students, and as students' progress

through the grade levels, the depth of conversation and the level of action taken by students regarding the ideas of the REACH values grows.

As a school that names fostering equity and academic excellence as part of its reason for existence, the promise of that mission has not yet been realized in the day to day operation of the school. The school receives an annual rating, termed a school performance framework (SPF), from the district. The SPF takes several areas of school performance into account, and the school receives a score for student achievement (grade-level performance), for student growth, for family and student engagement and satisfaction, and for equity. Scores are represented by a color chart, with red representing that a school is not meeting expectations, yellow meaning approaching expectations, green meaning meeting expectations, and blue representing exceeding expectations.

MTCS received a score of approaching expectations (yellow) for each of the categories of student growth, equity, and student/family engagement and satisfaction. The school was rated red, or not meeting expectations in grade-level student achievement. From these ratings, the district gives one overall score, which utilizes a color scale as well, from red (probation), to orange (on priority watch for probation), yellow (on watch), green (meeting expectations), or blue (distinguished performance). MTCS is currently in the orange band and has a mandate to improve or it risks closure. The school's most recent school improvement plan (required by the state on an annual basis) names literacy growth, math and literacy achievement, overall growth for students of color, and community partnership as school-wide priorities.

Utilizing the school's 2017 SPF, inequitable outcomes can be seen in several areas. For the younger students at the school (grades pre-k through second), 23.57% fewer students who were identified as English Language Learners (ELL) achieved on-grade-level scores on literacy measures. ELLs also saw 19.1% less growth than their monolingual English-speaking peers. For younger students receiving free or reduced-price lunch, there were 18% fewer who scored on-grade level than students who did not qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and a 12.5% gap in the level of growth. 19% fewer pre-K through second graders of color scored on grade-level than their white peers, and the level of growth for these students was 31.3% lower than for white students. 2017 was the first year that older students took the state standardized tests, so there were no growth scores, and there were not enough white students to do a comparison between students of color and their white peers. However, there was a 20.3% gap between the number of students scoring proficient in literacy and a 17.3% difference in students scoring proficient in math between students receiving free or reduced-price lunch and their wealthier peers.

In some sense, this study was born when I was named principal of Mountain Top Charter School in May of 2017. As I prepared to take on leadership within this growing, struggling, and very young school, I saw something of a blank canvas within the school, and thought about how I could help foster creation of systems and structures that

worked to meet the optimistic charge of the school's mission. Seeing wide gaps in proficiency and on-grade-level performance seemed unacceptable for a school serving such a diverse population and seeking to build for equity. Even more troubling was the huge gap in the growth scores. This meant that students of color, ELLs, and students in poverty were less likely to catch up to their white, wealthier, native-English-speaking peers. Not only was MTCS failing to provide equity of outcomes for students, it was moving further from reaching equity because of the lack of growth for impacted students.

I knew that I needed to learn more, to see something more, and to change something about my own leadership if I wanted to truly make change in this one school. From that understanding, I began to envision how to structure a project that could change the trajectory of the school, and more importantly, the students who were underserved by the current structures. My studies at the time were just introducing me to critical race theory and the idea that my whiteness needed to be questioned deeply in seeking to serve people of color more effectively. From that learning, and from my continued push to improve my school, I began to think about designing this project to help make change.

Key Terms

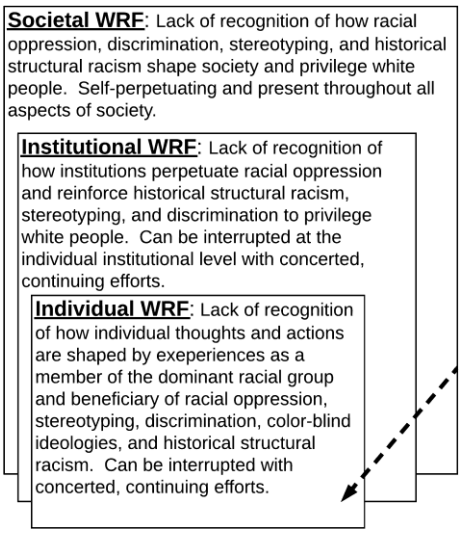
White Racial Framing. Feagin (2013) termed WRF as the way that white people's privilege and position in society allows them to construct meaning in the world. He named that white people might espouse a worldview that includes a "*broad and persisting set of racial stereotypes, prejudices, ideologies, images, interpretations and narratives, emotions, and reactions to language accents, as well as racialized inclinations to discriminate* [emphasis original]" (p. 3). Fitzgerald (2014) stated that WRF can dilute even earnest searches for equity, and that WRF can lead to white teachers' outright denial of the impact of race on schools, and resentment of focus on racial issues. Lack of attention to the influences of WRF may lead to re-creation of systems that limit equity in schools

Culturally Responsive School Leadership. According to Johnson (2014), CRSL consists of leadership philosophies and practices that lead to schools that are inclusive for students and families from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds. Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis (2016) name the key practices of culturally responsive leaders: use of critical self-awareness, ensuring a culturally responsive environment along with culturally responsive curricula and teacher preparation, and engaging parents to better understand the community context. Overall, culturally responsive school leadership points to ways that leaders value the cultural and historical knowledge that students and families bring to the school community, as well as the community's knowledge about its own needs and values.

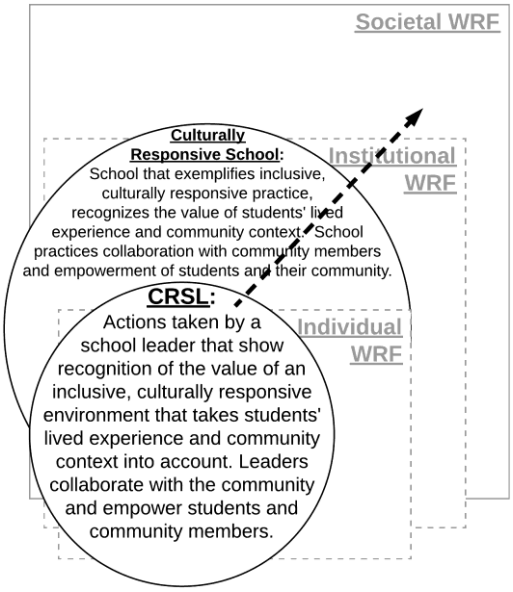
Equity. There is no clear, singular definition for equity that emerges from the research. For purposes of this work, the definition posited by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (www.dpi.wi.gov) will be utilized. This definition states that "Educational equity means that every student has access to the resources and educational rigor they need at the right moment in their education, across race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background, and/or family income" (https://dpi.wi.gov/rti/equity). It is important to note that this definition does not state that all outcomes must be the same, but rather points to access to both resources and educational rigor. When the term equity is utilized in this work, it is should be seen to represent such access based upon students' unique identities and needs.

Conceptual Framework:

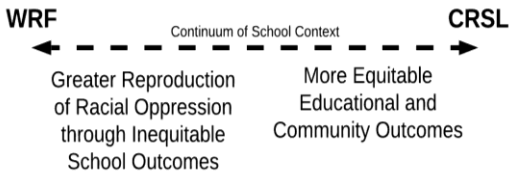
White Racial Framing: WRF can be seen on three levels: societal, institutional, and individual. Each is defined by its influence upon inequity. The arrow shows that the broadest level of WRF, influences each of the more narrow levels, and that Individual WRF lies within Societal and Institutional WRF.



Culturally Responsive School Leadership: CRSL serves as a way to interrupt WRF. First, school leaders can institute the tenets of CRSL, which will help to counteract the influence of individual WRF upon leadership. As part of implementation of CRSL, a leader will necessarily question how the school as a whole is failing to overcome institutional WRF. If or when CRSL creates a culturally responsive school, that will signal a disruption of institutional WRF within the school. My hope is that through using the process described in this project, other leaders may be more able to create culturally responsive, equitable schools. Though not considered in this work, creating a plurality of such schools could help to disrupt WRF at the societal level. In this diagram, the arrow of influence flows from the individual outward.



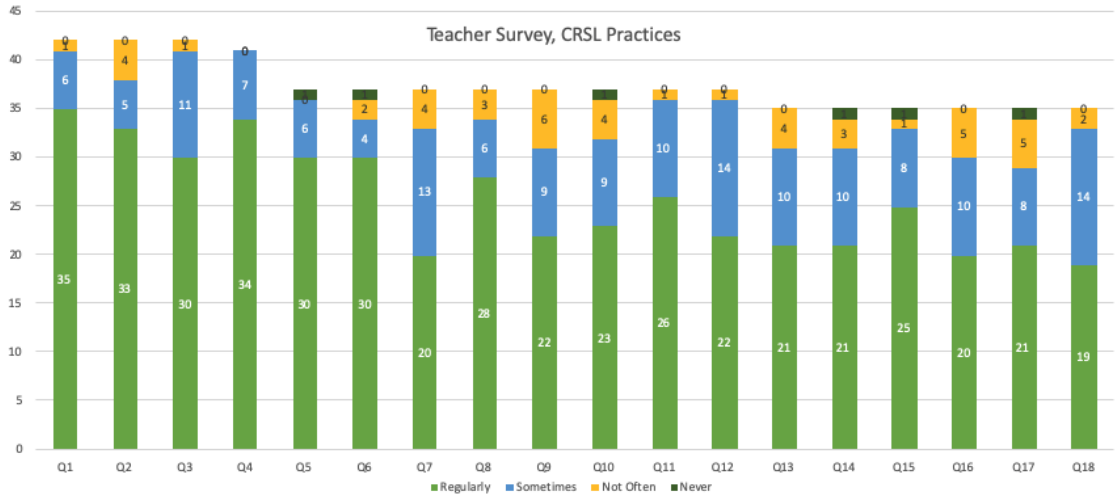
Taking these two diagrams, and specifically aligning the arrows contained within, a continuum of influence between WRF and CRSL can be created. This shows that as a school heads toward Cultural Responsiveness through CRSL, more equity can be expected. A school (and a school leader) that tends to exhibit the properties of WRF can be expected to reproduce racial oppression by failing to equitably serve its students.



Surveys

- 3 surveys administered: Teachers, Families, Students
- All questions provided below
- Survey designed to show evidence of CRSL at MTCS
- Positive answers tend to show CRSL

Culturally Responsive School Leadership Practices - Teacher Survey



- How would you describe your racial/ethnic background? _____
- How would you describe your gender identity? _____
- How long have you been working at the school? _____

1. Our principal's leadership practice ensures that all teachers are treated equitably regardless of race, culture, dis/ability, gender or socio- economic status.

2. Our principal treats me as a valued member of our school community.

3. Our principal provides opportunity for in-service training and professional development sessions that build our capacity for culturally responsive teaching.

4. Our principal's leadership practices emphasize high expectations for student achievement for all students regardless of race, culture, language, dis/ability, gender or socio- economic status.

5. Our principal's leadership practice reflects that it is important for students' classroom groupings to be representative of our school's racial, ethnic, socio-economic, and linguistic diversity.

6. Our principal ensures that the process for assigning students to classroom groups is equitable regardless of their racial, ethnic, gender, socio-economic, or linguistic background.

7. Our principal provides me with the instructional support needed to help all students reach academic success regardless of their racial, ethnic, socio-economic, or linguistic background.

8. Our principal's leadership actions ensure the participation of students from diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds in all school activities is representative of the larger student body.

9. Our principal's leadership practice supports the inclusion of the history, values, and cultural knowledge of students' home communities in the school curriculum.

10. Our principal models inclusive instructional and behavioral practices.

11. Our principal's leadership practice ensure that all students are treated equitably regardless of race, culture, disability, gender or socio- economic status.

12. Our principal's leadership practice ensures discipline policies are implemented equitably regardless of race, culture, dis/ability, gender or socio- economic status.

13. Our principal challenges exclusionary disciplinary policies, practices, and behaviors.

14. Our principal's leadership practice helps to develop a critical consciousness among teachers, staff, and students to challenge educational inequities within our school community.

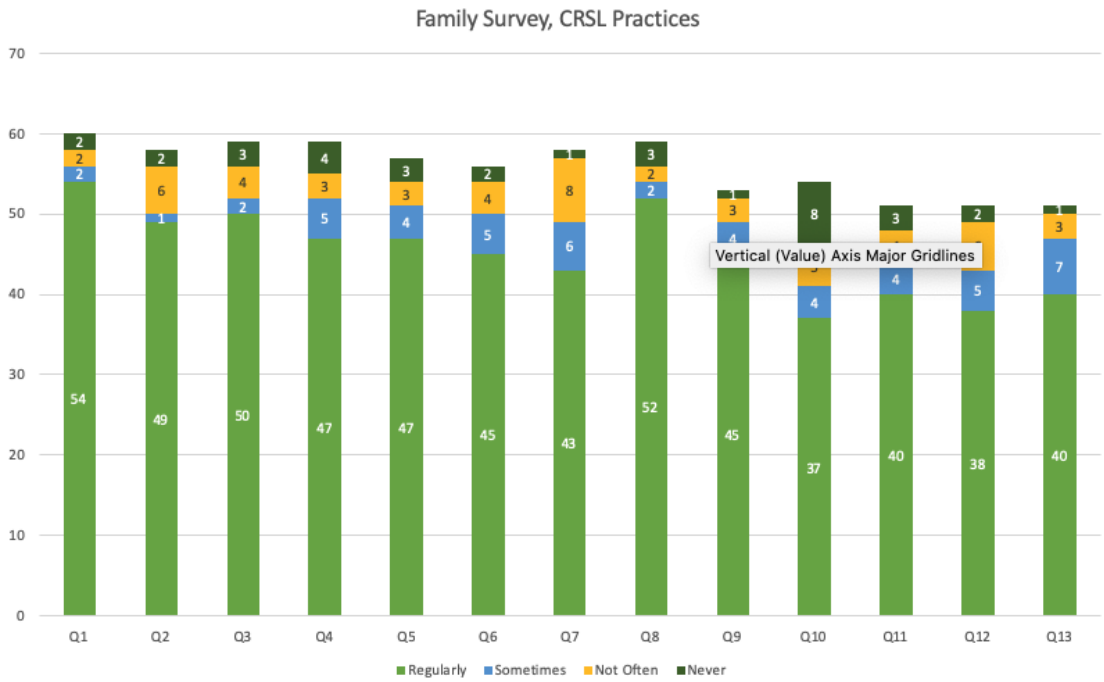
15. Our principal models the use of school data to discover and track disparities in academic and discipline trends.

16. Our principal's leadership practice reflects an inclusive organizational structure that engages students and their families in school decision-making and program planning.

17. Our principal actively seeks ways to improve engagement with non-English speaking families.

18. Our principal provides opportunities for staff to collaborate with families about how best to meet the academic needs of students.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership Practices – Parent/Family Survey



- How would you describe your racial/ethnic background? _____
- How would you describe your gender identity? _____
- How long have you been involved with the school? _____

1. The principal treats all families fairly regardless of race, culture, dis/ability, gender or socio- economic status.

2. The principal treats our family as a valued member of the school community.

3. The principal leads with high expectations for student achievement for all students regardless of race, culture, language, dis/ability, gender or socio- economic status.

4. The principal makes sure that the process for assigning students to classroom groups is equitable regardless of their racial, ethnic, gender, socio-economic, or linguistic background.

5. The principal's leadership provides support needed to help all students reach academic success regardless of their racial, ethnic, socio-economic, or linguistic background.

6. The principal supports the inclusion of the history, values, and cultural knowledge of students' home communities in the school curriculum.

7. The principal promotes an inclusive organizational structure that engages students and their families in school decision-making and program planning.
8. The principal treats all students equitably regardless of race, culture, disability, gender or socio- economic status.

9. The principal ensures discipline policies are implemented equitably regardless of race, culture, dis/ability, gender or socio- economic status.

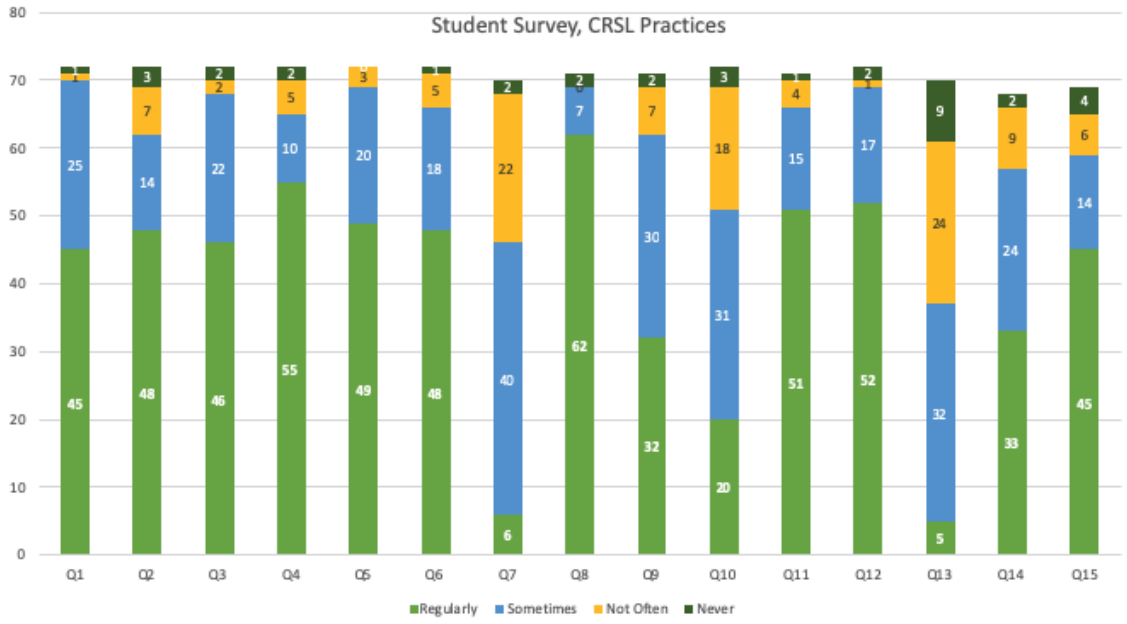
10. The principal does not promote exclusionary disciplinary policies, practices, and behaviors.

11. The principal promotes disciplinary policies that work to keep students in class as much as possible.

12. The principal actively seeks ways to improve engagement with non-English speaking families.

13. The principal provides opportunities for families to collaborate with the school staff about how best to meet the needs of students.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership Practices - Student Survey



- How would you describe your racial/ethnic background? _____
- How would you describe your gender identity? _____
- Which grades have you gone to school here?
    - ECE ___ K ___ 1st ___ 2nd ___ 3rd ___ 4th ___ 5th ___

1) The principal wants to make sure students from all races and cultures, students with disabilities, students of all genders, and wealthy or less-wealthy students are treated fairly.

2) Every student has a chance to do after school programs, enrichment, and other school events.

3) The principal treats me and my family with respect and tries to help us feel comfortable at school.

4) The principal likes all kinds of different students.

5) The principal wants me to feel included and accepted at school.

6) My teachers understand how to teach me and help me to learn.

7) Community members come to the school and help us learn.

8) I have students from different races and ethnicities in my classes.

9) I can see pictures of and learn about people who are something like me when I am at school.

10) When students get in trouble, they are not gone from class very long.

11) The principal wants me to do my best, and show what I am learning.

12) The principal knows that some kids are different from others, and says that is OK, everyone is welcome at school.

13) The principal asks families how they would like the school to run.

14) If a student speaks a language other than English, their parents can still be a part of helping them learn.

15) My teacher lets my family know what is going on in class, and talks to my family.

Virtual School Tour

(Note: CFC members were provided with links to several classroom videos and photographs of artifacts from the school so that they could complete a "virtual tour" in the absence of the ability to visit the school in the face of mandates closing the school for COVID-19 protection)

https://-----(link disabled for privacy purposes)-----

Notes and feedback from CFC

Evidence of: • Recognition of the value of students' lived experience • Recognition of the value of an inclusive, culturally responsive environment • Recognition of the value of empowerment of students and communities • Recognition of the value of community context (including historical oppression) • Recognition of the value of collaboration between schools and communities	Critical self-reflection
	Promoting Inclusive Environment
	Humanizing student identities
	Promoting Culturally responsive Curriculum and Instruction

Appendix E: Principal Survey Responses

Teacher Survey Responses

Question	Gray Rfxn
1. Our principal's leadership practice ensures that all teachers are treated equitably regardless of race, culture, dis/ability, gender or socio- economic status.	This is an area that I like to think that I do pretty well – I respond to teachers as individuals, hoping to honor who they are, and what needs they might have. In case of a teacher who came out to me as transgendered, I was supportive of their journey, and spoke with them about the correct salutation to add to their name. I also encouraged them to speak in front of the staff, and to lead a session on understanding and honoring gender identities. In thinking specifically about race, I am not sure that I actively promote and support equitable treatment. I do certainly speak up when confronted with inequity (when teachers make micro-aggressive comments or do not seem to see from others' perspective) and promote/participate in/suggest professional development helps teachers to develop deeper understandings of diversity, equity, and inclusion. However, I would imagine that I may do better with students and families on recognizing/honoring difference than with teachers. In many (most?) aspects of leadership, I would imagine that my blind spots are greater with teachers than with other groups of stakeholders. I am not sure why this may be – perhaps as a former teacher I try to hold teachers to the same (lofty? imagined? False? WRF-aided?) Standards as I held myself. Or do I take for granted the role that CRSL plays with teachers. If I hope to lead a community of teachers toward CR teaching practices, I need to make this more of an explicit aspect of my leadership.
2. Our principal treats me as a valued member of our school community.	Again, I think that I do this, but I do wonder what the perception is…the definition of "valued" can be extremely variable, as each person feels valued based on different factors. I am not sure how I show this value. For some people, I just trust them and leave them to do their work. For others, showing value may consist of laughing or joking, or offering support when I can/when I see a need for such support. This is another area where I should solidify my "way" of showing value, while also seeking to understand how individual teachers also receive the feeling of being valued. If I were to be better at showing value, what more could our school accomplish, and how much more smoothly would difficult times or difficult tasks be accomplished?
3. Our principal provides opportunity for in-service training and professional development sessions that build our capacity for culturally responsive teaching.	Though I do try to build on culturally responsive teaching practices overall, I really have not done this explicitly – we have had so much work to do in changing from a punishment-based (clip chart) discipline culture to a conscious discipline culture, and to develop teachers' understanding of and teaching to the standards, that we have not explicitly focused on culturally responsive teaching under that name. I would argue that we have been moving steadily toward

	CRT, but I also acknowledge that this is an area for much more development.
4. Our principal's leadership practices emphasize high expectations for student achievement for all students regardless of race, culture, language, dis/ability, gender or socio-economic status.	This is another category where I could likely stand to be even more explicit in naming high expectations, for academics, especially. When talking about high expectations, I think that those words are often conflated to mean just behavioral expectations, and some teachers boast of maintaining high expectations without the requisite support to allow students to successfully meet these expectations. This is the same idea for academics – it is great to hold high expectations for students, as long as you are not holding high expectations *over* students, or holding high expectations *against* students when they cannot meet them. In some sense, high expectations for students are not effective until a teacher holds high expectations for herself. It is also so important to ensure that the "regardless of…" aspect of this statement does not devolve into color-blindness or difference-blindness and a sense of superiority in holding all students to expectations but only providing the atmosphere for success for the students who are likely to succeed anyway (i.e. those who are most like the teacher or those who are best able to navigate the overall environment of school.
5. Our principal's leadership practice reflects that it is important for students' classroom groupings to be representative of our school's racial, ethnic, socio-economic, and linguistic diversity.	When we select classroom placements for students, teachers use index cards with students' names printed on them. They then include academic, language, racial, gender, and relevant personality traits (e.g. "shy", or "needs to be with cousin") on the cards. Teachers are then asked to create heterogeneous groups that are balanced among identity groups, academic levels, and that contain a group of positive peers. This is to ensure that all students have a diverse/welcoming group in their classes. I have also eliminated the practice of performance grouping at the school.
6. Our principal ensures that the process for assigning students to classroom groups is equitable regardless of their racial, ethnic, gender, socio-economic, or linguistic background.	This question is answered by the process as outlined in question 5.
7. Our principal provides me with the instructional support needed to help all students reach academic success regardless of their racial, ethnic, socio-economic, or linguistic background.	This is an area for improvement. I think that I am working to grow in this area as a leader and as an academic leader in the school. To be honest, I think that many of the other struggles of serving in what amounts to a turnaround environment take me away from academic focus too often. Instead, I often allow assistant principals to work on the academic instructional development of teachers. Though I know that they do well in this work, and it is a great way to give teachers more hands-on support, the message or delivery of expectations may be more disjointed because of my absence from such hands-on, well-aligned support. I could definitely work harder at delivering this support myself or working alongside the APs to ensure alignment, consistency, and clarity of message.

8. Our principal's leadership actions ensure the participation of students from diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds in all school activities is representative of the larger student body.	I definitely advocate for this, working to ensure that a variety of students are included in all school activities. However, again, this can be done fairly indirectly, and so may not be as explicit and clearly defined as it could be. (Before even looking at teacher, family, or student responses yet I am beginning to see a pattern here, and something to consider – a need for explicit framing of actions, and alignment of actions to a clearly articulated plan of cultural responsiveness. The exercise of going through these survey questions myself should be a part of ongoing work in the interests of building more CRSL. Without explicit planning or reflection around these items, I may not be communicating or leading as clearly as I think I am. Assuming that my actions translate into CRSL is short-sighted at best, and potentially bowing to WRF at worst.)
9. Our principal's leadership practice supports the inclusion of the history, values, and cultural knowledge of students' home communities in the school curriculum.	Teachers are encouraged to bring in culture and home-based funds of knowledge into the classroom. Teachers are expected to build homeroom communities in which students are empowered to share their own experiences, whether mundane or profound, and to represent themselves in their work. Programming encourages conversation about cultures and different backgrounds.
10. Our principal models inclusive instructional and behavioral practices.	In working with students, I aim to use restorative approaches and in working with teachers, I talk about inclusion and ensuring that all are welcome and feel efficacy within the classroom. However, the word "models" makes this more challenging. I am not sure how I could/should/would model these practices rather than simply espousing them in setting expectations and following up. Perhaps (again) more explicit focus on inclusion and building toward highly inclusive classrooms would speak more plainly of my commitment to such practices – but modeling such practices is still a question to me.
11. Our principal's leadership practices ensure that all students are treated equitably regardless of race, culture, disability, gender or socio- economic status.	I have a strong belief in treating students equitably, and so I have spent a lot of time and energy in developing systems at the school to ensure that each student receives grade-level as well as skill-level instruction on a daily basis. Additionally, I have ensured a strong social-emotional focus throughout the school from Conscious Discipline practices to keeping a behavior interventionist on staff to ensuring that restorative approaches are a part of our daily work. I consistently question why we do things the way we do, and look for better ways of ensuring all students are treated equitably. Hopefully this is seen throughout the school, and in our work to partner with parents and families as much as possible – not to use deficit mindsets about students and their families. In some sense this study is an attempt to see how my practices and actions could better create the conditions for equity and ensure that equitable practice is the standard. It is my hope that when people encounter my leadership and my leadership practices, the work towards equity is apparent and can be viewed as the most essential part of what I do as a leader. I am hopeful that I will continue to grow

	in this aspect of my leadership, and that I will also gain greater understanding of how to better practice leadership that leads toward equity.
12. Our principal's leadership practice ensures discipline policies are implemented equitably regardless of race, culture, dis/ability, gender or socio- economic status.	The area of discipline is definitely a highly charged aspect of schools. On one hand, there is focus on ensuring that discipline is equitable and moves to ensure the success of all students within the classroom. I am concerned about the long-lasting impacts that discipline can have on children, and the bias that I, or members of the school staff may bring to bear upon instances of discipline. However, many teachers struggle to effectively implement discipline practices that work with and for their students, and trauma-influenced backgrounds of many of our students mean that disciplinary events occur, and there is a need to enlist disciplinary actions from time to time. I am glad to say that our school is a low-suspension school, and that we focus much more on restorative actions, reflective conversations, and behavior/safety plans than we do on using suspension. However, because we have staff members dedicated to working with students who have needs that cannot be met in the tier 1 classroom setting, some of our teachers tend to rely on the process of sending students away from the classroom to work through their struggles. Not many teachers seem to reflect on the place of their own practices and routines in either building up appropriate actions in the school, or pushing students to a place where they do not know how or do not feel comfortable expressing their needs/ fears/ misunderstanding in a way that ensures they will be heard, seen, and accepted.
13. Our principal challenges exclusionary disciplinary policies, practices, and behaviors.	I do challenge them, but I am not sure how clearly and publicly I challenge them. Since I have been in the school, I have removed the practice of using a clip chart to track behavior, have implemented conscious discipline practices, and required the use of restorative approaches with students. I do feel that each of these changes are in response to exclusionary practices, but perhaps they don't go far enough. Particularly, to go back to the practice of teachers calling for behavior support and using that support as an opportunity to send students away from the classroom – this is an exclusionary practice, but one that goes on regularly. The expectation for teachers is that if a student leaves the class, the teacher should be contacting family to follow up and ensure clarity, but we do not have a good way of tracking this, nor of holding teachers accountable when they are overusing the support systems. For some students, a break with the behavior interventionist, or even a trip to the calming room to get out some anxious energy or sit quietly in a space away from the classroom is something that helps them to get back to focus and be successful, but for some students it is a punishment to be away from their class. I think that this practice and occurrence has decreased in the time I have been at the school, but I hope to continue to get better at this, and to make the need to change this practice more explicit.

14. Our principal's leadership practice helps to develop a critical consciousness among teachers, staff, and students to challenge educational inequities within our school community.	This is definitely something that I would like to continue working on. The work to help staff develop critical consciousness and to begin questioning what they do and why they do it is certainly important in creating a truly culturally responsive school. It does feel like "next-level" work, though, in that I need to better clarify and implement my own ideas and ideals. Some aspects of that implementation will certainly be looking at studies and literature that calls people to critical consciousness, but to get to a place of actively building critical understanding seems like it will come after we are able to more clearly name a need and a desire for culturally responsive practice. This doesn't even begin to address calling students (from ages 4-11) to challenge ineqiuities – which feels like a monumental and miraculous task in some ways. Perhaps building the pathways by which they can express their concerns, understandings, and experience is a way forward here. Certainly this is an area for growth.
15. Our principal models the use of school data to discover and track disparities in academic and discipline trends.	Getting our school to be a more data-rich environment has been a major focus of my work since starting at the school. We have been bulding systems to track grade-level standards attainment, as well as skill level progression. Implementation of an intervention program (which did not exist when I started) and asking interventionists to know students skill needs and build their skill levels has been key – and using data to show our thinking is a growing and improving aspect of this process. I do look at data regularly, and disaggregate it to try to see disparities. I do not know how regularly I "model" this behavior though, and whether teachers have a sense of how I, along with my leadership team and other teacher-leaders, use some of the data to drive decision making and areas of focus. This could be a more cohesive and regular practice.
16. Our principal's leadership practice reflects an inclusive organizational structure that engages students and their families in school decision-making and program planning.	Certainly, one of my own areas for growth is in my communication practices – internally to staff, to families, and with students. I have really struggled to gather a large size group to share in the decision making process for the school. I struggle to even visualize how best to do this. We do have a parent group that sometimes offers insights, and a school advisory committee that helps with creation of the Unified Improvement plan, but these groups are not especially active in helping to make plans for the school. Getting to know families wants/needs, and concerns for the future of the school would be extremely valuable, but I still need to do much more work to understand how to do this.
17. Our principal actively seeks ways to improve engagement with non-English speaking families.	For the current school year, we hired a community and culture liaison to be a part of the administrative team. This person has worked on building better outreach with families who speak a languages other than English, a key aspect of her role. I do not have a great understanding of how best to accomplish greater communication and engagement with families, but this is an area we are actively seeking to improve upon. In our school this is particularly tricky, as we have many different languages spoken (23), but only three languages that have over 10 families who speak them (English, Spanish, and Amharic).

18. Our principal provides opportunities for staff to collaborate with families about how best to meet the academic needs of students.	There are many opportunities – we use family/teacher conferences very early in the school year as a goal-setting conference. Teachers sit down with parents/families to set goals for the student for the year, and then talk about the work that will go into meeting the goals. Later conferences serve to review progress toward the goal, and to name work that remains to be done. As a school we are building stronger systems for the conferences, but we are communicating goals and progress toward these goals much more clearly with families than we have in the past.

Family Survey Responses

Question	Gray Rfxn
15. The principal treats all families fairly regardless of race, culture, dis/ability, gender or socio- economic status.	This is something that I certainly try to do. I think it is important to be welcoming and flexible for all families – it is not my job to judge anyone or decide that families should be a certain thing or act a certain way. Beyond just thinking, I work to respond to inequities that I see or understand to be in place in the school. I think that the question of "fairness" is an interesting one, though, as this can have so many differing definitions and each definition of fairness is likely influenced by culture, background, experiences both inside and outside of school, and many more factors. To aim to be fair is a good aim, but this is the heart of CR practice – to be open to understanding what others might need or see missing so that it can be fair. As a school leader, I think that I do need to build stronger practices to allow me to connect directly with families, to allow them to feel like they can speak directly to me, and to express what they need to in order to feel that school is "fair" and has their best interests, and the best interests of their children in mind – not as prescribed by the school, but as understood by the family.
16. The principal treats our family as a valued member of the school community.	This is another value call as well – what makes a family feel valued? What makes a family feel that their presence in the school community is part of what gives the community its identity? What are the ways to reach out to families to show them that they are valued? Again, this is different for each family, and taking each family's needs/preferences into account is vital – but in our school, in our school community, there are so many challenges to helping families to feel valued. I know for some families, just to see their language or culture represented in the school means so much. I am curious about resources that may be available that I am unaware of that would help communicate in these ways with families…
17. The principal leads with high expectations for student achievement for	As a currently low performing school, this is a bit of a balancing act. Though I do hold high expectations for all students, the school is not yet able to deliver on these expectations. Because of this, a lot of

all students regardless of race, culture, language, dis/ability, gender or socio-economic status.	time, energy, and effort has been put into programming to lift student achievement, but these efforts have not yet borne as much fruit as I had hoped/still hope they will. There is a balance to be struck between setting high expectations and acting in an exclusionary way. Though it is important to me to have all students making strong growth each year, and moving toward grade-level achievement or above, it is also important that no students or families feel that they are not welcome because of lower results or less than expected outcomes. I know that even the ways we measure "Achievement" can be incredibly biased and deleterious of culture, language, and ways of expression outside of the (white) mainstream. However, I do not think that knowledge of these challenging aspects of delivering strong outcomes for students should limit my focus on high academic expectations, or the demands that I make that teachers teach ALL students to the standards and provide skill-level instruction to fill gaps in learning alongside GL content. With that said, I am not sure how much information or how clearly I am communicating this to families. Do they know what my expectations are when they are high? Do they agree with my expectations? Do they feel that the school works to help their child meet those expectations even if/when/though we are not yet meeting the high bar? These are all important questions to consider.
18. The principal makes sure that the process for assigning students to classroom groups is equitable regardless of their racial, ethnic, gender, socio-economic, or linguistic background.	It is extremely important to the mission of [redacted] that we are a group of diverse students and adults. To me, this is displayed at a granular level through the identities of each homeroom class. Because of this belief, we go through an extensive process of placing students into as heterogeneous of groupings as possible in the homerooms. This process asks teachers to look at the identities of students (race, language, gender, achievement level, dis/ability, positive peers and negative peers) and to create groupings that contain a mix of students. Though we do not guarantee placements for any students with a specific teacher or peer, we do take family requests into account.
19. The principal's leadership provides support needed to help all students reach academic success regardless of their racial, ethnic, socio-economic, or linguistic background.	This year I instructed teachers that they needed to ensure that each student was receiving both grade-level and skill-level instruction. This meant that all teachers must teach to the common-core state standards for their grade level. Additionally, ensuring that each student has instruction in the areas in which they show a gap in skills/knowledge should come through intervention. We hired 7 interventionists to create space for instruction at the skill level, and had them trained in interventions programming to help give students what they each need to be successful academically. This represents the "All Students" idea and mentality. However, it is an important question to ask whether looking at students of disaggregate groups shows that each is being supported equitably. I would guess that by looking at racial categorizations, SES,

	and ELL status, the answer would be no. This second question is part of the purpose of seeking to be more culturally responsive – though not each subgroup points to cultural difference, CR practice helps educators to assess their own practice and see the places where they are failing to serve a student in the way s/he needs. I believe that to build long-term, sustainable success within the [redacted] community, we need to be able to answer both the ALL and the EACH aspects of this question with a YES. We DO serve all students, and that is reflected in the achievement levels. And we DO serve students as individuals, and that is shown by the programming and practices that we use and espouse. This is a stronger future state.
20. The principal supports the inclusion of the history, values, and cultural knowledge of students' home communities in the school curriculum.	I do. Now, how to make that support more visible, tangible, and actionable is another question. I think that this is an area where I may get in my own way. My desire to have teachers take on their own work, and to express themselves through their instructional practice (and to be distributive in my leadership) could lead me not to speak up more forcefully regarding the need to include history, values, and funds of knowledge from the diverse cultures we have. Do the parents know this? See this? Do they feel that their family can be seen in the work that is happening at the school? My guess would be that they do not. This is certainly an area where I could grow. In some sense this is an area where I need to learn how to grow. I think that the support in idea is one thing, but support in action is another, and I need to work to determine how best to do this.
21. The principal promotes an inclusive organizational structure that engages students and their families in school decision-making and program planning.	As a young and growing school, we are still working on how to do this better. This year we have enlisted more support from families in the UIP process, though this is something that I would like to see grow and become a smoother, more collaborative process in the upcoming years. It would be good to have a "school advisory council" that could be more of an advisory body – to look at big picture items and help the school leadership with decision making and plans for programming. At this time, I don't think that I do this particularly well. This is a bit of an aside, but as a person with social anxiety that impacts my interactions with families and larger groups of people, how do I overcome this to allow for closer collaboration with families and parents?
22. The principal treats all students equitably regardless of race, culture, disability, gender or socio-economic status.	This is an area in which I think that I do pretty well, but also remains an area where I am thinking about how I communicate this to families. In some sense, I would hope that they know that this is work that I take very seriously, and part of my focus as a school leader. However, I do know that some families have had experiences within my school that cause them to feel that equitability is not a focus, or that their own child experiences something less than an equitable experience. I should think about and find ways to better communicate the work that the school is doing on behalf of creating

	greater equity, and also work on inviting familes to see and experience the day to day of the school so that they can learn about what we do, or so they can have specific areas or suggestions to share when they see that things are lacking.
23. The principal ensures discipline policies are implemented equitably regardless of race, culture, dis/ability, gender or socio-economic status.	Again, I wonder how many families are aware of our discipline policies, and the the ways that they are implemented? Are families aware of how the numbers have shifted since I have been there, or how they can be expected to shift as students get older and older. Since my arrival, I have stressed with the staff that discipline needs to be done in a way that honors students and their own particular realities. We have implemented Conscious Discipline as the base for our practices, and this has meant eliminating a clip chart system that was in common practice. Additionally, we use Restorative Approaches as much as possible, seeking to help students repair harm that they have done rather than to "punish" them. I will be very interested to know how families view this practice, I think that I often hear from as many families who are concerned that "no disciplinary action" was taken against a student who is a perceived offender as I do from families who are concerned about over policing of students or overly punitive measures. Perhaps even more of a question will be in what the perception is of how students are treated across the lines mentioned in the question. How equitable does the community perceive discipline to be – how do they gauge equity and what do they see that leads to this perception?
24. The principal does not promote exclusionary disciplinary policies, practices, and behaviors.	These questions basically ask the same thing, and to answer them, I think that the answer to the previous question is fairly similar to this one – we try hard not to keep students out of classes for very long. Perhaps a disconnect here could be that we do have several teachers who seem to send students out of their classroom, or call for support from the behavior interventionist for seemingly minor infractions without utilizing the full scope of the conscious discipline strategies. Could teachers better communicate their process and practice to families? How can we bring the numbers of students who do need to leave class down? It would seem that through greater CR practices, these numbers would fall.
25. The principal promotes disciplinary policies that work to keep students in class as much as possible.	
26. The principal actively seeks ways to improve engagement with non-English speaking families.	I have certainly sought to improve this in the current year – I have hired a community/culture liaison who is bilingual (Spanish-English) and have worked to ensure that school communications go out in at least two if not three or four languages. Additionally, I have tried to explain that the weekly newsletter is sent on a platform that allows for translation into 12 languages. I am not sure how well these measures are received, and what picture they paint of the school. I do know that we have had a much higher participation rate from families who do not speak English at home (as a first language) since bringing on the community/culture liaison, and we have received a lot of positive feedback from families about what we do.

27. The principal provides opportunities for families to collaborate with the school staff about how best to meet the needs of students.	This question is very tricky, and something that I don't know how well I do – but I also feel like part of this is that I am such a new principal that I am nit yet quite ready to let go of the reigns, and I do not have the skill to drive the conversation that could/should happen. I think that in my planning forward, I need to build in clear steps and stages for myself, and to allow things completely out of my hands from time to time. I am very able to do so with a group of teachers, but when it comes to parents, I tend to lose this ability in some ways. We do, of course, invite families in for SPF, UIP, and SAC conversations, as required, but even these are poorly attended, and the academic side of things (particularly re-capping past academic performance) does not seem to grab attention of families. What are ways to engage this voice more creatively and effectively? How do I allow for the fact that some families have expressed that they do not feel it is their place to tell the school what to do, while other families have expressed that there are not enough opportunities? This question may be one of the great challenges of leading for equity within diversity.

Student Survey Responses

Question	Gray Rfxn
1. The principal wants to make sure students from all races and cultures, students with disabilities, students of all genders, and wealthy or less-wealthy students are treated fairly.	I think that the students see me working with all different kinds of students, and that I try to work with them in ways that work for those particular students. There is somewhat of a fine line here between holding expectations while supporting students to meet them, and allowing all students to "do what they want". I assume some 5th graders would find the expectations of the school restrictive, while other really appreciate the structure that these expectations bring.
2. Every student has a chance to do after school programs, enrichment, and other school events.	I would expect that this response may be a bit less positive than some of the others. A lot of the enrichment programs are on a pay basis, so some students are left out. Additionally, there are not enough different kinds of enrichment programs for all students to find an interest. I have worked to help change this, though results are slow in coming. This year, by partnering with AmeriCorps' City Year program, I was able to provide more free after school options than any other year, and tutoring has been established at the school as an additional result. I hope to continue expanding this, as I have asked the Parent group to turn fundraising efforts toward these programs, and I have asked the network office to apply for 21st century grant funding to cover the cost of the after-school enrichment programs. I am curious what the students see on this account, and how they perceive the programming overall.

3. The principal treats me and my family with respect and tries to help us feel comfortable at school.	This is another area where I wonder how students would perceive or recognize this. I also wonder how students would define feeling comfortable at school. There are many different measures that we have taken to welcome folks into the school and to provide a place for all, but I am not sure on how it is received. As I am working through these questions, it seems like I should think forward about how to collect this information from students. Perhaps a series of "focus group" style conversations with different groups of students would reveal more about how they see and think about what we are doing at the school.
4. The principal likes all kinds of different students.	Absolutely. I work hard to be kind and patient with all different kinds of students at the school – I hope that they can see this. I really do appreciate the fun/funny differences that students bring each day, and I try to work with all kinds of students.
5. The principal wants me to feel included and accepted at school.	This goes back to question 3 – really, what does this mean to students, and how do they see it or not see it. Further, this question asks about what I do as principal, but do they students see teachers' actions as part of my leadership? Do teachers? With several of the mental health and behavior supports, as well as the way that teachers are expected to teach about the REACH curriculum. I am hopeful that students see that this is true, but I will be curious to see how they respond to this question – do they know what is different about our school vs. others, and do they know what is the same? All interesting takes on how students feel about the school.
6. My teachers understand how to teach me and help me to learn.	As a school, we currently struggle to consistently hire high-quality teachers, and we do not have a well-enough developed core of teachers and curricula that create success across the board. Part of the challenge of this fact is that it is very difficult to ask a teacher to adjust her thinking and teaching when she is barely able to keep her head above water. With that said, we do have very many high-quality teachers, and many teachers who focus very closely on students' needs and how to meet those needs. We also have several groups who focus on meeting student's intervention, SpEd, social-emotional, and other needs. I am curious to know more about how the students see their teachers too – I have a sense that there is strong love and loyalty there, which is so important, but I wonder if they think that they are learning a lot from their teachers.
7. Community members come to the school and help us learn.	This is an area of weakness to be sure. I had ideas and dreams about this, but I have not yet been able to put anything concrete or consistent together. In some ways, I struggle to know even where to start. I do have a sense that if I had better/more communication with

	families, I might be able to ask them to suggest community members to come in and supplement some of the learning that goes on.
8. I have students from different races and ethnicities in my classes.	In Denver, it is likely that students are within fairly homogeneous classes, and that they live in fairly homogeneous communities. Our neighborhood is not like that, and so MTCS is not like that. I think it would be impossible for a student to say that s/he does not have students from different groups in class. Particularly, and in an effort to ensure greater equity, we have removed the practice of performance grouping, as it too often became a tracking system in which students who were underserved would fall further behind, and there was not a mechanism for them to catch up.
9. I can see pictures of and learn about people who are something like me when I am at school.	I hope that this is the case. Some of the students can see pictures of their literal selves on the walls of the school, and the teachers do well to adapt curricular materials and assignments to more closely represent the students. In 5th grade, the work on Esperanza Rising, and the work the classes did for Black History Month are two examples of studies regarding people of different backgrounds that might be similar to some students. In these, students were asked to think about and write about themselves in relation to the characters and to think about how their experiences mirror or diverge from those of the people in their fiction and informational reading.
10. When students get in trouble, they are not gone from class very long.	This is another interesting question that will show students' perceptions, and may vary based on whether they have been to other schools, how they define "get in trouble" and what their expectation is of what consequences should be. For example, I would imagine that some students see it as a bad thing that students come back to class quickly when they get in trouble, while others are glad to have friends back quickly, or for they themselves to not miss too much time in class. I tend to think we do very well at getting students back to class as quickly as possible, and that sometimes this does make some students or teachers (or families) uncomfortable. This is another question where follow up with a focus group would be prudent.
11. The principal wants me to do my best, and show what I am learning.	If this question were worded "My teacher wants me to…" I would say that it should be a definite for all kids. For myself, I am not sure if the students know how I feel about their school work, and how important I think it is for them to do their best work at all times. I want to continue to think about this question, and to think about how I can better communicate with students to show them that I am on board with their families and teachers in wanting them to do their best.
12. The principal knows that some kids are different from others, and says that	Again, I hope that students see that I enjoy greeting and working with all different kinds of students, and that I value what each of them brings to the school. I would imagine that some perceive that I "like

is OK, everyone is welcome at school.	the good kids" but when I am with the students, I try my best to talk to a wide range of kids about their work, what they are doing, and how they are feeling.
13. The principal asks families how they would like the school to run.	I am not sure how aware students are about my reaching out to families, however, I am not always sure that families are either. I think that clearer communication and visibility of adults and community members who the students know and respect would help to bring this into greater clarity. At this time, I don't think the students would feel strongly that their families are highly involved in expressing how they would like the school to be run.
14. If a student speaks a language other than English, their parents can still be a part of helping them learn.	In some ways, this question could be interpreted as measuring students' values, or measuring how students feel about the school operations. I hope that we are a school that teaches students to value their families and where they come from. However, I know that for students who are starting to understand how society works and how their families are treated by society, they may feel that there is not a place for their parents who do not speak English. This is a sad reality of contemporary society. On the other hand, I hope that students see that there is a place for their parents who do not speak English – that the school values their family and it's background, and that we will work to try to ensure communication. This would be a good question for follow up with a focus group of students.
15. My teacher lets my family know what is going on in class, and talks to my family.	Teachers are required to send out weekly updates to families, and to be in communication. There was an expectation set that teachers make a positive phone call for each student each semester, but I have not yet figured out how best to track this, so I am not sure how widespread this practice it. I hope that students know that teachers are in touch with home, and particularly in cases where there is an academic or behavior concern, teachers are empowered to reach out to families to enlist their support for the student.

Appendix F – Focus Group Questions and Moderators' Guides

Family Focus Group - Moderator's Guide (online group)

03/18/2020

(5 min) Introductions: Once recorder is on, please let participants know that the conversation is being recorded to be used for data gathering, and that if they are uncomfortable with being recorded, they can leave the group at any time – ask for verbal confirmation of understanding – "If you agree to be recorded, please state your first name" – go around circle to let them all say.

Moderator shares name, what you do professionally, and a few details about yourself. Please invite the participants to share their names and the age(s) of their child(ren) in the school (please remind participants that their identities will not be shared in any way in the final product that will be produced).

(1 min) Introduce the purpose and process:

Read or paraphrase the following statement: Thank you for agreeing to join this focus group tonight. Our purpose for this group is to illuminate some of the information that was collected through the Culturally Responsive Practices survey you all took last week. Today we hope to dig a little deeper into the responses, and to gain some insights into the ways that Mr. Gray's leadership actions may or may not help you experience culturally responsive practice in the school.

Please ask everyone to get a piece of paper and a pen/pencil. This is just for the first question.

(4 min) Set ground rules:

- Each participant will have a chance to talk, please be mindful of your air time, and ensure you are not speaking over anyone.
- Please be present in the conversation, try not to be distracted while others are talking.
- Please practice two of our [redacted] norms of collaboration, presuming positive intention, and pausing when necessary.
- Please respond to the questions asked, share your honest opinion, and speak your truth. There are no wrong answers.

Please ask if each participant can agree to these ground rules, and seek verbal confirmation from each.

(45-60 min) Questions

1) Opening Question: On the paper you have in front of you, please write down 5 – 10 words to describe what culturally responsive practice means at a school. (Have participants name what they have written on the card.)

2) Broad Question 1: When you think about [redacted] and Culturally Responsive practice, what role do you see Mr. Gray playing in developing this practice.

3) Broad Question 2 (optional): What areas does he need to improve in developing this practice?

4) Detail Question 1: One of the survey questions states, "The principal treats all families fairly regardless of race, culture, dis/ability, gender or socio- economic status" – what information can you give in response to this question?

5) Detail Question 2 (optional): Another of the questions states, "The principal leads with high expectations for student achievement for all students regardless of race, culture, language, dis/ability, gender or socio- economic status." – what information can you give in response?

6) Detail Question 3: In response to the survey question, "The principal's leadership provides support needed to help all students reach academic success regardless of their racial, ethnic, socio-economic, or linguistic background." what response would you give?

7) Detail Question 4 (optional): One of the survey questions states, "The principal does not promote exclusionary disciplinary policies, practices, and behaviors." Do you think this is true, and why or why not?

8) Detail Question 5: For the survey question, "The principal supports the inclusion of the history, values, and cultural knowledge of students' home communities in the school curriculum" – what is your response, and why?

9) Detail Question 6 (optional): For the question, "The principal promotes an inclusive organizational structure that engages students and their families in school decision-making and program planning." – how would you respond?

10) Closing Question: Let's please go around the table, and one at a time, share a final thought or closing remark.

(5 min) Thank you, and next steps: Mr. Gray may follow up with you if he has any questions or needs clarification on anything from the conversation today. Thank you all for your time, your thoughtfulness, and your willingness to participate in this discussion.

Optional, additional survey questions to explore, if needed (for time):
The principal makes sure that the process for assigning students to classroom groups is equitable regardless of their racial, ethnic, gender, socio-economic, or linguistic background.

The principal treats all students equitably regardless of race, culture, disability, gender or socio-economic status.

The principal actively seeks ways to improve engagement with non-English speaking families.

Teacher Focus Group - Moderator's Guide

03/12/2020

(5 min) Introductions: Once recorder is on, please let participants know that the conversation is being recorded to be used for data gathering, and that if they are uncomfortable with being recorded, they can leave the group at any time – ask for verbal confirmation of understanding – "If you agree to be recorded, please state your first name"

Moderator shares name, what you do professionally, and a few details about yourself. Please invite the participants to share their names and their roles in the school (please remind participants that their identities will not be shared in any way in the final product that will be produced).

(1 min) Introduce the purpose and process:

Read or paraphrase the following statement: Thank you for agreeing to join this focus group tonight. Our purpose for this group is to illuminate some of the information that was collected through the Culturally Responsive Practices survey you all took last week. Today we hope to dig a little deeper into the responses, and to gain some insights into the ways that Mr. Gray's leadership actions may or may not help build more culturally responsive practice in the school.

(4 min) Set ground rules:

- Each participant will have a chance to talk, please be mindful of your air time, and ensure you are not speaking over anyone.
- Please be present in the conversation, ensuring you are not distracted while others are talking.
- Please practice the [redacted] norms of collaboration, particularly presuming positive intention, and pausing when necessary.
- Please respond to the questions asked, share your honest opinion, and speak your truth. There are no wrong answers.

Please ask if each participant can agree to these ground rules, and seek verbal confirmation from each.

(45-60 min) Questions

11) Opening Question: On the card you have in front of you, please write down 5 – 10 words to describe what culturally responsive practice means at school. (Have participants name what they have written on the card.)

12) Broad Question 1: When you think about [redacted] and Culturally Responsive practice, what role do you see Mr. Gray playing in developing this practice.

13) Broad Question 2 (optional): What areas does he need to improve in developing this practice?

14) Detail Question 1: One of the survey questions states, "Our principal's leadership practice ensures that all teachers are treated equitably regardless of race, culture,

dis/ability, gender or socio- economic status" – what information can you give in response to this question?

15) Detail Question 2 (optional): Another of the questions states, "Our principal provides me with the instructional support needed to help all students reach academic success regardless of their racial, ethnic, socio-economic, or linguistic background" – what information can you give in response?
16) Detail Question 3: In response to the survey question, "Our principal's leadership practice ensures that all students are treated equitably regardless of race, culture, disability, gender or socio- economic status" what response would you give?

17) Detail Question 4 (optional): One of the survey questions states, "Our principal's leadership practice ensures discipline policies are implemented equitably regardless of race, culture, dis/ability, gender or socio- economic status." Do you think this is true, and why?

18) Detail Question 5: For the survey question, "Our principal's leadership practice supports the inclusion of the history, values, and cultural knowledge of students' home communities in the school curriculum" – what is your response, and why?

19) Detail Question 6 (optional): For the question, "Our principal provides opportunities for staff to collaborate with families about how best to meet the academic needs of students" – how would you respond?

20) Closing Question: Let's please go around the table, and one at a time, share a final thought or closing remark.

(5 min) Thank you, and next steps: Mr. Gray may follow up with you if he has any questions or needs clarification on anything from the conversation today. Thank you all for your time, your thoughtfulness, and your willingness to participate in this discussion.

Optional, additional survey questions to explore, if needed (for time):
Our principal's leadership practices emphasize high expectations for student achievement for all students regardless of race, culture, language, dis/ability, gender or socio- economic status

Our principal's leadership practice helps to develop a critical consciousness among teachers, staff, and students to challenge educational inequities within our school community.

Appendix H: Personal Reflection

1) What?
    a. What do these data say about cultural responsiveness within my own practice?
    b. What do these data say about stakeholders' experience of my leadership?
    c. What might I not be seeing due to WRF?

Overall, the data point to a decent amount of cultural responsiveness in my own practice, as most of the survey responses, along with the focus group answers point to experiences from the stakeholders that indicate inclusive practices, that people feel welcomed, seen and heard at the school. It would be easy, and a likely outcome in many cases, to simply take these responses and pat myself on the back for a job well done, and to continue to point to other factors as creating inequity in the school that leads to a gap in student outcomes across the school. I think that this is certainly tempting, and that in looking at survey results, it is easy to focus on the positive, but there is so much more to look at. The stakeholders represented here have mostly positive experiences. It is interesting that the students have more areas in which they do not see culturally responsive practice – I think, as I began to stumble onto in responding to the survey questions, that there is a lack of clear statement of purpose for culturally responsive practice, and a lack of communicating and checking back in with different stakeholders to see if actions take the desired effect. It might seem almost that, yes, good things are happening, but they may be happening by accident. It is fantastic if they are happening without solid intention, but how much more effective could the work of the school be, how much more able to see and measure responsiveness in their work would teachers be, and how much more able would parents be to say that the school is "their" school, that meets ALL of the needs of their student without diminishing any aspect of their culture, home life, or experience.

My own responses to the reality on the ground at the school and, my own vision for how to bring about equity in this context are likely muted by WRF. When I think deeply about the community in which I serve, I often come to a point of exhaustion, confusion, or perplexedness that leads me to figuratively throw up my hands. I have often thought that there is no way to do it, no way to unite people of such disparate backgrounds, cultures, ways of thinking, ways of experiencing life in this city and country. This is undoubtedly followed by a thought of, something along the lines of, "If they would just all do ___ and do it like this, it would be so much better. Can't people see what is possible? It is in these moments, and in these reflections that I show how WRF can infiltrate and deaden even earnest searches for equity. By seeking a "normal" or a

"correct" way of doing, I normalize dominant ways and minimize the real and lived experiences of students, their families, teachers, and the community writ large. This realization helps me to know that I am undoubtedly missing something in these results. What is the available voice of those who do not wish to communicate with the school? Where is the account of those who speak a language outside of the few that the school is able to provide translation for? If I am seeking the data in these surveys for affirmation that I am one of the "good guys", I can certainly find it. If I use the data in these to instead look beyond what is there to what is missing, I may be on the track to opening up the school to true equity, and to building a stronger community sense of ownership and belonging in the school.

In thinking about better culturally responsive practice, I am also regularly confronted with a sense of fear in turning over aspects of what the school is and could be to the community. I am not sure if I really know how to reach out to the community as a whole, to bring in a variety of voices and experiences, and to let them know that they are a valued part of the process of making the school better. I wonder about the voices that I am hearing in this survey – are there a large number of families who are feeling marginalized? Do they feel that marginalization within the wider community context as well? Does it seem better or worse at the school? What do they really think is missing from their (or their child's) school experience? Is it even possible for the school to provide that? I think that the idea of inviting in true community voice can be daunting in knowing how to do so in a way that truly gathers from a cross-section of the community as well as in allowing that voice to go where it may. Am I scared to learn that I cannot lead this community because of my lack of understanding? Am I scared to learn that I cannot lead this community because of some other aspect of who I am/where I am from/what I think about/what I believe? In some sense, this fear will only be confronted by committing to CRSL, and to charting a path toward implementation. When I set the wheels in motion, I can choose – if a fear overwhelms me, who is one whom I trust to take over that part of the plan, to lead that aspect of the school and the school process?

2) So What?
    a. What is it important for me to consider as I work to implement culturally responsive leadership practice?
    b. What do I hope stakeholders will experience differently through culturally responsive leadership?
    c. In what areas do I need to be particularly mindful of WRF in my practice?

As I think about implementation, I think it is especially important to be methodical. I think that I have identified many of the actions/realities/feelings that are indicators of cultural responsiveness, but that without building a clear and methodical way forward, I

could easily get back to the muddied waters that occur when faced with the realities of school leadership (which are often mundane, regularly unpredictable, and rarely conducive to extended periods of building understanding through reflection). In a sense I am moving from a theoretical place (CRSL as concept) into a concrete place (CRSL in the school) – and I need to use the works I have read to help me chart that course. I need to commit to various steps at various times, and then find/enlist the right people to help make sure those steps are accomplished. It is a matter of small steps, and reflection at each step to ensure that I am indeed being culturally responsive and not succumbing to my neutral, which is WRF.

I hope that stakeholders will feel even more ownership and partnership with the school. Whether that be students/staff/families. I think that those two aspects are important. Our school song (based on the Woody Guthrie tune) begins, "This school is your school, this school is my school" and I hope that culturally responsive practice can bring about a true sense of that. By saying it is mine, I am not excluding the fact that it is ours together, and that we all have a part and a place. I also hope to be able to tell the story of the work of the school better. As reflected in a lot of this collected data, there are many great things happening in the school, but they are not quite organized, not quite named and grouped in a way that they can become part of a succinct and accurate depiction of the school as meeting its mission of existing "to foster a diverse and equitable community" and furthermore, that the outcomes of that existence can be easily seen to be "academic, personal, and civic excellence" – not just by an arbitrary definition created by boards of education or leaders of schools, or academic thinkers, but by each definition that each member of the school community has and uses to measure. This would mean that every person would say, "Yes, that has been accomplished" and also, when the are asked what academic, personal, and civic excellence means, each person would potentially have a different answer.

Coming back to the power of WRF over this process, it comes any time I am making a judgement call about how someone's experience is not important, not valid, or not a part of what we need to pay attention to as a school. This is not to say that I should not be setting rules and expectations, and should not be directing the school in a certain direction, but it does mean that I need to ensure wide inclusion in the conversation about what that direction could be, and how it could meet the needs of more students and families. I think, as I have mentioned that with careful planning, and by ensuring I am enlisting contradictory voices in making and carrying out the plans, and by using frequent critical reflection both internally and in conjunction with others, I can start to lessen the impacts of WRF.

As I continue thinking about WRF, I am wondering more and more how much of the power of WRF exists in creating a sense of normality about deficit thinking. Is it the

same thing that tells me it's impossible to bring people together that allows me to normalize that they are apart? If I could look at the uniting forces (often, the kids!) instead of the dividing forces, what would I see differently, what would be possible, what would change for me?

3) What Else?
    a. What further questions do I need to ask?
    b. What do I not know that I now think I need to know?

Questions to ask:

- Who is NOT represented in this data? How can I represent them better?
- What is the best way to communicate?
    - Is there a different person would would garner different response?
    - How different would response have been if I was not principal/researcher, but just researcher?
- How do I balance the various definitions of success while ensuring all can reach their definition?
- What steps do I need to take to build community in such a diverse group of people.
    - Are there ways to increase the sense of group? What intersections would allow for this?
    - How can students be the catalyst for bringing families together (not just theoretically, but what actually would I hope that they could do to accomplish this?
- How will I measure results?
- How long am I willing to do this?
- Who else needs to be on board? Who already is?